

READING ACTIVITIES IN EFL-TEXTBOOKS:

An analysis of upper secondary school textbooks

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract Lukutaito on yksi suomalaisen opetusjärjestelmän päätavoitteista. Vieraskielisten tekstien lukutaidon merkitys korostuu lukiossa, jossa oppilaiden lukutaitoa arvioidaan jatkuvasti kielitaidon erillisenä osa-alueena. Vaikka vieraalla kielellä lukeminen eroaa merkittävästi äidinkielellä lukemisesta ja sitä tulisi tarkastella ympäristöönsä sidottuna ilmiönä, suuri osa lukutaidon tutkimuksesta liittyy nimenomaan äidinkielellä lukemisen tutkimukseen.</p> <p>Tässä tutkielmassa arvioidaan lukion viimeisen kurssin oppimateriaaleja vieraan kielen opetuksen näkökulmasta. Pääasiallinen tutkimuskysymys on millaisia luetunymmärtämisen harjoituksia oppikirjat tarjoavat lukutaidon harjoittamiseksi. Tutkielmassa analysoitiin kahta lukion oppikirjaa, <i>In touch 6</i> (Davies ym. 2003) ja <i>Open road 6</i> (Karapalo ym. 2010). Opetusmateriaali analyysin kohteena on relevantti, sillä aiemmat Suomessa tehdyt tutkimukset aiheesta ovat osoittaneet, että oppimateriaalien rooli vieraiden kielten opetuksessa on merkittävä. Luetunymmärtämistä vahvistavia harjoituksia ei kuitenkaan toistaiseksi ole tyhjentävästi tutkittu vieraan kielen opetuksen näkökulmasta lukiotasolla.</p> <p>Tutkimusmenetelmänä käytettiin kvalitatiivista sisällönanalyysia. Käytetty tutkimusote oli pääasiassa deduktiivinen. Saatuja tuloksia, jotka esitettiin myös taulukoina, vertailtiin lukion opetussuunnitelman tavoitteisiin sekä ylioppilaskokeen vieraiden kielten kokeissa käytettäviin arviointikriteereihin.</p> <p>Harjoitukset olivat molemmissa oppikirjoissa hyvin samankaltaisia ja keskittyivät usein pinnallisen luetunymmärtämisen tukemiseen. Ylioppilaskokeessa mitattavia taitoja harjoitettiin paljon, mutta joitain opetussuunnitelman tavoitteita ei aina huomioitu. Tuloksia tarkasteltaessa tulee huomioida se, että tutkimusaineisto koostui vain kahdesta oppikirjasta sekä se, että laadullinen tutkimus pohjautuu aina tutkijan tulkintaan aineistosta. Tutkimuksessa esitettiin yksi tapa arvioida luetun ymmärtämisen harjoituksia vieraankielen opetuksen näkökulmasta. Lisäksi tutkimustulokset kannustavat opettajia opetusmateriaalin kriittiseen tarkasteluun ja osoittavat mahdollisen lisämateriaalin tarpeen luetunymmärtämisen opetuksessa.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Reading skills are, in the context of the Finnish educational system, considered a necessity. Learning skills that facilitate learning to read in one's mother tongue are among the goals of preschool education and if the Finnish school system is examined even further, it is evident that reading skills are required at all levels of formal education. In addition to reading in one's mother tongue, the pupils' reading skills in a foreign language are assessed throughout the educational system. The role of English especially is very prominent, as it is a compulsory subject for all Finnish students. One of the most explicit methods of assessing the ability to read in a foreign language takes place in upper secondary school, when students are required to participate in the Finnish matriculation examination. Thus, pupils are expected to succeed in reading in a foreign language and in their mother tongue.

The act of reading in a foreign language is, in the context of the present study, referred to as *L2 reading*, whereas reading in one's mother tongue is referred to as *L1 reading*. Research on L2 reading is often based on the assumption that L1 and L2 reading are, in certain aspects, similar. There are, however, several factors and variables related to both L2 readers and L2 reading contexts that differentiate L1 and L2 reading (Grabe and Stoller 2002, Aebbersold and Field 1997, Urquhart and Weir 1998). In addition, it has often been argued that transfer of reading skills from L1 to L2 occurs automatically, yet currently there is no conclusive evidence of automatic interlingual transfer of reading skills (Hinkel 2006). Consequently, it is, in my view, reasonable to argue that L1 and L2 reading are different by nature and thus, research on L2 reading instruction is relevant.

Textbooks are one of the main content providers for foreign language teaching. The term *EFL textbook* is often used when examining teaching materials designed for foreign language learners: *EFL* means English as a foreign language and *textbook* may refer to different kinds of books used in teaching. In the present study, the term *textbook* refers to a course book that contains both texts and exercises. Textbooks and their role in foreign language teaching have been widely investigated (e.g. Luukka et al. 2008, Grant and Starks 2001, Hutchinson and Torres 1993). For example, a large scale study that examined the text and media practices of Finnish 9th graders (Luukka et al. 2008) also included an analysis of the exercises and texts provided by textbooks. However, textbook studies on L2 reading in the context of the Finnish upper secondary school have not yet been conducted.

The present study aims to provide insight on what kinds of tools textbooks offer teachers and students of upper secondary school in order to facilitate L2 reading comprehension: the main research question of the present study is what kinds of reading activities are presented in textbooks to support comprehension of texts. To establish a framework for the present study, a general overview of theories on reading and on comprehension of texts in a foreign language, followed by a brief examination of the relevance of textbooks and reading activities in teaching L2 reading, is provided. The present study consists of a qualitative content analysis of the reading activities related to key texts in two textbooks, *Open road 6* (Davies et al. 2003) and *In Touch 6* (Karapalo et al. 2010), which are aimed at pupils attending their last compulsory course of English in upper secondary school.

2 L2 READING IN THE CONTEXT OF FINNISH UPPER-SECONDARY SCHOOL

In this section, the aim is to address theoretical and practical issues related to teaching L2 reading. Firstly, to answer the question of what L2 reading is and how it can be taught, a brief overview of central concepts of reading and text comprehension and a discussion of differences between L1 and L2 reading are included. Secondly, the relevance of reading tasks and textbooks to teaching L2 reading are discussed both in the context of the Finnish education system and in a more general context.

2.1 Views on L2 reading and text comprehension

It is possible to simply state that reading is, by nature, a receptive ability which is often conducted privately and silently (Alderson 2000:4). Views on reading as interaction between the text and the reader have also often been presented (e.g. Aebersold and Field 1997; Urquhart and Weir 1998:58-62). Duffy et al. (2010:61), however, point out that the social context of reading should also be taken into consideration, while recognizing that the reader, the text and the interaction between the two are relevant when considering the act of reading and reading instruction. In addition, it is also possible to consider reading as a *process* that results in an understanding or comprehension of a text (Alderson 2000:3).

Grabe and Stoller (2002:19-31) offer a description of reading as a set of lower- and higher-level reading processes that are activated when an act of reading takes place. Lower-level processes that are related to decoding the text include word recognition, syntactic parsing, semantic proposition formation and working memory activation. *Word recognition* is related to the ability to connect a

printed word to a lexical item, whereas *syntactic parsing* requires understanding of the syntactic structures of a language. *Semantic proposition formation* and *working memory activation* are related to the ability to derive a meaningful interpretation of a part of the text. Higher-level processes, on the other hand, have more to do with building and monitoring text comprehension. The forming of *a text model of reading comprehension*, which involves understanding main ideas and details and their relation in a text, *a situation model of the reader interpretation*, which refers to using background knowledge to understand and assess texts, and *executive control processing* that monitors the reading process, are all listed as higher-level processes. Components of reading, such as word recognition and language aspects, and the role of background knowledge, are also discussed in detail for instance by Urquhart and Weir (1998:51-84).

The definition of reading as a complex set of processes influenced by language and background knowledge can be further broadened by introducing some additional views presented by Grabe and Stoller (2002:11-39), who point out that a reader always has a purpose for reading. The main purposes for reading include reading to search or scan for information, to skim a text to quickly gain an overall view of it, to learn from texts, to integrate information, to write or critique texts or to generally comprehend a text. The purpose of reading has significant impact on the skills and strategies required to fulfill the purpose successfully.

The issue of determining reading as a set of strategies and skills, however, is slightly problematic. As Alderson (2000:9-13) points out, it is difficult to come to a conclusion whether reading is indeed a sum of skills and strategies and what those skills and strategies might be. In addition, there is disagreement over what the differences between reading skills and strategies are and over the fact that several skills commonly linked to reading are not necessarily reading skills per se, but general language skills. Furthermore, Alderson (2000:305-307) asserts that in testing situations different readers may actually use very different strategies and skills and still achieve similar results.

In addition to having a close link with reading strategies, purposes for reading, as described by Grabe and Stoller (2002:13-15), are closely connected to the discussion of different types of reading (e.g. Grellet 1981, Urquhart and Weir 1998). For instance, Grellet (1981:4) suggests four different types of reading: skimming, scanning, extensive reading and intensive reading. The purpose of *skimming* is to quickly find the main idea of a text, whereas *scanning* is used to quickly find some relevant piece of information. *Intensive reading*, on the one hand, is useful when trying to achieve a detailed understanding of a text and *extensive reading*, on the other hand, is useful when reading longer texts and focusing on main ideas. Urquhart and Weir (1998:102-105) offer another possible

taxonomy for types of reading and within this taxonomy, the concept of *careful reading* is introduced. Careful reading is described as a type of reading where the goal is to learn from the text; it involves processing an entire text in detail and trying to derive the main ideas and details as they are presented by the original author of the text. This definition is quite similar to the definition of reading to learn as a purpose for reading as presented by Grabe and Stoller (2002:13-14).

The previously introduced ideas of reading are mostly based on research of L1 reading. There are, however, some key differences between L1 and L2 reading. Urquhart and Weir (1998:33-34) point out that when considering the term “L2 reading process” it should be taken into account that L2 readers are not a homogenous group and that there are several variables that affect reading in L2. The more detailed consideration of differences in L1 and L2 reading provided by Grabe and Stoller (2002:41-63) mentions three main differences between L1 and L2 reading while recognizing the diversity within the group of L2 readers. The three main types of differences mentioned are related to linguistic and processing differences, individual and experiential differences and socio-cultural and institutional differences.

When considering *linguistic aspects* that affect L2 reading, according to Grabe and Stoller (2002:42-55), it is crucial to note the main things that separate L1 and L2 readers: L2 learners already know their mother tongue, have a varying amount of metalinguistic skills and L2 readers have, in comparison to beginner L1 readers, significantly less knowledge of different aspects, such as grammar, vocabulary, discourse and text types, of L2. Knowledge of L1 may, in some aspects, be helpful to L2 readers, as it has been argued that for instance L1 reading strategies and skills might be transferred to L2 reading. Nevertheless, it should not be taken for granted that this type of transfer occurs automatically (Hinkel 2006:120-123). Grabe and Stoller (2002:42-55) assert that pre-existing knowledge of L1 when reading in L2 is also a significant due to inter-lingual differences, transfer and interaction between L1 and L2. While all the aspects mentioned above are distinctive to L2 reading, the most crucial linguistic aspect in successful L2 reading seems to be knowledge of L2 vocabulary. The connection between sufficient lexical knowledge and successful text comprehension has been widely recognized and for example, Hu and Nation (2000, cited in Schmitt 2010:29) estimate that a 98% coverage of words is required to comprehend written texts. The significance of syntactical knowledge in L2 reading, however, may be more difficult to substantiate (Urquhart and Weir, 1998:60-61).

Other factors presented by Grabe and Stoller (2002:40-62) that affect the nature of L2 reading are *individual and experiential differences* and *socio-cultural and institutional practices*. Individual

features include differences in L1 reading ability and different motivational factors for reading, whereas the experiential differences discussed are related to the kinds of texts used and the use of resources, such as glossaries and dictionaries, in L2 reading. Differences in socio-cultural backgrounds, different social and cultural preferences in ways of organizing texts and different expectations set by institutions are mentioned as socio-cultural and institutional variables that determine the nature of L2 reading.

There are several approaches to L2 reading instruction. For instance, Urquhart and Weir (1998:178), state that L2 readers learn to read in a target language, at least to some extent, without formal reading instruction. Nevertheless, Urquhart and Weir (1998:178) also point out that comprehension instruction may be useful as if no instruction is given it is likely that less fluent readers do not improve but fluent readers do. Grabe and Stoller (2002:44), on the other hand, assert that providing L2 students with instruction on grammar and structural features will aid them to gain a better comprehension of a text. Other recent suggestions of ways of teaching reading include combining teaching L2 reading with teaching other skills, providing explicit vocabulary instruction and reading strategy instruction when needed, using authentic reading tasks and emphasizing extensive reading activities (Grabe and Stoller 2002:44; Duffy et al. 2010:61-67; Hinkel 2006:120-123).

To summarize the views presented so far, the features that define reading and L2 reading are the following:

- Reading, in general, is a process that involves several lower and higher level processes, language and background knowledge and skills and strategies.
- Both L1 and L2 reading require interaction between a text and a reader, take place in a social context and are mediated by the teacher and /or exercises when necessary.
- L2 reading has its own distinctive features, but L2 readers are not a homogenous group and thus examining the context of teaching L2 reading is relevant.
- Purpose of reading may affect the strategies and types of reading used, but readers may use different strategies and still achieve a similar interpretation of a text.

The following section addresses the relevance of textbooks and different task types used to facilitate and measure L2 reading comprehension.

2.2 Reading activities and the role of EFL textbooks

EFL textbooks and the reading activities they provide are important factors to consider when examining L2 reading. Firstly, textbooks are often used as major providers of content for foreign language teaching (Luukka et al 2008:94; Hutchinson and Torres 1993). Secondly, reading tasks may have significant impact on the reader's purpose of reading (Alderson 2000:248-249) and thus affect the type of reading used. In addition, reading tasks may also guide readers towards a pre-given interpretation of a text (Luukka et al. 2008:64). The aim of this section is to examine the role of EFL textbooks in a more general context and in Finland in particular and also to examine some ways of categorizing reading comprehension activities.

2.2.1 The role of EFL textbooks

Textbooks are a common feature of English Language Teaching, ELT, all over the world (Hutchinson and Torres 1993:315). It seems to be the case that teachers rely heavily on textbooks for various teaching purposes (Luukka et al. 2008, Grant and Starks 2001, Hutchinson and Torres 1993). Nevertheless, this reliance on textbooks also creates controversy as textbooks are often seen as "workable compromises" (Hutchinson and Torres 1993:325) at best. Some aspects related to textbooks that have been criticized include the lack of authenticity in textbook materials (e.g. Grant and Starks 2001:29-49) and the idea that textbooks diminish a teacher's responsibility and freedom of choice concerning methods used in teaching (Hutchinson and Torres 1993:315-316).

In Finland, textbooks are closely tied to *the National Curriculum* set by the Finnish National Board of Education and thus they should reflect the general goals and norms presented in the curriculum. So far, textbooks and teaching materials have been studied from various points of views. For instance, a large scale study (Luukka et al. 2008) that examined the text and media practices of Finnish 9th graders and their teachers showed that textbooks are highly influential factors in setting goals for teaching and that they also serve as significant content providers in foreign language teaching. These results seem to support the general notion of a strong emphasis on using textbooks and activities provided by them as a resource for teaching in Finland (Luukka et al. 2008:64).

2.2.2 Different kinds of reading activities

Reading activities are commonly used in teaching and testing reading. For example Grellet (1981:11) states that using reading comprehension exercises allows students to evaluate and improve their reading ability. In testing situations, however, tasks often become the purpose for

reading (Alderson 2000:248-249). One might also question whether this applies to any given situation when the reader faces a text and is asked to complete a task: Luukka et al. (2008:64) point out that reading activities influence the way texts are approached and how interpretations may be formed. For example, if readers are directed to make word and sentence-level interpretations of texts and correct interpretations are pre-given, this might restrict the reader's independent interpretation of the text. Thus, reading tasks are used to perform a certain function, e.g. to test or evaluate one's reading abilities, but they also affect the purpose and product of reading. There are several ways for categorizing reading tasks, three of which are addressed further in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, it is quite common to consider reading activities by dividing them into categories based on the *reading strategies* they require. The connection between reading strategies and tasks, however, is not that straight-forward as argued by Alderson (2000:305-307). Nevertheless, as it is relatively simple to predict whether tasks are to be done before the act of reading occurs or after the act of reading has occurred, it is possible to link activities with pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading strategies. In their discussion of pre-, post-, and during-reading strategies, Urquhart and Weir (1998:183-188) point out that pre-reading activities, while- or during-reading activities and post-reading activities have all been claimed to contribute, to some extent, to helping readers comprehend texts. Pre-reading strategies include previewing and predicting. *Previewing* is often used for instance to decide whether the text should be read, and *predicting*, on the other hand, is used to anticipate the content of the text. Pre-reading tasks often take the form of discussions, previewing texts and vocabulary instruction or activation. While- or during-reading strategies are used to self-monitor one's comprehension of a text: examples of during-reading activities include summarizing paragraphs and clarifying content while reading. Lastly, post-reading strategies and activities might involve evaluating and building a personal response to the text.

Secondly, it is possible to examine task types by the *purpose* they are expected to serve. Grellet (1981:12-25) introduces four general types of reading comprehension activities. In her taxonomy, the main four categories that are based on the assumed function of the tasks are exercises related to training reading techniques, reaching overall comprehension, understanding meaning and assessing and evaluating the text that has been read.

Lastly, Alderson (2000:202-270), provides 14 different types of *techniques for measuring reading comprehension* and points out that even though the list provided is initially a list of testing techniques, teaching and testing techniques are often similar. The techniques presented by Alderson

(2000) are all used in the field of language testing. In addition, the listed techniques, which include for instance summaries, multiple choice questions and short-answer questions, can also often be found in FL textbooks.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

Drawing on the idea of L2 reading as a process that is defined by situational variables and tied to its context (Urquhart and Weir 1998:33-34), it is relevant to define the educational context of the study before introducing the results. In this section, the context of the study, research questions, data collection and methods used in the present study are discussed.

3.1. The context of the study and the research questions

The present study takes place in the educational context of upper secondary school education in Finland. The textbooks analyzed are meant for students who have started learning English as a foreign language from third grade at the latest. The general objective for students in upper secondary school who study English at this level, also referred to as A-level in the *National Core Curriculum*, is to reach the reading comprehension skills equivalent for CEFR level B2.1, which means that the student needs to have the skills necessary to manage regular interaction with native speakers. (*National Core Curriculum for upper secondary school* 2003:102; 246.)

In addition to helping students achieve the general goals set by the *National Core Curriculum*, upper secondary school education prepares the students for the Finnish matriculation examination, which is a *high-stakes examination* taken after all compulsory courses have been completed. The examination aims to measure both productive and receptive language skills of the participants and approximately 23 % of the final test score is based explicitly on reading comprehension tasks that require understanding of different kinds of texts. The Finnish matriculation examination has a specific list of task types that may be used in foreign language testing. (*Toisen kotimaisen kielen ja vieraiden kielten kokeita koskevat määräykset* 2011:20). The requirements of the Finnish matriculation examination will be further discussed when discussing the results of the present study.

The present study focuses on text comprehension tasks provided by two textbooks in upper secondary school level in Finland in particular. The aim of the present study is to examine what kinds of tools textbooks provide their users, both teachers and students, in building and monitoring text comprehension. The main research problem of the study is *what kinds of reading*

comprehension activities are provided by textbooks aimed at upper secondary school students to facilitate comprehension of text. The main research question can be further divided into the following sub-questions:

1. *Are the tasks conducted individually or in pairs and groups?*
2. *Are the tasks conducted pre-, post- or during reading?*
3. *What types of tasks (techniques) are included?*
4. *What kind of goals do the tasks set for the reader?*
5. *What type or types of reading do the tasks seem to require?*
6. *Are other skills (listening, speaking, writing) being trained simultaneously?*

3.2. Data collection

The textbooks analyzed in the present study, *In touch 6* (Davies et al. 2003) and *Open road 6* (Karapalo et al. 2010), are used as teaching material for the last compulsory course of upper secondary school. Thus, they should be in accordance with the description of course content provided in the National Curriculum. *The National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary School* (2003:104) states that from the point of view of reading, emphasizing understanding of demanding language material and providing possibilities to practice reading strategies are relevant throughout the course. The main themes of the course include science, economy and technology. It is, however, important to point out that as *In touch 6* was first published in 2003, it does not necessarily fully comply with the guidelines.

The steps of data collection in the present study are based on methods of qualitative content analysis as presented by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:92-98). However, the data collection-phase differs slightly from the methods presented by Tuomi and Sarajärvi: as the data analyzed is already in textual form, it is not necessary to convert it into a textual form. In addition, as pre-distinguished categories based on previously discussed theories are used, the exercises are directly included in their respective categories. The categories used to sort data are built to answer the sub-questions presented previously and to clarify the categories used, some examples of prompts included in different categories are given when presenting the results.

Nearly all activities provided in textbooks require using reading skills to some extent. To establish a more fixed framework for reviewing the results presented in the following section, it is important to narrow down what activities, in the context of the present study, are counted as reading

comprehension activities. In the present study, the only exercises examined further are those that are directly related to the key texts presented in the selected books.

What is meant with direct relation to the text is that the exercise could not be completed without interaction with the text or that the exercise is indicated as a discussion task related to the text. For example, prompts that require filling in the exact expressions used in the key text are counted as reading comprehension activities, as it is reasonable to assume that the reader will scan the text for the correct answer. On the other hand, prompts that require translating single words or prompts that contain no direct reference to the text, even though students might be required to use structures presented in the text while translating sentences, are excluded. In addition, C-tests, which are commonly used in language testing to measure reading comprehension, grammatical and lexical knowledge and the ability to use a language in a given context, are excluded as reading comprehension activities as they tend to measure general language proficiency.

3.3. Methods of analysis

In the present study, the method of analysis selected to answer the research questions presented is qualitative content analysis. The main idea of qualitative content analysis is to derive an analysis of written, heard or seen content (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:91). As the data collected is in textual form, but needs to be interpreted and processed by the researcher to organize it and draw conclusions from it, this method seems most suited for the purposes of the present study.

To explain this method further, it is useful to present the common steps taken to conduct the analysis. The steps, as presented by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:92-94), are the following: going through the content to find the material that is relevant to the research question, giving a textual form to the content and dividing the relevant content into different categories and subcategories with suitable labels that simplify the presentation of the results. The analysis is then completed by writing a summary of the results. It is also common to classify the research as either inductive, which means moving from one example towards a generalization or as deductive, which means moving from a generalization to examine single examples (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:97-98). The approach used in the present study is mostly deductive as pre-existing frameworks and categories that are based on the concepts explored in the previous section are used. However, the framework used was not fully fixed but was adjusted to conform to the data collected.

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:105) also point out that even when using the qualitative approach to content analysis it is possible to extend the qualitative analysis with quantification of the data. In the

present study, quantifying the data is used to illustrate what types of exercises were found and if there were differences between the textbooks. Thus, the objective of quantification is to allow the reader to consider the proportions of the findings.

Finally, it is vital to point out that the present study focuses only on the activities that are presented in the two textbooks. It is also recognized that teachers and students may naturally use other resources when teaching and learning L2 reading and that as only two books were analyzed, the results do not necessarily apply to all textbooks used in upper secondary school.

4 READING ACTIVITIES IN TEXTBOOKS

The textbooks examined in the present study, *In touch 6* and *Open road 6*, are aimed at upper-secondary school students who are attending their last compulsory course. In the present study, the aim for providing numerical data is to allow comparison of the two books and more importantly, to support the qualitative analysis conducted. Firstly, to provide insight on what kinds of exercises the textbooks provide, the results of the analysis are presented in tables and some illustrative examples are also given. The presentation of the results is based on the research questions examined in the previous section. Secondly, other general observations are pointed out. Finally, the results drawn from the data analysis are compared to the objectives set by National Core Curriculum and the criteria used in the assessment of the matriculation examination. The comparison is conducted to gain insight into whether the construct of reading presented in the exercises of the textbooks matches the construct of reading introduced in the *National Core Curriculum* (2003) and in the criteria for assessment of the Finnish Matriculation Examination.

4.1. Various kinds of activities to support reading comprehension

The two textbooks studied are organized differently; *Open road 6* is divided into nine chapters whereas in *In touch 6* the material is divided into four units. *Open road 6* provides a total of 89 exercises and *In touch 6* a total of 77 exercises. In both books, approximately one third of all the exercises are reading activities; in *In touch 6* 36% of all exercises are reading activities whereas in *Open road 6* the percentage is 35%.

4.1.1 Task types and techniques

In Table 1, tasks are divided by the way they are conducted: individually, in pairs or in a group. It is possible that some exercises that are listed as individually conducted exercises could also be

completed in pairs or groups and vice versa, but in the present study the general principle in classifying the tasks is that if it is not stated in the prompt that the exercise is to be completed in pairs or groups, it is listed as an individually conducted exercise.

Table 1. Task mode.

	<i>In touch 6</i>		<i>Open road 6</i>	
	N=28	%	N=31	%
Individually	12	43 %	15	48 %
In pairs	14	50 %	13	42 %
In a group	2	7 %	3	10 %
Total	28	100 %	31	100 %

The results of Table 1 show little difference between the books. The main difference is that in *In touch 6* half of the exercises are to be completed in pairs, whereas in *Open road 6* the focus is on exercises that are to be completed individually: 48% of the tasks are individual tasks. However, the number of individually conducted tasks is relatively notable (i.e. over 40%) in *In Touch 6* as well and several tasks that are meant to be completed in pairs are pre-reading or post-reading tasks, where the role of the key text is to provide material for discussion.

In Table 2, tasks are listed as pre-reading, during-reading or post-reading exercises. The tasks are placed into their respective categories by analyzing both their placement in relation to the text of the tasks and the instructions provided by the prompts.

Table 2. Pre-, during- and post-reading activities.

	<i>In touch 6</i>		<i>Open road 6</i>	
	N=28	%	N=31	%
Pre-reading	7	25 %	8	26 %
During-reading	0	0 %	0	0 %
Post-reading	21	75 %	23	74 %
Total	28	100 %	31	100 %

Both textbooks contain exercises that are specifically indicated as pre-reading activities. The ratio between pre- and post-reading exercises is similar in both textbooks, and the two books seem to favor post-reading activities. In both books, approximately three quarters of the activities are to be completed post-reading.

Quizzes, games, surveys and discussions are extremely common as pre-reading activities in both books: a typical example of a pre-reading activity is illustrated in example 1 below. In *In touch 6*, however, discussion tasks are also commonly used as post-reading tasks to elicit personal response from the students. These tasks are labeled as “Talking about the text” –exercises (e.g. *In touch 6* 2003:13).

1. “Guess how your partner’s mind works. Don’t think, just jot down the first answer that comes to mind. Your partner will do the same for you. Afterwards talk about your answers and see how many you got right” (*Open road 6* 2010:55)

Table 3 shows the techniques used in reading activities that are found in the textbooks. The taxonomy used for dividing the exercises in their own categories is based on Alderson’s (2000) listing of different techniques for testing reading.

Table 3.Techniques.

	<i>In touch 6</i>		<i>Open road 6</i>	
	N=28	%	N=31	%
1. Cloze or gap fill	1	3.6 %	3	9.7 %
2. Summary	5	17.9 %	7	22.6 %
3. Matching task	1	3.6 %	2	6.5 %
4. Ordering task	1	3.6 %	0	0.0 %
5. Multiple choice	1	3.6 %	1	3.2 %
6. Dichotomous items	1	3.6 %	0	0.0 %
7. Quiz, game or survey	2	7.1 %	4	12.9 %
8. Discussion	4	14.3 %	4	12.9 %
9. Role-play	1	3.6 %	1	3.2 %
10. Open-ended questions	6	21.4 %	2	6.5 %
11. Translating or finding words/phrases/sentences	4	14.3 %	7	22.6 %
12. Other	1	3.6 %	0	
Total	28	100 %	31	100 %

The table indicates that both textbooks that were analyzed employ a range of different techniques to facilitate reading comprehension and that there are some differences between the two books.

The exercises in *Open Road 6* are often related to finding translations or words, phrases or sentences from the text (22.6%) or summarizing the text with the help of clues (22.6%), as shown in examples 2 and 3:

2. "Complete the collocations that appeared in the text."(*Open Road 6* 2010:21.)
3. "Take turns retelling the text with the help of prompts."(*Open Road 6* 2010: 29)

In *In Touch 6*, on the other hand, approximately one fifth of the reading exercises are open-ended questions, see example 4 below. Summarizing tasks, as in example 5, are also quite common in *In touch 6*: nearly 18% of the reading activities require summarizing the text.

4. "Answer the questions in Finnish", (*In touch 6* 2003:13)
5. "Here are some dates that come up in the first part of the text. Jot down what each one refers to. Then take turns retelling Stephen Hawking's life story."(*In touch 6* 2003:38)

What is notable about the summarizing tasks in general is that both books provide students with some assistance for completing the tasks, for example in the form of questions or key words.

4.1.2 Types of reading

In table 4, the exercises are divided into categories according to the type of reading they seem to elicit. It is crucial to note that it is, however, difficult to assign exercises to fit descriptions of different types of reading. Quite often tasks can be completed in various ways and they might not require a specific type of reading.

Table 4. Types of reading.

	<i>In touch 6</i>		<i>Open road 6</i>	
	N=32	%	N=34	%
Skim	0	0 %	1	3 %
Scan	5	18 %	8	26 %
Careful Reading	13	46 %	14	45 %
None	10	36 %	8	26 %
Total	28	100 %	31	100 %

Table 4 indicates that most of the tasks that require processing the actual text could be seen as exercises that elicit *careful reading* (Urquhart and Weir 1998:102-105); nearly half of the reading tasks in both books seem to require careful reading. For instance summarizing tasks, open-ended questions and matching tasks often entail examining the text as an object of study and focusing on main ideas and details. Consequently, these types of tasks are listed as tasks that elicit careful reading. Some tasks, on the other hand, require no reading at all even though they are clearly reading-related activities. Pre-reading activities and other activities that elicit personal responses do not necessarily require reading the text at the time of completing the exercise, even though they are

related to the text. In *In touch 6*, a little over one-third of the exercises require no reading at all, whereas in *Open road 6* approximately one quarter of the text-related exercises did not involve actual reading. Finally, tasks that require locating specific items presented in the text can be viewed as activities that require scanning. In *In touch 6*, only 18 % of the tasks require scanning, whereas in *Open road 6* approximately a quarter of the reading exercises involve scanning the text. Activities related to skimming the text are notably absent in *In touch 6*.

4.1.3 Goals of reading

Table 5 illustrates what types of goals could be identified in the reading tasks. Some tasks have more than one identifiable goal and in these cases, the task is counted in all relevant categories. The categories presented below are loosely based on the classification of purposes of reading presented by Grabe and Stoller (2002:13-15).

Table 5. Goals of reading activities.

	<i>In touch 6</i>		<i>Open road 6</i>	
	N=30	%	N=31	%
Finding grammar items	0	0 %	1	3 %
Finding vocabulary items	4	13 %	4	13 %
Sentence level comprehension	0	0 %	5	16 %
Understanding main ideas and details	14	47 %	10	32 %
Author's point of view	0	0 %	1	3 %
Elicit personal response	9	30 %	8	26 %
Evaluate and criticize	2	7 %	0	0 %
Read to write	1	3 %	0	0 %
Other	0	0 %	2	6 %
Total	30	100%	31	100%

Most tasks in both books require understanding main ideas and details, but activities that elicit personal response based on the text, opinions or background knowledge are also quite common. In *Open road 6*, nearly half of the exercises and in *In touch 6*, nearly a third of the exercises emphasize understanding main ideas and details. An example of a task that requires understanding the main ideas is illustrated in example 6 below. Tasks that elicit personal response, as in example 7, are second most common in the two books.

6. "Explain in English how the following things are related to becoming fossilized." (*Open road 6* 2010:79)

7. "Work with your partner. One of you is Little Bee and the other a local newspaper journalist interviewing her. Act out the interview. The text does not give you answers so use your imagination." (*Open road 6* 2010:11)

What stood out in the results is that in *Open road 6* there are no tasks that require evaluation or criticizing of the texts; the activities rely heavily on comprehending the ideas presented by the text. A more literal comprehension of the text is often required, and in some exercises (16%) provided in *Open road 6*, only sentence level understanding of the text is required, as shown in a sentence pairing exercise illustrated in example 8 below:

8. "Choose the sentence that best corresponds to the one from the text." (*Open road 6* 2010:79)

In *In touch 6*, tasks that specifically require sentence level comprehension are absent and there are some activities that require evaluating and criticizing texts and going beyond the actual text, as shown in examples 9 and 10. The questions that require a more critical approach to the text, however, are often combined with questions related to a more general comprehension of the text.

9. "What does the extract reveal about American society?" (*In touch 6* 2003:54)

10. "In your opinion, did Dr. Franksburg treat Jean professionally? Why or why not?" (*In touch 6* 2003:84)

Table 6 illustrates if completing the exercises requires practicing any other language skills. In some cases, exercises involve using two other skills, most commonly writing and speaking. All discussions and exercises that require explaining to a partner are listed as exercises that train speaking skills, even though they naturally involve listening to the other speaker as well. The tasks that require using no other skills than reading skills include for instance reading aloud and matching and ordering activities.

Table 6. Training other skills in combination with reading activities.

	<i>In touch 6</i>		<i>Open road 6</i>	
	N=32	%	N=34	%
None	4	13 %	3	9 %
Writing	11	34 %	15	44 %
Speaking	16	50 %	16	47 %
Listening	1	3 %	0	0 %
Total	32	100 %	34	100 %

The data in Table 6 shows that speaking and writing are most commonly combined with reading exercises, but in *In touch 6* the emphasis is more on practicing speaking skills with reading skills, whereas in *Open road 6*, writing and speaking are nearly equally often trained in combination with reading skills.

Reading activities that require writing often elicit short answers. However, in *In touch 6*, reading and writing are also combined in the activities labeled as Write On-tasks, where students are instructed to first read an extract and pay attention to its form and then write their own text. As these activities are mainly writing activities and they are not directly related to key texts, they are not included in the analysis. It is interesting to note that exercises of this type, which might help pupils gain more insight on different text-types, are not included at all in *Open road 6*.

4.2. Other observations

In addition to the data presented in the previous tables, a few general observations that are relevant to the study were made during the data collection phase. These considerations are briefly discussed below.

Considering the fact that one of the main aims of course six is to practice reading skills, it was surprising to notice that in *Open road 6*, there is a chapter that requires independent research done by the students, but only one of the possible tasks specifically requires reading. The chapter was left out of the analysis as the research projects did not include any exercises related to key texts.

In addition, both books provide explicit reading instruction to some extent: In *Open road 6* (2010:103-104), critical reading skills are introduced in a separate section, whereas in *In touch 6* reading instruction is scattered and provided in the form of “tool boxes” that are located in the vicinity of key texts or exercises related to them.

Another important aspect to consider is the language used in the reading activities: the instructions are generally given in L2 and the emphasis is on requiring students to respond in English. There are few exercises or sets of open-ended questions that elicit response in the students’ L1.

4.3. Discussion

To analyze the results in the context of the Finnish educational system, the findings suggested by the data are compared with the objectives stated in the *National Core Curriculum* (2003:247) and with the assessment criteria used for foreign language testing in *the Finnish Matriculation Examination*. This is done firstly by introducing the objectives and criteria and, secondly, by

presenting conclusions drawn from the data and comparing them to the assessment criteria and objectives.

The details of the goals for reading comprehension set for skill level B2.1 as stated in the *National Core Curriculum* (2003:247) are the following:

- Can read a few pages of text independently (newspaper articles, short stories, popular fiction and nonfiction, reports and detailed instructions) about his/her own field or general topics. Texts may deal with abstract, conceptual or vocational subjects and contain facts, attitudes and opinions.
- Can identify the meaning of a text and its writer and locate several different details in a long text. Can quickly identify the content of text and the relevance of new information to decide whether closer study is worthwhile.
- Difficulties only occur with idioms and cultural allusions in longer texts.

In addition, the Finnish Matriculation Examination system has outlined criteria for assessment of foreign language testing. The criteria state that those participating in a foreign language test in the Matriculation examination are expected to be able to understand the main idea or ideas of a text, understand relevant details and examples, make inferences and translate single words or expressions (*Toisen kotimaisen kielen ja vieraiden kielten kokeita koskevat määräykset* 2011:20).

The results of the present study suggest that the textbooks studied are, in general, very similar even though *In touch 6* was published ten years ago, in 2003. The most striking difference is that the older book, *In touch 6*, provides students with more exercises that require deeper processing of texts, whereas *Open road 6* provides more exercises that require scanning the text to locate specific items in the text. Other conclusions drawn from the data are discussed further below.

Firstly, the data shows that reading is quite a solitary activity and reading activities generally take place after reading the text. Even though the data included pre-reading activities and exercises, where the role of the actual text is to provide a framework for the following pair discussion, over 40% of the exercises provided in both textbooks are conducted individually. By examining both course-level and larger scale goals of education and the criteria for assessment, it is possible to conclude that students should be able to read *independently*. Thus, the nature of reading comprehension seems to be, according to this framework, also quite solitary.

Secondly, the data suggests that the key to L2 reading instruction seems to be finding main ideas and details. The guidelines and criteria state that readers are expected to be able to identify *the meaning* and to find *details*, to identify *the writer* of a text and to deal with *various kinds of texts* that may contain *attitudes* and *opinions*. Thus, the framework provided for upper-secondary school education assumes that texts have, at least to some extent, a fixed meaning and that the readers should be able to comprehend and locate main ideas, details and the writer. In addition, students should also be able to notice whether presented information is factual or based on opinions or attitudes. Most of the exercises provided in both textbooks actually emphasize identifying main ideas and details. However, a considerable number of exercises focus on eliciting a personal response, activating background knowledge and stating one's own opinion, which are objectives that are not mentioned in the curriculum or in the assessment criteria. Moreover, exercises that require inferencing or a deeper analysis of the information presented in the text are lacking, especially in *Open road 6*.

Thirdly, L2 reading activities are mostly conducted in the target language and training other skills may be integrated to reading tasks. In the case of the Finnish matriculation examination system, the tasks used to measure reading comprehension may require the ability to answer questions in the target language in writing; thus, even though the test claims to measure reading skills in particular, reading and writing skills may be integrated. This criterion was well met, as nearly all (i.e., over 90%) of the reading exercises elicit responses in the target language and reading activities are often combined with training other language skills.

In addition, reading tasks in textbooks utilize several techniques for facilitating reading comprehension. The techniques used in reading exercises provided in textbooks are also aligned with the assessment criteria of the matriculation examination: all the types of tasks that are used in the Finnish matriculation examination are represented in the books. These techniques include multiple choice questions, open-ended questions, summaries or instructed summaries, translations and explanations (*Toisen kotimaisen kielen ja vieraiden kielten kokeita koskevat määräykset* 2011:20). The focus on detail and on the ability to translate expressions is especially prominent in *Open road 6* as 23% of the exercises require translating or finding words, phrases or sentences in the texts.

Lastly, the results of the study show a tendency to favor exercises that require careful reading. In both books, the majority of the exercises seem to encourage the student to carefully examine the

text. Activities that require quick skimming of texts to gain an overview of the content, on the other hand, are not prominent: instead, the exercises favor scanning the text to locate details and expressions. The types of reading that seem relevant considering the assessment criteria of the matriculation examination and the *National Core Curriculum* (2003) are careful reading and skimming: On the one hand, careful reading, which is often used in educational contexts, seems to be valued as students are expected to be able to understand short texts *in detail* and to understand them with no great difficulties. On the other hand, students are also expected to be able to *quickly identify the content* and *evaluate* whether it is relevant and worthwhile to study the text further. Thus it seems that skimming is also valued, however exercises that require skimming are not prominent in either book.

5 CONCLUSIONS

To summarize the results of the present study, the following statements about reading activities in textbooks can be made: The reading tasks analyzed portray reading as a mainly solitary activity, emphasize careful reading and focus on comprehending the main ideas and details. Different techniques are employed in the reading tasks, activities are integrated with other general language skills and the majority of tasks are conducted in the target language. All in all, based on the findings of the study, the activities provided by the two books analyzed are mostly in line with the criteria set for the Finnish Matriculation Examination system, but they fail to meet some of the objectives set in the *National Core Curriculum* (2003).

It is important to bear in mind that textbook studies are by nature limited, as it is not possible to determine in detail what teachers and students choose to do with the textbooks they use: it is only possible to provide a general description of what kinds of exercises are found in them and what kind of construct of reading the exercises seem to support. Furthermore, only two textbooks were analyzed and consequently the results do not cover every textbook that may currently be in use in upper secondary schools. In addition, the placing of results in their respective categories is, naturally, based on subjective evaluations of the researcher. Despite these shortcomings, the study did, however, provide an attempt at a framework for how reading activities might be analyzed.

In addition to providing a possible modifiable framework for further studies, the results have some practical implications for reading instruction and further research on the topic. What the results

seem to suggest, in terms of reading instruction in practice, is that some additional material might need to be provided by teachers to further facilitate students' L2 reading skills. For instance, extensive authentic materials might be useful to practice skimming skills. Providing additional tasks that elicit critical evaluation of texts can, in light of the results of the present study, be recommended.

As the present study showed some discrepancy with the current *National Core Curriculum* and the more recent textbook, *Open Road 6*, critical evaluation of textbooks seems to be worthwhile, especially as the curriculum will be revised in 2016. Another possible topic for further research suggested by the results can be drawn from the conclusion that additional L2 reading instruction might be beneficial. Further research could, perhaps, take on a different point of view and focus on how teachers approach L2 reading instruction in practice. Possible research questions might include what kind of L2 reading instruction teachers favor and with what types of, if any, additional reading tasks they provide their students to complement the reading activities in textbooks.

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