

**ORAL SKILLS EXERCISES IN A FINNISH EFL TEXTBOOK AND
TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THEM**

Bachelor's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Suullisen kielitaidon tärkeys on ajankohtainen aihe kieltenopetuksessa. Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena oli tutkia, millaisia suullisen kielitaidon tehtäviä englannin kielen oppikirjat sisältävät, ja mitä opettajat ovat niistä mieltä. Tarkoituksena oli selvittää, onko tehtäviä riittävästi, ovatko ne sisällöltään hyödyllisiä, ja kuinka paljon opettajat hyödyntävät niitä opetuksessa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen aineistoksi valikoitui Sanoma Pron <i>On the Go 3</i>, joka on yhdeksäsluokkalaisille tarkoitettu englannin kielen oppikirja, joka on käytössä monissa kouluissa ympäri Suomea. Aineisto analysoitiin kategorisoimalla suullisen kielitaidon tehtävät tehtävätyypeittäin sen perusteella, mitä suullisen kielitaidon osa-alueita ne harjoittavat. Opettajien näkemyksiä kartoitettiin kyselytutkimuksen avulla. Tutkimuksen osallistujat olivat 27 suomalaista englannin kielen opettajaa, jotka käyttivät opetuksessaan <i>On the Go 3</i> -oppikirjaa. Kyselylomake sisälsi seitsemän kysymystä suullisen kielitaidon harjoituksista.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa ilmeni, että eniten esiintyvä suullisen kielitaidon tehtävätyyppi <i>On the Go 3</i>:ssa on sanasto- ja rakenneharjoitukset. Suurin osa opettajista piti suullisen kielitaidon harjoitusten määrää <i>On the Go 3</i>:ssa liian vähäisenä, vaikka niiden määrä on aiempiin tutkimuksiin verrattuna suurempi. Hyödyllisimpiä harjoituksia suullisen kielitaidon kehittymisen kannalta olivat opettajien mukaan keskustelu- ja ääntämisharjoitukset. Tutkimuksen lopputuloksena on, että kielten oppikirjojen tulisi sisältää mahdollisimman paljon erilaisia keskusteluharjoituksia, jotta harjoittelu olisi autenttista ja harjoittaisi oikeassa elämässä tarvittavia vuorovaikutus- ja keskustelutaitoja.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of oral skills has been a current topic in language learning and teaching. Language teaching in Finland has faced criticism for not giving enough value on oral skills and focusing too much on grammar and written skills (Kaski-Akhawan 2013: 39; Ahola-Houtsonen 2013: 52). Although the emphasis on oral skills has recently grown in language teaching, it is still quite common among Finnish students to feel like their oral skills in English are lacking compared to their written skills. According to previous studies (Ahola-Houtsonen 2013; Kaski-Akhawan 2013), students feel like speaking skills are not practiced enough and that they would like to practice them more.

Oral skills teaching is a quite popular topic for BA and MA theses, and there are some previous studies about oral skills exercises in language textbooks (e.g. Hietala 2013; Lainejoki 2021). There are also previous studies about teachers' opinions about oral skills teaching (e.g. Ahola-Houtsonen 2013; Kaski-Akhawan 2013). However, not many of the previous studies include both a textbook analysis and a teacher perspective. Therefore, this study aims to find out how many and what kind of oral skills exercises there are in a Finnish EFL (English as a foreign language) textbook and to find out teachers' thoughts on them. Previous studies also often focus on textbooks and language teaching in upper secondary school (e.g. Ahola-Houtsonen 2013; Hietala 2013; Lainejoki 2021). Therefore, the data of this study consisted of a textbook for ninth graders (*On the Go 3*) and the participants of the questionnaire survey were 27 Finnish EFL teachers in the comprehensive school. The aim of this study is to find out if the number of oral skills exercises in the textbook is sufficient and if teachers find them useful. Therefore, this study gives an insight into the oral skills exercises and if there is need for modification.

This study consists of four chapters in addition to the introduction. In chapter 2, I will introduce the theoretical background and previous research about the topic. The aim and research questions as well as the data and methods of the study will be presented in chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. Finally, in chapter 5, I will discuss the findings of this study in relation to previous studies, give implications for language teaching, and make suggestions for further research.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter introduces the theoretical background of the study. The key concepts are defined. The guidelines for teaching oral skills are described by presenting what is stated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR 2001; 2020) and in the National Core Curriculum for basic education (NCC 2016). In addition, oral skills teaching as well as previous research about oral activities in textbooks are presented and discussed.

2.1 Definition of oral skills

One of the main goals in language learning is to be able to speak it. Therefore, one needs to learn oral language skills in order to succeed in oral communication and interaction. According to The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001: 11), language skills, both written and oral skills, consist of general competence and communicative language competence. General competence refers to learner's knowledge, skills and abilities to learn. Communicative language competence consists of three components: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence (CEFR 2001: 13). Linguistic competence includes lexical, phonological and syntactical competence. The phonological aspect of language involves the processing of phonemes, i.e., the sounds that one produces when speaking (Honig 2007: 583). Therefore, phonological competence is a fundamental aspect in oral language competence, since a major part of language learning is learning its pronunciation. Syntactical competence refers to knowing the order of words in a sentence, which is defined by the grammar rules of a language (Honig 2007: 585).

Sociolinguistic competence consists of the sociocultural aspects of language use, such as rules of politeness and norms between different social groups (CEFR 2001: 13). Pragmatic competence refers to the functional use of language, such as understanding cohesion and coherence as well as identifying different forms, such as irony (CEFR 2001: 13). Communicative language competence includes different language activities: reception, production, interaction and mediation (CEFR 2001: 14). Reception and production are necessary parts of interaction, since interaction is all about receiving and producing utterances with other people.

Thus, there are multiple different elements in oral language skills. Oral language competence requires knowing the phonological features of a language, such as pronunciation, as well as grammatical

aspects. Communication and interaction skills are also an essential part of oral skills, since the aim of language learning is to be able to communicate in the target language.

2.2 Guidelines for teaching oral skills

There are two guideline manuals for language teaching in Finland, The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR 2001; 2020) and the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NCC 2016). The CEFR (2001; 2020) provides guidelines for language syllabi, curriculums, examinations, and textbooks across Europe. It is designed to promote co-operation between different European countries and provide a common basis for language learning and teaching (CEFR 2001: 5). The CEFR also has a companion volume (2020) which is an updated version of the CEFR 2001. The companion volume extends the contents according to developments in language education after the publication of the 2001 version.

The CEFR emphasizes social interaction and communication between language users (2020: 28). It also highlights the importance of cultural knowledge (CEFR 2020: 30). In CEFR (2020: 28), it is stated that “language learning should be directed towards enabling learners to act in real-life situations, expressing themselves and accomplishing tasks of different natures”. It also emphasizes the use of suitable teaching methods and materials as well as having purposeful tasks in the classroom (CEFR 2020: 30).

CEFR (2020: 36) presents the six Common Reference Levels (A1-C2) which represent language proficiency. The levels are intended to provide a guideline for learners and teachers to reflect language proficiency instead of being absolute qualifications. The levels can be divided into three categories: *basic user* (A1 and A2), *independent user* (B1 and B2) and *proficient user* (C1 and C2) (CEFR 2020: 36). In addition to the general scale, The Common Reference Levels are used to describe language proficiency in several separate scales according to which aspect of language competence is viewed. For oral skills, the CEFR (2020: 62) presents a scale of overall oral production, in which level A1 requires producing simple phrases about people and places. The requirements get higher on each level, and level C2 is described as being able to “produce clear, smoothly following, well-structured discourse with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points” (CEFR 2020: 62).

The CEFR (2020: 133-135) introduces a scale of phonological control, which is an important aspect of oral language proficiency. Levels A1 and A2 of overall phonological control are described as being able to pronounce familiar words with some guidance. Level C2 indicates a “full range of phonological features in the target language with a high level of control”, including clear and precise articulation (CEFR 2020: 134). There is also a scale of fluency (CEFR 2020: 142). Fluency means easy and spontaneous expressions and having long conversations without hesitation or pauses (CEFR 2020: 142). The levels of fluency range from producing short, isolated utterances with many pauses (A1) to expressing natural and effortless speech without hesitation (C1) (CEFR 2020: 142).

The National Core Curriculum (2016) provides common guidelines for basic education in Finland and sets qualifications for teaching. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education was published in Finnish in 2014. In this thesis, I will refer to the English version of the NCC which was published in 2016. The requirements and instructions of language teaching in Finland are defined in the NCC. The NCC (2016) states that teaching English as A-language in grades 7-9 aims to encourage pupils to “use the English language in diverse interaction and information acquisition” (NCC 2016: 375). The objectives of instruction (NCC 2016: 376) set the goals for English teaching in five areas: growing into cultural diversity and language awareness, language-learning skills, interaction skills, text interpretation skills, and text production skills. It is stated that teaching aims to “encourage the pupil to find interesting English-language contents and environments that expand his or her perception of the globalizing world and opportunities for acting in it” (NCC 2016: 376). English teaching also aims to “guide the pupil towards positive interaction where delivering the message is most important” and to “encourage the pupil to participate in discussions on diverse topics” (NCC 2016: 376). In addition, teaching should support pupils to initiate communication as well as support intercultural communication (NCC 2016: 376).

Overall, the importance of oral skills is visible both in the NCC (2016) as well as in the CEFR (2001; 2020). Both guideline manuals emphasize enhancing pupils’ interaction skills as well as encouraging them to take part in discussions. It is also stated in both manuals that intercultural communication and understanding cultural diversity is one of the main goals of English language teaching.

2.3 Oral skills exercises and language textbooks

Textbooks are often used in language teaching. According to Lähdesmäki (2004: 529), textbooks are one of the most important tools for teachers and learners and they have a major influence on teaching. In Finnish comprehensive schools, language textbooks often have two books for one grade, a textbook and a workbook. Textbooks mainly include texts that follow certain themes, but there are also different tasks and additional content. Workbooks are full of different kinds of exercises.

There are some previous studies about oral activities in foreign language textbooks. Hietala (2013) studied two English textbook series (*Open Road* and *ProFiles*) that are used in Finnish upper secondary school. They wanted to find out the number of oral activities compared with the total number of activities, what kind of oral activities there are, and which aspects of oral skills they practice. According to Hietala (2013: 47), there were nine main categories of oral activities: conversation strategies, discussions, non-verbal communication, presentations, problem-solving, pronunciation, role-plays, translations and vocabulary and structure. The number of oral activities in *Open Road* varies between 17 and 22 per book, and the share of oral activities compared to the total number of activities is 21% (Hietala 2013: 48-49). The largest categories were discussions and vocabulary. The percentage of oral activities in *ProFiles* was 14.3%, the number of them varying between 11 and 16 per book (Hietala 2013: 80). In this series, the largest categories were discussions and role-plays. These textbook series follow the old, 2003 version of the National Core Curriculum.

Lainejoki (2021) has also studied oral skills exercises in textbooks. They studied two textbook series, one for English (*Insights*) and one for Russian (*Ponjatno!*), that are widely used in Finnish upper secondary schools. These textbook series follow the 2015 version of the National Core Curriculum. Lainejoki (2021) wanted to find out what kind of oral language skill activities can be found in the textbooks, and if they differ from each other in English and Russian textbooks. According to their study, there were thirteen different categories of oral activities in the textbooks: discussion, interview, problem-solving, role-play, presentation, report, pronunciation, read-aloud, game, vocabulary and structure, translation, conversation strategies and non-verbal communication. The activities were divided into three main activity types: drills, exercises and tasks (Lainejoki 2021: 59).

The findings of Lainejoki's (2021: 119) study showed that the number of oral activities tends to be higher in the first textbooks of the series. In the English textbooks, the number of oral activities in one textbook varied between 46 and 95 activities per book (Lainejoki 2021: 60). The largest oral

activity categories were vocabulary and structure and discussions. In Russian textbooks, the number of oral activities in one textbook varied between 49 and 147 per book (Lainejoki 2021: 97). The largest categories were vocabulary and structure and read-aloud. According to Lainejoki (2021: 120), the English textbook series was fairly communicative, and the activities allow students to produce English freely. In the Russian textbooks, there were not that many opportunities to speak freely.

Both in Hietala's (2013) as well as in Lainejoki's (2021) studies, the English textbook series had one textbook that was designed for practicing oral skills. Those textbooks were analyzed separately, since the number of oral activities is much higher in them and therefore it would distort the results if they were included in the same analysis as the other textbooks. The results of both studies showed similarities: the categories of the oral skills exercises were quite similar in all of the textbooks. Vocabulary and structure exercises as well as discussions were the most common categories. When comparing the results, it could be concluded that the number of oral activities is higher in the textbooks that follow the newer, 2015 version of the National Core Curriculum. Therefore, there tends to be a higher emphasis on oral skills in textbooks than previously. However, these studies include only four textbooks and therefore, the results cannot be generalized to apply to all textbooks in the upper secondary school.

2.4 Teaching oral skills

There are different approaches to language teaching, and one that emphasizes oral skills is communicative language teaching (CLT). Communicative language teaching emphasizes communicative competence and the use of authentic materials, such as newspapers and magazine articles (Hummel 2014: 115). Instead of focusing too much on structures or grammar rules, CLT emphasizes spontaneous interaction in the target language. Communicative language teaching engages learners in authentic and meaningful use of language (Hummel 2014: 115).

Another approach that is closely related to communicative language teaching is task-based language teaching (TBLT). In TBLT, learners interact with each other by doing different kinds of tasks (Hummel 2014: 116). Tasks are language activities in which the focus is on meaning and are often related to real-life situations. The main point in completing tasks is communication and interaction. According to Kafipour, Mahmoudi and Khoiasteh (2018: 1), TBLT increases fluency and confidence in the target language, since the focus is on interaction and practicing real-life situations.

Concrete ways to teach different aspects of oral skills are for example repetition activities, teaching formulaic language and teaching sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence (Pakula 2019). Formulaic language consists of certain language units that usually occur together, such as collocations, phrasal verbs, idioms and figures of speech (Pakula 2019: 99). Repetition and teaching formulaic language help automatize language production and increase fluency. Teaching sociolinguistic competence involves paying attention to rules of politeness and recognizing sociocultural cues (Pakula 2019: 106). Pragmatic competence can be taught through conversations, turn-taking and speech acts (Pakula 2019: 108).

2.4.1 Oral skills teaching in Finland

Ahola-Houtsonen (2013) studied students' and teachers' views about learning and teaching English speaking skills at upper secondary school. The participants of the study were students and teachers of two upper secondary schools in Finland. According to the study, the majority of students have a positive attitude towards learning speaking skills and they consider it important (Ahola-Houtsonen 2013: 46). However, the students thought that speaking skills are not practiced enough, and that the focus is more on grammar (Ahola-Houtsonen 2013: 52). Thus, the students emphasize the importance of speaking skills and would like practice them more.

The teachers also viewed teaching speaking skills positively. According to Ahola-Houtsonen's (2013: 50) study, teachers use different tasks and methods, such as pair work, dialogues, group discussions, teaching cultural knowledge and revising phrases to teach speaking skills. One teacher stated that students might not always realize that the exercises done in class practice oral skills (Ahola-Houtsonen 2013: 51). Therefore, the students might think that speaking skills are not practiced enough, when in fact they are included in exercises that are not necessarily seen as oral exercises.

Kaski-Akhawan (2013) also studied students' and teachers' opinions about teaching and learning oral skills in upper secondary school. They wanted to find out how speaking skills are taught, and which types of oral exercises are considered the best according to teachers' and students' opinions. The participants were four teachers and 84 second year upper secondary school students from two upper secondary schools in Finland. According to the study (2013: 47) pair and group discussions are the most used oral exercises in class. They were also considered to be the most pleasant and beneficial ways of practicing oral skills. The least used oral activity was presentation, which was also reported

to be the least pleasant oral exercise. According to Kaski-Akhawan (2013: 36), the students were quite satisfied with the variety of oral exercises. Free discussions and real-life based situations were exercises that the students would like to practice more. They also thought that pronunciation was not practiced enough.

The teachers listed dialogues, role-plays, group and pair discussions, presentations, debates, describing a picture, pronunciation exercises, preparing an advertisement, presenting oneself, summarizing listening comprehensions, discussing videos, telling jokes, improvisation, acting and interviewing parents as oral exercises that they use in class (Kaski-Akhawan 2013: 40). The teachers thought that teaching oral skills in upper secondary school has improved, and its importance has grown (Kaski-Akhawan 2013: 46). In their own teaching, the teachers were satisfied with the role of oral skills teaching, but they thought that it should be tested more, for example adding an oral test in the matriculation examination.

The results of Ahola-Houtsonen's (2013) and Kaski-Akhawan's (2013) studies showed that practicing oral skills is quite sufficient in Finnish upper secondary schools. However, pronunciation and free production were aspects that students wished to practice more. Both studies were conducted in 2013, which means that the older version of the National Core Curriculum (2003) was used at the time. Therefore, the results could show slightly different outcomes if it were done today as the teaching follows the newer version of the NCC. The oral exercises used in class were similar to the exercises that Lainejoki (2021) and Hietala (2013) found from the textbooks. Thus, it could be concluded that many of the oral exercises used in class are from language textbooks.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

This chapter introduces the aims and research questions of this study. In addition, the data and methods of analysis will be presented.

3.1 Research aim and questions

Many of the previous studies analyze textbooks that are used in upper secondary school. Therefore, I wanted to take a closer look to a textbook from comprehensive school. According to previous research about oral activities in language textbooks (Hietala 2003; Lainejoki 2021), there is a greater emphasis on oral skills in textbooks that follow the newer version of the National Core Curriculum for upper secondary school. Therefore, the aim of this study is to find out whether that applies to textbooks in comprehensive school as well. I want to find out how many and what kind of oral skills exercises there are in a Finnish EFL textbook for ninth graders (*On the Go 3*). I also want to find out which skills they practice.

Although textbook analyses are quite popular among BA and MA theses, not many of them include a teacher perspective. Therefore, I am interested in finding out what Finnish language teachers think about the oral activities in language textbooks. I want to find out if they think that there are enough oral skills exercises or if there should be more. I also want to hear if teachers find the exercises sufficient and useful, how much they use them and if they use oral skills exercises outside the textbooks. My research questions are:

1. How many oral skills exercises does the Finnish EFL textbook *On the Go 3* have?
2. What kind of oral skills exercises does *On the Go 3* have?
3. What do teachers think about the oral skills exercises?

3.2 The data and data collection

The textbook that is analyzed in this study is *On the Go 3* (Daffue-Karsten et al. 2021). *On the Go 3* is an English language textbook that is designed for ninth graders in Finnish lower secondary school. The textbook series *On the Go* was chosen because it is widely used in Finnish schools, and it follows the latest version of the National Core Curriculum. *On the Go 3* is divided into two separate books: a

textbook and a workbook. However, in this study, they are analyzed together and will be referred to as one book, since they are meant to be used together and there is no need to analyze them separately.

To map the teachers' point of view, a questionnaire survey was used. A questionnaire survey is a data collection method that consists of questions. Its form varies depending on the purpose and the target group (Valli 2017: 16). Questionnaires are widely used as a data collection method in human sciences as well as in other fields of study (Valli 2017: 15). Questionnaires can include different types of questions: open-ended questions, closed questions, quantity questions, lists, category questions, rankings and grids (Marshall 2005: 132-133).

The survey for this study consisted of seven questions, using a Likert scale in one question. A Likert scale is a scale where the respondent can choose an option depending on whether they agree with a statement or not (Marshall 2005: 133). The survey also included five closed questions and one open-ended question. In an open-ended question, the participant answers the question using their own words, whereas closed questions offer a choice of alternatives from which the respondent chooses one or more (Marshall 2005: 132). The survey was conducted using the Webropol online survey tool provided by the University of Jyväskylä.

The participants of this study were 27 Finnish EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers who use *On the Go 3*. The link to the survey was sent to a few teachers via email. It was also sent to a Facebook group of Finnish EFL teachers. The participants were teachers from different schools around Finland. The survey was anonymous and no personal information about the participants was collected.

3.3 Methods of analysis

This study is a qualitative study, since the aim is to describe and get a good overall picture of the oral skills exercises and how teachers view them. However, this study contains features of quantitative research as well, since there is numerical information about the oral skills exercises and some of the answers to the questionnaire are presented in numbers and percentages.

The data of this study was analyzed using the qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is an analysis method that is often used in qualitative research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018: 103). Content analysis is used to analyze text data, such as books, articles, journals, letters, interviews, speeches,

discussions, dialogues and reports (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018: 117). In qualitative content analysis, the aim is to describe and understand the phenomenon that is studied (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018: 117).

There are three approaches to qualitative content analysis: conventional, directed and summative (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1277). The conventional approach is usually used in studies that aim to describe a certain phenomenon. This approach is often used when there is limited theory or research literature on the phenomenon. (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1279). The advantage of the conventional approach is that it gains direct information from the participants without being influenced by existing theories. A challenge is to develop a complete understanding of the material, which can result in findings that represent the data inaccurately (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1280). The directed approach to content analysis is used when the existing theory of the phenomenon needs further description (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1281). This approach extends the previous theory, but there is a risk that using existing theory may lead to biased findings (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1283). The summative approach analyzes single words or content in text, aiming to understand their contextual use rather than their meaning (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1283).

In this study, the results of the questionnaire were analyzed using the conventional approach of qualitative content analysis. The answers to the closed questions are presented in tables with numbers and percentages of how many participants chose a certain answer. The answers to the open-ended questions are presented through examples and direct quotes from the participants. The answers to the open-ended questions were analyzed by looking for similarities between the answers in order to find out which topics occurred the most.

In order to identify the exercises that practice oral skills, I defined the criteria for what is considered an oral skills exercise. The exercises need to require some kind of oral production in English. It can be free production, translating from Finnish to English or simply reading sentences or words aloud. However, in some pronunciation exercises, the purpose is to identify different intonations or accents, and therefore they do not always require oral production. Nevertheless, those exercises are regarded as oral skills exercises, since pronunciation is an important aspect of oral skills.

Categorization was used as a method to analyze the oral skills exercises. The oral activities were divided into categories based on their type of exercise and what aspects of oral language skills they practice. When categorizing the oral skills exercises, previous studies (Hietala 2013; Lainejoki 2021) were used as a guide to determine and name the categories. Once the categories were created and the

oral skills exercises were counted, the number of oral skills exercises was compared to the total number of exercises. The categories of the oral skills exercises are presented in tables with numbers and percentages. I also wrote a description for each oral skills exercise about what is typically done in the exercise and which skills it practices.

4 RESULTS

In this section, I will present the results of the study. This chapter answers the research questions that are presented in section 3.1. Firstly, I will present the results of the textbook analysis. The oral skills exercises are divided into categories based on their type of exercise. The different types of oral skills exercises are presented. Secondly, I will present the results of the questionnaire survey about teachers' opinions about the oral skills exercises.

4.1 Oral skills exercises in *On the Go 3*

As Table 1 shows, the total number of exercises in *On the Go 3* is 398, of which 120 practice oral skills (30.2%).

Table 1. The number of oral skills exercises compared to the total number of exercises in *On the Go 3*

Total number of exercises	Number of oral skills exercises	%
398	120	30.2

As can be seen in Table 2, there are ten different types of oral skills exercises in *On the Go 3*: vocabulary and structure, role-play, read-aloud, pair discussion, pronunciation, translation, presentation/speech, game, group discussion, and debate. The biggest categories are vocabulary and structure (21.7%), role-play (17.5%) and read-aloud (15.8%). The descriptions for the different types of oral skills exercises are presented below.

Table 2. Oral skills exercises in *On the Go 3*

Type of exercise	Number of exercises	The % of oral skills exercises
Vocabulary and structure	26	21.7
Role-play	21	17.5
Read-aloud	19	15.8
Pair discussion	17	14.2

Pronunciation	15	12.5
Translation	8	6.7
Presentation/speech	7	5.8
Game	5	4.1
Group discussion	1	0.8
Debate	1	0.8

Vocabulary and structure

Vocabulary and structure exercises are the most common oral skills exercises in *On the Go 3*. These exercises are often located after the text of each unit, and their purpose is to help understand the content of the text and to practice the vocabulary. Vocabulary and structure exercises are usually “Work with a partner” -exercises where students take turns asking and answering questions about the text. They can also be exercises where students are supposed to tell the contents of the text in their own words with the help of pictures or other cues. Vocabulary and structure exercises can also practice grammar. For instance, in the grammar sections there are exercises where students practice grammatical structures with a partner. These exercises allow students to produce English freely.

Role-play

Role-plays are the second largest category of oral skills exercises. They are often dialogues in which students act out a conversation with a partner. These exercises do not usually practice free production, since the dialogue is usually given.

Read-aloud

Read-aloud exercises are usually “Listen and repeat” -exercises in which students listen words or sentences from a recording and then repeat them. Read-aloud exercises practice listening comprehension, pronunciation as well as vocabulary.

Pair & group discussion

In discussions, there are usually questions about a certain topic and student are supposed to discuss them with a partner or in small groups. Discussion exercises allow a lot of free production in English.

Pronunciation

Each unit has a pronunciation section which includes different pronunciation exercises. These exercises do not always require oral production, since sometimes the point is to practice for example to identify intonation variations or different accents. Pronunciation exercises also include exercises where students read words or sentences aloud and pay close attention to correct pronunciation and word stress.

Translation

In translation exercises, students translate words or sentences from Finnish to English. They are often A-B dialogues in which the students translate their own part from Finnish to English to their partner. The partner has the correct English translation and helps if needed. These exercises practice translation as well as vocabulary and structural aspects.

Presentation/speech

Presentation or speech exercises are often in the “Your choice” section, where students can choose an exercise that they prefer. These exercises include giving a presentation or a speech about a certain topic and presenting it to the class or to a small group. They practice free production and presentation skills.

Game

Games are usually board games that are played in pairs or in small groups. There are often questions to answer and knowing the right answer allows the player to move forward on the game board. There are also exercises in which students play a game of Alias, which means explaining (or acting) a word and the others try to guess it. Games practice multiple aspects of oral skills in an amusing and authentic way.

Debate

The students have a debate about a certain topic. The students choose their point of view and prepare arguments to support their opinions. These exercises practice free production and argumentation skills.

4.2 Teachers' views on the oral skills exercises in *On the Go 3*

I will now present the results of the questionnaire survey. The survey included questions about the oral skills exercises in *On the Go 3* to find out what teachers think about them.

The participants were asked if they think that the number of oral skills exercises in *On the Go 3* is suitable, or if there are too many or too little. 41% of the participants answered that the current number is suitable, and 59% answered that it is too little. None of the participants thought that the current number is too much. The participants were also asked whether they agree with the statement "*I find the oral skills exercises in On the Go 3 useful*". 22% of the participants partially disagreed, 11% did not agree or disagree, 45% partially agreed, and 22% fully agreed. No one fully disagreed with the statement. Therefore, the majority of the participants find the exercises at least somewhat useful.

The participants were asked to choose which types of oral skills exercises they find the most useful for the development of oral proficiency. They had the possibility to choose one or more options. As Table 3 shows, pair discussions and pronunciation exercises got the most votes; almost every participant (25 out of 27) found these exercise types the most useful. The second most useful exercise types were vocabulary and structure exercises (17 answers), read-aloud exercises (16 answers), and games (15 answers). The participants found translation exercises and debates the least useful (3 answers to each).

Table 3. Oral skills exercises considered the most useful by the participants

Type of exercise	n	%
Pair discussion	25	92.6
Pronunciation	25	92.6
Vocabulary and structure	17	63.0
Read-aloud	16	59.3
Games	15	55.6
Group discussion	10	37.0
Role-play	8	29.6

Presentation/speech	5	18.5
Debate	3	11.1
Translation	3	11.1

The participants were also asked how much they use the oral skills exercises from *On the Go 3* in their teaching. Nine participants (33%) answered that they use almost every exercise. 18 participants (67%) answered that they choose the exercises according to the need and situation. They were also asked if they use oral skills exercises outside the textbook or if they only use exercises from the textbook. 10 participants (37%) answered that they only use the exercises found in the textbook. 17 participants (63%) answered that they use other oral skills exercises as well. They were asked to clarify where they find them. The most common answer was that the participants find oral skills exercises from the internet, for example from the website *All things topics* and *BBC learning English*. Many also come up with new exercises themselves or find exercises from other textbook series.

The questionnaire included one question where the participants could choose which aspects of oral skills they find the most important to be practiced in an oral skills exercise. As Table 4 shows, conversation skills were considered the most important aspect. Practicing pronunciation and free production were also seen as important by many participants. The question included an additional answer option if the participants found something else important that was not included in the given options. Interaction skills, stating an opinion and practicing listening comprehension were listed there as important aspects.

Table 4. Aspects of oral skills considered important in an oral skills exercise by the participants

Aspect of oral skills	n	%
Conversation skills	24	88.9
Pronunciation	19	70.4
Free production	17	63.0
Vocabulary	13	48.1
Grammar and structure	7	25.9

The participants were also asked which factors they take into consideration when choosing an oral skills exercise. The most common answer was suitability for the target group (Example 1, Example 2). The following examples illustrate the importance of finding a suitable exercise for the group:

Example 1.

”Oppilasryhmän perusteella valitsen, tehdäänkö enemmän pari- vai ryhmätehtäviä ja kuinka soveltavia tehtäviä valitsen.”

”Based on the group of students, I choose whether to do more pair or group exercises and how applicable exercises I choose.”

Example 2.

”Ryhmän ja heidän tasonsa sekä miten tehtävä toimisi juuri kyseisellä ryhmällä.”

“According to the group and their skill level and how the exercise would work with the group in question.”

The results also showed that teachers find it important that the oral skills exercises are as authentic as possible (Example 3). The following example emphasizes the importance of finding an exercise that practices real-life skills:

Example 3.

“Että suullisen kielitaidon harjoittelu olisi luontevaa, ei päälleliimattua. Mahdollisimman monipuolisia ja ”aitoja” tilanteita.”

”That practicing oral skills would be natural, not forced. As versatile and “authentic” situations as possible.”

Some consider the length of the exercise an important factor when choosing an oral skills exercise. The exercise should not take too much time or be too short (Example 4, Example 6). It is also seen

as important that the exercise and the instructions are clear and simple (Example 5). The exercises should be meaningful and practice different aspects (Example 6, Example 7). The following examples illustrate the importance of finding exercises that fit to the schedule and engage in different areas of language skills:

Example 4.

“Tehtävän pituus on myös tärkeää. Liian lyhyt tehtävä hutaistaan, pitkää ei jakseta tehdä.”

“The length of the exercise is also important. Too short an exercise is rushed, and too long is tiring.”

Example 5.

“Ohjeistuksen yksinkertaisuus ja tehtävän selkeys.”

“The simplicity of the instructions and the clarity of the exercise.”

Example 6.

”Mitä siinä harjoitetaan, esim. sanastoa on hyvä tulla myös suullisesti. Miten paljon aikaa tehtävä vie. Suosin varsin lyhyitä harjoituksia, että jaksaminen riittää.”

”What is practiced, for example it would be good to practice vocabulary orally as well. How much time the exercise takes. I prefer quite short exercises, so that students are able to do them.”

Example 7.

“Että se harjoittaa järkevästi kappaleen sanastoa tai kielioppiasiaa tai englannille ominaisia small talk -piirteitä. Tehtävän pitää olla tarpeeksi strukturoitu että oppilaat ymmärtävät mitä tehdään ja miten edetään ja tehtävä pitää pystyä toteuttamaan myös suppeamalla sanavarastolla.”

”That it in a reasonable way practices the vocabulary of the unit or grammar or small talk features that are characteristic of English. The exercise must be structured enough for students to understand what is being done and how to proceed, and the exercise must also allow to be completed with a limited vocabulary.”

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study consisted of two aspects: a textbook analysis on oral skills exercises in an EFL textbook and a questionnaire survey to find out what teachers think about them. The purpose of this study was to find out how many and what type of oral skills exercises there are in *On the Go 3*, which is an English language textbook for ninth graders in Finland that follows the latest version of the National Core Curriculum. In addition, the aim was to find out whether teachers who use *On the Go 3* find the exercises useful, how much they use them and which aspects they find the most important in an oral skills exercise.

As mentioned previously in section 2.3, the number of oral skills exercises tends to be higher in upper secondary school textbooks that follow the newer version of the NCC compared to the older textbooks. The aim of this study was to find out whether the number of oral skills exercises is satisfactory also in a textbook used in comprehensive school.

The results of this study correlate with the findings of previous studies that there is a greater emphasis on oral skills exercises in textbooks following the newer version of the NCC. For instance, according to Hietala's (2013) study, the number of oral skills exercises varied between 11 and 22 per book, which is significantly less than in *On the Go 3* that had 120 oral skills exercises. The findings of Lainejoki's (2021) study were more similar to the findings of this study; in Lainejoki's (2021) study, the number of oral skills exercises varied between 46 and 147 per book.

The findings of this study revealed that the number of oral skills exercises is quite sufficient in *On the Go 3*. However, this study focused on only one textbook, and therefore one cannot say whether the number of oral skills exercises is satisfactory in all textbooks used in the comprehensive school. It is also difficult to draw conclusions whether the number of oral skills exercises has increased compared to the comprehensive school textbooks that follow the older version of the National Core Curriculum, since there are not so many previous studies about textbooks used in comprehensive school. Many of the previous studies focus on textbooks that are used in upper secondary school instead of comprehensive school. That was also one reason why I wanted to analyze a textbook for ninth graders, since I wanted to include a textbook that is used in comprehensive school. Since this is BA thesis, it was not reasonable to analyze multiple textbooks, since it would have been too extensive. Therefore, the data of this study is limited to only one textbook. For further studies, it would be

beneficial to include a couple of different textbook series from different grades in comprehensive school and compare them in order to get a better view of the oral skills exercises in them.

The findings of this study showed there are no significant differences in the categories of oral skills exercises between the textbooks in previous studies and in this study. Problem-solving, conversation strategies and non-verbal communication were exercise types that were found in the textbooks in the previous studies, but not in *On the Go 3*. However, the categorization was made by me based on what is done or practiced in the exercise. Therefore, the categories were created using my own judgement, which means that someone else might have done the categorization slightly differently. In addition, the criteria for an oral skills exercise in this study included that it must require some kind of oral production. Therefore, exercises that practice for example non-verbal communication were excluded in the analysis of this study. Hence, the different approaches to the categorization and analysis of the oral skills exercises might lead to slightly different outcomes, which is important to take into consideration.

The participants of the questionnaire survey were Finnish EFL teachers who use *On the Go 3*. The results of the questionnaire survey showed that the majority of the participants think that there are not enough oral skills exercises in *On the Go 3*, which is slightly surprising. Although the emphasis on oral skills has increased in textbooks, according to teachers there could still be an even greater emphasis on them. The results also showed that most participants search for oral skills exercises outside the textbook, which indicates that the exercises existing in the textbook are not always sufficient or do not meet the needs of the lesson. Therefore, although textbooks are one of the most important tools for teachers, it is common to utilize other sources as well.

There are different factors to take into consideration when choosing an oral skills exercise. The most important factor is that the exercise is suitable for the target group. The groups and their skill levels vary, and therefore it is important to consider how the exercise would work with the group in question. The exercises should also be appropriate length: not too time-consuming or too short. Therefore, the exercises in language textbooks should be carefully considered so that they are used in class. These are relevant observations for teachers who come up with exercises themselves; it is important to consider these aspects in order to have effective exercises.

The results of this study showed that exercises that were considered most useful are pair discussions and pronunciation exercises. The findings of Kaski-Akhawan's (2013) study showed similar results:

discussions were the most used and considered the most pleasant oral skills exercises in class both among teachers as well as students. According to previous studies (Kaski-Akhawan 2013; Ahola-Houtsonen 2013), students would like to practice free discussions and real-life based situations more. Conversation skills and authenticity were also emphasized in the results of this study. Therefore, it can be concluded that especially discussions are important oral skills exercises, since they practice free production and conversation skills. For the development of oral skills, it would be beneficial that language textbooks would include discussion exercises as much as possible.

This study gives new information as well as reinforces previous findings about the topic. The strength of this study was that in addition to the textbook analysis, it included a teacher perspective as well. However, the limitations of this study make it slightly difficult to draw general conclusions, since this study focused on only one textbook and the teacher perspective consisted of only 27 participants. As already mentioned previously, in order to get a better view of the topic it would be beneficial to study multiple textbooks series and from different grades in comprehensive school. A greater number of participants would also give a wider picture of teachers' opinions. Nevertheless, the research questions of this study were answered quite successfully, and the results give important observations about oral skills exercises in language textbooks.

As presented in chapter 2.4, there are different approaches to language teaching that emphasize oral skills. Communicative language teaching (CLT) or task-based language teaching (TBLT) would be good solutions for improving interaction skills and making oral skills teaching more authentic. As can be seen from the results of this study as well as from previous studies, language teaching should aim at a more communicative direction. After all, the main goal in language learning is to be able to communicate with it.

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APPENDIX 1

KYSELYLOMAKE / QUESTIONNAIRE

ORAL SKILLS EXERCISES IN ON THE GO 3

1. Olen yli 18-vuotias ja annan luvan vastausteni käyttämiseen yllä mainitussa kandidaatintutkielmassa / I am over 18 years old and give permission to use my answers in this BA thesis

- Kyllä

2. Onko suullisen kielitaidon tehtävien määrä On the Go 3 -kirjassa sopiva? / Is the number of oral skills exercises in On the Go 3 suitable?

- Nykyinen määrä on sopiva / The current amount is suitable
- Nykyinen määrä on liian vähän / The current amount is too little
- Nykyinen määrä on liikaa / The current amount is too much

3. Suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukset On the Go 3 -kirjassa ovat mielestäni hyödyllisiä / I find the oral skills exercises in On the Go 3 useful

- Täysin eri mieltä / Strongly disagree
- Osittain eri mieltä / Somewhat disagree
- Ei samaa eikä eri mieltä / Neutral
- Osittain samaa mieltä / Somewhat agree
- Täysin samaa mieltä / Strongly agree

4. Mitkä suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukset On the Go 3 -kirjassa koet hyödyllisimmiksi suullisen kielitaidon kehittymiselle? Valitse yksi tai useampi / Which of the oral skills exercises in On the Go 3 do you find the most useful for the development of oral skills? Choose one or more

- roolileikit, dialogien esittäminen ääneen / role plays, acting out dialogues
- ryhmäkeskustelut / group discussions

- parikeskustelut / pair discussions
- esitelmät, puheen pitäminen / presentations, speech
- väittelyt / debates
- ääntämisen harjoitukset / pronunciation exercises
- ääneen lukeminen / read-aloud
- sanasto- ja rakenneharjoitukset / vocabulary and structure
- kääntämisharjoitukset / translation
- pelit / games
- muu, mikä? / other, what?

5. Käytätkö opetuksessa suullisia harjoituksia kirjan ulkopuolelta? Jos kyllä, millaisia ja mistä etsit niitä? / Do you use oral skills exercises outside the textbook? If yes, what kind and where do you search for them?

- Kyllä, mitä ja mistä? / Yes, what kind and where from?
- Ei, käytän vain kirjan harjoituksia / No, I only use the exercises in the textbook

6. Kuinka paljon hyödynnät On the Go 3 -kirjan suullisia harjoituksia opetuksessa? / How much do you use the oral skills exercises in On the Go 3 in your teaching?

- Lähes kaikkia tehtäviä / Almost every exercise
- Valikoituja tehtäviä tilanteen mukaan / Selected exercises according to the situation
- En käytä niitä ollenkaan / I don't use them at all

7. Mitä asioita otat huomioon valitessasi suullisen kielitaidon tehtävää? / Which aspects do you take into consideration when choosing an oral skills exercise?

8. Minkä tai mitkä asiat koet tärkeimpinä suullisen kielitaidon tehtävässä? Valitse yksi tai useampi / What or which aspects do you find the most important in an oral skills exercise? Choose one or more

- Vapaa tuottaminen / Free production
- Ääntämisen harjoittelu / Practicing pronunciation
- Sanaston harjoittelu / Practicing vocabulary
- Kieliopin ja rakenteiden harjoittelu / Practicing grammar and structures

- Keskustelutaitojen harjoittelu / Practicing conversation skills
- Muu, mikä? / Other, what?