

Minority students' perceptions of English instruction in two upper secondary schools in Norway



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To my two tutors, Sigrid and Craig. To both of you thousand thanks. I would have been utterly lost without your help.

To my wife: Sorry for all the questions; I am in debt, though I have been since I met you.

And to my first son, born under a Master thesis. I am finally here.

Abstract

This qualitative study explored eight minority language students' perceptions of English language instruction at the upper-secondary school in Norway. The goal was to understand how these students experienced the practical aspects of language teaching as they began their upper-secondary education.

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted in two different schools in northern Norway. Four teachers were also interviewed. Results pointed at a blend of feelings regarding class dynamics. Interviews yielded an abundance of opinions on oral and written activities, visual devices used in class, the importance of explicit grammar teaching, the topics dealt upon in the subject, the feedback given by teachers, and the kind of help these students received.

In general, minority language students in Norway are satisfied with the English instruction, yet they continuously ask for improving interventions in almost every practice they are exposed to. The role of multilingualism in class is also commented on, of which a possible related finding regarding the facilitatory use of the Norwegian language in learning English is highlighted and recommended for further research.

Abstrakt

Denne kvalitative studien undersøkte åtte minoritetsspråklige elevers oppfatning av engelskundervisning ved to videregående skoler i Norge. Målet var å forstå hvordan disse elevene opplevde de praktiske sidene ved engelsk språkopplæringen da de begynte på videregående opplæring.

Det ble gjennomført åtte semistrukturerte intervjuer ved to ulike skoler i Nord-Norge. Fire lærere ble også intervjuet. Resultatene pekte på en blanding av følelser angående klassedynamikk. Intervjuer ga en overflod av meninger om muntlige og skriftlige aktiviteter, visuelle hjelpemidler som ble brukt i klassen, viktigheten av eksplisitt grammatikkundervisning, temaene som ble behandlet i faget, tilbakemeldingene gitt av lærere og hva slags hjelp disse elevene fikk.

Generelt er minoritetsspråklige elever i Norge fornøyde med engelskundervisningen, men de ber kontinuerlig om forbedrede intervensjoner i nesten hver form for undervisningsopplegg. Flerspråklighetens rolle i klassen blir også kommentert. Et mulig relatert funn angående tilretteleggende bruk av norsk språk i å lære engelsk er belyst og anbefalt for videre forskning.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In 2014, I moved to Norway from Spain and started to work as a teacher in a secondary school. I taught, and have been teaching ever since, mostly Spanish, but complemented my working hours with some English courses, especially in the Minority Language speakers' section (MI).

At that time, I did not have any experience with these kinds of students. I was not worried, though; students from war-torn countries could not be different from Spanish students learning English or Norwegian pupils learning Spanish.

I was wrong. It did not take me long to understand that a teacher's job with minority speakers went beyond the classroom -the teacher's profession often does- in ways never experienced before. During the last eight years, I have met resilient human beings with heart-wrenching stories. I have visited them in their countries, celebrated Eid with them, even tried my bit at Ramadan fasting for a few days, just out of respect. The people I met from Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, and many other places have been my teachers in ways I could have never suspected. They have given me some of the most enriching experiences I have ever had.

I often wonder if I have done the same to them.

Teaching minority speakers puts you in front of everything you have learnt about how to do your job: activities that work in mainstream classrooms lead to uncomfortable silences with MIS; lesson plans for the day can spread for weeks, materials are not understood in ways one would have never understood they could be misunderstood, goals and objectives that seemed solid are entirely forgotten the next day; clear explanations with confirming nods are square ones as one comes into the classroom again. And then there are all the unexpected situations, the product of the clash of two worlds.

I have unbelievable anecdotes at every turn. My students' condescending glances as I told them about Disney and Mickey Mouse and their looks while listening to "*I am on Fire*" by "The Boss." That is what I told them, "The Boss", as if everybody should know who that is. Or the fascination in their eyes as they watch an erupting volcano for the first time. And then there are

those words that still resound in my head. I had told them about DNA, Darwin, and evolution; "Ok, but I don't believe all this," one of them said.

Soon, one realizes that no matter what one tries, changes, and adapts from one year to the next, or how much advice one receives from teachers who experience the same, MIS are likely to improve slowly, if at all. Many pedagogues within MI departments have come to accept it: some of their students will drop out, often at the beginning of the school year. Those that stay will show reduced gains. Exceptions are very exceptional indeed and even more exceptional in the English language subject.

I often wondered whether what I did in class, all the steps I had planned and prepared to lead towards a particular goal, were suitable for these students. What if I was offering them something that did not work? What if I, blinded by my pedagogical background, fed by my own culture, years of education, courses, seminars, and meetings, all of them directed towards western students in western educational contexts, had been stolen the freedom to see beyond our paradigm? What if, not only was I giving MIS something that did not work for them, but something that was decidedly poisonous?

I had to ask them. I wanted to hear from them: what they liked, what they hated, what they thought helped them best to learn, what they believed was a waste of time, and what they missed, how they felt when speaking or writing, what their opinions were on the activities in the classroom, the movies they watched, the topics they had to talk about, the way teachers corrected and tried to help them.

Hence this research, though with a last-minute turn. Instead of focusing on MIS at foundational classes, I decided to look at MIS during their first year at the upper-secondary. I took this decision based on one circumstance. Unlike MIS in foundational classrooms, these students were thrown inside a whirlpool of classroom dynamics meant towards mainstream students with ten years of previous English instruction. I believe the resulting tensions and benefits, as they go through the subjective filter of these students, might be laden with meaningful views. And I hope some of them might help me better understand these students' needs and wishes.

1.2. The importance of subjectivity

The interface between the Norwegian English language teaching practices and the Norwegian peculiarities, and a unique segment of students, made up of minority speakers, undoubtedly results in meaningful subjective views on the value of the events these students experience in the classroom. Their opinions should not be mistaken as wrong interpretations of untrained voices in SLA and language teaching pedagogies; on the contrary, as stated by Brown (2009, p. 47): "recent trends in SLA scholarship seem to indicate that learners' beliefs and perceptions might be more central to effective L2 acquisition than previously thought". Learners' preference for a given practice can be counter-productive when scientific data supports the validity of another method; simultaneously, the overlapping of the students' opinions and the proper instructional practices might lead to increased linguistic gains (Horwitz, 1988). Motivation loss and an eventual "discontinuation of L2 study" (Brown, 2009, p. 46) might be other secondary effects of mismatches between students' expectations and the reality of classroom practices.

1.3. Delimitation of the research question

Studies exploring minority students in new, often western, school settings are not rare, though they are not commonplace either. In general, research points at a concatenation of external and personal factors affecting these students' school life and influencing their academic performance and overall social integration. These are primarily prescriptive studies, often addressed to teachers in need of more effective pedagogies to confront this segment of learners (Baynham, 2006; De Jong & Harper, 2005; Perry, 2013). Research on these students' subjective views, though not so common, also exists (Dooley, 2009, Madziva & Thondlana, 2017; Uptin et al., 2012, Kanu, 2008), often combined with interviews on the teachers' perspectives (Miller et al., 2014; Windle & Miller, 2019). Of interest is that students' views highly concord with pedagogues or other educational actors.

Exploratory studies on the views these students have on the actual instruction they receive, on the other hand, are scarcer; actually, I am not aware of any emic study on this field of research, least when it comes to the Norwegian context. This is a paradoxical situation given that minority speakers living outside their countries of origin and consequently being immersed in educational contexts where English learning is compulsory are among the highest growing population segments in the West. Their voices, therefore, matter.

By conducting this research, I have intended to explore how minority students in Norway experience practical English instruction in upper secondary school. My goal has been to answer the following research question:

How do minority students perceive practical English instruction in their first year in the upper-secondary school in Norway?

1.4. Minority language students. Who are they?

They are referred to with the acronym MI in the Norwegian educational system, but who are they? MI stands for “minoritetspråklige,” literally, somebody who speaks a minority language. In the case of Norway, that automatically includes linguistic minorities in the country, such as Sami, Romani, Romanes, and Kven people (minoritetspråkpakten, 1998). However, all of these are Norwegian nationals; they do not have what authorities call immigrant background (innvandrerbakgrunn).

MI with an immigrant background can be newcomers to the country, but also second-generation students who do not even speak their parents’ languages anymore; this group raises interest because of their increasing presence in the school and the associated risk they have for “poor learning outcomes, school dropout and marginalisation” (Hilt, 2016, p. 668). The focus of this dissertation is, however, on the first generation of immigrants in Norway, that is, recently arrived individuals. To emphasize their condition of students, I will be using the acronym “MIS,” thus adding the “student” layer on it, as opposed to “MI,” which mainly accounts for the condition of speakers of minority languages.

Nevertheless, the formulation of MIS is a grey one because it allows the inclusion of speakers of Scandinavian languages, such as Danish or Swedish, together with speakers of Dutch and German. For the scope of this dissertation, however, all these students are left out under the same criteria that Hvistendahl and Roe used in their study: “they are not represented ... because Swedish and Danish are languages that are very similar to Norwegian” (Hvistendahl & Roe, 2004, p. 311). Nationals from other European countries, or their Norway-born kids, are not included either. In this case, they are left out because of their previous experience with school systems highly resembling the Norwegian one. The idea of a “school” (or educational) system is often used in this dissertation; as such, this is an umbrella term to cover a wide range of

school-related elements that make countries in the EU a relatively homogeneous group, despite apparent variations.

MIS in this research have been selected based on their origins, linguistic background, and lack of experience with the Norwegian - or a similar one- educational system. More on these criteria can be found under the corresponding point in this dissertation's methodology section.

Statistics in Norway show that this kind of MIS generally score lower in all curricular areas than mainstream students and long-term residents of migrant backgrounds (Bakken, 2018). The case of English is especially worrisome, as some fear that underachievement in this subject might lead to a divide between privileged students, or English-haves, and unprivileged students, or English-haves not, a split solely due to the skills in this language (Thomas & Breidlid, 2015).

1.5. Minority language students' adaptation to the Norwegian classroom

Like most countries in the West, Norway was quick to embrace the communicative wave of the '70s and '80s, leaving behind, by doing so, an era where all sorts of methods bloomed (Skulstad, 2012). The Audio-Lingual method, the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, Suggestopedia, the Silent Way, and others were quickly substituted by an approach, the communicative one, which would come to dominate the SL teaching landscape up to our days. A quick look at the newest educational reform in Norway, the so-called "fagfornyelse," bears witness to that influence: communication is, as Chvala (2020, p. 6) notes in a study on English teachers' perceptions in the Scandinavian country, "the unchanged foundation of English in school". In the new curriculum, like in the previous one from 2006 -adapted later in 2010 and 2013- the ability to communicate is a "core element" (Norwegian Directorate for education and training, 2019). As a matter of fact, the subject's communicative nature -forgive the repetition- is emphasized by a short bullet point: communication must take place from the "very first moment" (ibid.). As such, this is a very CLT-inspired principle indeed, and one that overlaps with other CLT foundations in the current teaching plan: communication must be "authentic" and happen in "practical situations" (ibid.).

Communicative approaches might not be so prevalent in other places worldwide, often because of the impossibility of adapting the system's core principles to different cultures of learning (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). William Littlewood (2007), for example, notices that CLT approaches are rarely fully implemented in Asian countries; at the most, they might consist of sporadic opportunities for controlled oral exchanges. He acknowledges the influence of tradition in teaching practices and expectations and advocates for context-wise implementations of more learner-centred pedagogies. Littlewood's words echo Stephen Bax's as he says that "language teaching everywhere will benefit from fuller attention to the contexts in which operates" (Bax, 2003, p. 284). Other scholars mention the weight of culture. Centrally-controlled school traditions with little individual teacher autonomy seem to be especially reluctant to the adoption of CLT-based approaches (Hu, 2005), as are teaching contexts "dominated by a teacher-centered, book-centered, grammar-translation method and an emphasis on rote memory" (Zhenhui, 1996). The all-pervading role of memorization is also mentioned by Mourssi when describing the dominant language teaching pedagogy in Saudi Arabia (2013). He says:

... prescriptive Arabic grammarians think that grammar is the only element which shows how language is used. They also view the traditional grammar of any language as a set of rules, and the major concept in learning language is to learn its grammar first. (Mourssi, 2013, p. 399)

His words can be taken as confirmation of an intuition: grammar-oriented lesson designs are relatively spread worldwide, a view also shared by Derewianka, who describes explicit grammar teaching as "arguably still the most widely used model in ELT internationally" (Derewianka, 2007, p. 844)

A question automatically arises: how do these students, originating in educational contexts where memorization (Mourssi, 2013) and the explicit teaching of grammar (Derewianka, 2007) are the norms, experience the teaching practices in Norway? The chances are that they might go through lots of hardships as they try to adapt to the new dynamics in class. Evidence of these challenges is put forward by the comments Norwegian teachers dedicate to these students: they are "old" and "traditional"; they do not learn, but "replicate" and "reproduce" (Hilt, 2016), all negative terms pointing at their difficulties in class.

Other students may not adapt at all. Research shows that students in new educational contexts might meet the new instructional approaches with scepticism, even plain rejection. Dooley (2009, p. 9) referring to MIS in Australia, writes about the "tension between the expectations and needs of African students and their communities and school English education in the West". Kata (2008, p. 924) in a study in Canada, mentions the "different academic expectations" in the new country. Jun, also in a study in Canada, though this time with Chinese immigrants, notices these students' concern for "the lack of advanced academic training (and) the absence of specific teacher expectations" (Jun, 2009, p. 492). Popov and Sturesson (2015), in Sweden, are perhaps the best to expose the challenges experienced by MIS as they adapt to a new educational environment. The two authors use quite ironic images: "Finding appropriate ways of exposing immigrants to Swedish cultures of communication and learning appears more challenging than accommodating their food traditions." (p. 73).

2. Review of the Literature

2.1. Study plans

This research happens in a time of transition in which the English teaching plan from 2006, and its adaptation from 2013, are being progressively updated to a new teaching plan (2019), valid from 01.08.2020. As interviews took place in spring 2021, the participants in their first year were already immersed in the new teaching plan. Another group of students, however, those in their second and third upper-secondary years, had received English instruction under the old teaching plan. Although unmistakably different, the previous plan from 2006 (2013) and the current plan share some central elements. It is mainly these elements that make the foundation this literature review has been built upon.

2.2. The importance of oral practice

Oral production is a core element of the new teaching plan: “elevene skal ta i bruk egnede strategier for å kommunisere muntlig” (students should use appropriate strategies for communicating orally). As such, the plan does not differ much from the old one: “å bruke hensiktsmessige kommunikasjonsstrategier” (to use appropriate communication strategy) (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019).

Of the four traditional divisions of language - speaking, listening, reading, and writing- the first one has often been the targeted skill in language courses within CLT frameworks, no matter this widespread preference for oral practice has been described as a misconception (Spada, 2007) and a myth (Bax, 2003). Speaking seems the preferred activity among Norwegian teachers of English, as Orenburg points out in a comparative study of Norwegian and Dutch practices. He notices that English instruction in Norway is "mainly directed towards developing oral communicative competence, with writing given less priority... and where less importance is attached to writing skills and knowledge of grammar" (Drew et al., 2007, p. 327)

Speaking activities might take many forms. These depend on a variety of factors, though mainly are shaped by the teachers' beliefs on the most effective ways to make students speak in an otherwise artificial environment: "pedagogy in speaking is interdependent on how teachers adopt the ways to encourage students in speaking, how they implement their plan" (Ahmed,

2018, p. 97). As a rule of thumb, advice on speaking activities designs revolves around the need for "systematic procedures and strategic ways" (ibid., p. 97) so that interactions between learners are not left to chance: "This requires teachers to tailor their instruction carefully" (Shumin, 2002, p. 208)

Speaking activities can be broad, highly resembling natural debates or discussions, or constrained by different rules. Besides differences in their scope, oral activities can also vary in the number of participants; thus, they can happen in open-class, smaller groups, or pairs. Regarding these three types of segmentations, the latter seems to be the preferred one for students (Saeed et al., 2016). Whether small groups and one-to-one activities are the preferred form for teachers is a more ambiguous issue. Some scholars notice that teachers use splitting to "help students form relationships and create a higher comfort level" (Ewald, 2007, p. 123); others, however, observe that "teachers have a great tendency to evade the segmentation of classroom into pair and group considering the number of students" (Ahmed, 2018, p. 106).

Speaking activities can also take the form of oral presentations; in fact, presentations are a traditional practice within Norwegian schools. Their popularity is due to their ability to engage students in an enriching process of product creation (Vulchanova et al., 2014), but especially to their dialectic nature - though hidden behind a façade of monologue (Hadjikoteva, 2015)- which can bring about shifts from "extended presentation to interactive dialogue" (Bunch, p. 104). Finally, one must mention the possibilities that oral presentations have both as teaching devices aiming at a wide range of speaking and discourse skills (Sundrarajun & Kiely, 2010) and as a means for oral assessment to which formative learning can be attached (ibid.).

Whatever their form, speaking activities are likely to be an arduous undertaking for MIS as these are usually students with low language levels. Moreover, speaking carries heavy burdens in terms of psychological demands. Because of their spontaneous nature "under the pressure of ever ticking time" (Luoma, 2004, p. 20), oral activities can be very stressful, often triggering "communication apprehension" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127), an umbrella term for a series of "related performance anxieties." (ibid., p. 127). Down the line, these anxieties can lead to frustration because of the clash between the need to speak to learn the language and a mental blockage making oral communication impossible (Yoshida, 2013).

Of these performance anxieties, there is one, "fear of negative evaluation" by others (ibid., p. 127) which seems worth mentioning because data from other studies points at the rather relatively low negative influence that classmates have: "In sum, although students acknowledge different ability levels... they do not always consider each other as sources of anxiety" (Ewald, 2007, p. 130)

2.3. A focus on writing

The ability to communicate in written form is another central element of the 2019 teaching plan in English; this communication must be adapted to the different situations that can come up: "forskjellige situasjoner". Again, this core element resembles its 2013 counterpart: "Hovedområdet omfatter også å skrive engelske tekster i ulike kommunikasjonsituasjoner" (The main area also includes writing English texts in various communication situations) (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013).

This communicative mention turns writing into "a communicative activity and not simply a tool to promote grammar" (Drew, 2019, p. 73). Still, the chances are that writing practices might be relegated to a secondary position to "support and reinforce patterns of oral language use, grammar, and vocabulary" (Weigle, 2002, p. 1). This is an often-observed inertia, after all, in communicative lessons, since these tend to "emphasize(s) speaking and listening—often to the exclusion of reading and writing" (Spada, 2007, p. 278). This promotion of oral activities, though again based on a misconception (Bax, 2003; Spada, 2007, Thompson, 1996) might nonetheless steal writing the time needed to have any effect on the learners. Perhaps more than any other skill, writing needs frequent practice: "We contend that this (to teach students to write successfully) can only be accomplished if students write frequently" (Graham et al., 2013, p. 8). Frequent written assignments come with an added perk: they prepare students for the commonest of test types (DelliCarpini, 2012).

Writing is a very tough undertaking for any student (Graham et al., 2013, DelliCarpini, 2012) but for MIS, the wall represented by a blank page might be unsurpassable. MIS do not master the language -not yet- and show, therefore the difficulties expected: "we will simply note that one cannot write in a second language without knowing at least something about the grammar and vocabulary of that language" (Weigle, 2002, p. 7). Those difficulties are far-reaching: texts that L2 learners write, not necessarily MIS, show less sophistication (Drew, 2019, p. 66), less

lexical variation (DelliCarpini, 2012), problems with the language structure (Muhammad et al., 2012) and unresolved issues with low order writing abilities. Spelling is an often-cited one – not a surprise given the significant number of irregularities in English (ibid.); the unsystematic use of punctuation is another commented challenge with low achievers: "Students usually commit mistakes in using commas, full stops, semicolons and colons which affects communication process. The misuse of the capital letters is the most common writing problem." (ibid., p. 186).

Besides the pure linguistic challenges, writing is also problematic because it brings about difficulties of another kind: writing demands the activation of abilities in text organization, use of genre conventions, the expression of ideas, or paragraph transition: "Another problem which learners of English face is that of a well-knit and well-organised presentation" (ibid., p. 186). Needless to say that it is mainly these high-order abilities that constitute the teaching focus in more advanced courses such as the ones MIS in the current research take part in: "Basic writing skills have been a tenet of elementary classrooms, whereas text generation and organization have been more critical to secondary classrooms" (Poch et al., 2020, p. 500). This is indeed true in the specific case of Norway; as observed by Horverak: English teachers focus on "how to structure argumentative texts or five-paragraph essays," given particular importance to "coherence" and "the adjustment of language to the correct formality level" (Horverak, 2019, p. 113).

Given MIS' shaky baseline, some scholars have outlined plans targeting the different causes blocking their writing abilities. DelliCarpini (2012) for example, speaks of intense text exposure so that students could understand the conventions of each genre; she also mentions vocabulary training and extended writing time for those learners with low levels of language proficiency. In the same line, Silva (1993) recommends the establishment of writing classes for underachieving writers so that they are not forced into "mainstream writing classes" and the consequently mainstream directed assessment (Silva, 1993, p. 670). He refers, of course, to MIS within "native speaker-dominated" environments (ibid., p. 670); for the sake of this research, however, the interest just lies on his proposal, independently of the students' L1. Worth mentioning is his realization that students need "more of everything" (Raimes, p. 185, as cited in Silva, 1993, p. 670) by which he acknowledges a need to focus, besides the pure linguistic elements, on the "strategic" and "rhetorical" aspects of text creation (Silva, 1993, p. 670): "In essence, teachers need to provide realistic strategies for planning, transcribing, and

reviewing that take into account their L2 students' rhetorical and linguistic resources" (ibid., p. 671). His recommendation resembles the one by Drew regarding Norwegian students: "that they (the students) should experience strategies, especially process writing, that are likely to enhance the quality of their writing (Drew, 2019, p. 73). Tony Burner, also in Norway, supports this piece of advice, though in his case through the use of portfolios: "They (the teachers) can adopt a system where texts are not finished after receiving feedback, but incorporate students' response to the feedback while the teacher is present in the classroom enacting her supervisor role" (Burner, 2019, p. 94). Other scholars have based their recommendations on the highly creative nature of the writing process. Perhaps more than any other language skill, writing activities can benefit from safe and comfortable environments where ideas and inspiration can flourish (Graham et al.; 2013, p. 9). Peer work and small groups can help ideas bloom; ideally, students should work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions (ibid., p. 12).

2.4. Language awareness and knowledge of English as a system

The new and old teaching plans in the English subject give metalinguistic knowledge (the explicit knowledge of grammar and how the language works) a central position, though in the 2013 teaching plan, this ability may not be so apparent as in the current teaching plan from 2019. The former plan refers to a rather vague "knowledge about the language" and the use of "grammatiske mønstre" (grammatical patterns) when using English. The latter plan might be more explicit; it mentions "language awareness and knowledge of English as a system," the way the language is "built up," and how to use "setningsstrukturer" (sentence structures) (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013).

To the best of my knowledge, there are no available data on the perceptions MIS in Norway hold on the practices around the grammar instruction they are exposed to. Calls for explicit grammar teaching are mentioned, but in American and European pupils learning foreign languages, not in MIS. Although not precisely the same, as these are mainstream L2 learners with experience in communicative-derived educational contexts, their views might nevertheless shed some light on the impressions that language students have on grammar teaching. In one such study, Schulz (1996) commented on a generally favourable attitude by students toward formal grammar instruction, a stand also shared by Brown (2009), who went as far as "to prepare teachers to confront a population of students who, for the most part, prefer to have

formal grammar instruction take precedence over communicative exchanges in the L2 classroom” (Brown, 2009, p. 53).

In general, the students’ favourable opinions towards explicit grammar teaching have been looked down on by teachers, who often described them as “irrelevant, naïve and scientifically unfounded” (ibid., p. 47). Quite simply, teachers did not believe that students had the necessary theoretical knowledge to make sound assumptions about language learning. The teachers’ opinions, on the other hand, were more valid because they were based on “theoretical findings and explanations for second language acquisition and Universal Grammar” (DelliCarpini, 2012, p. 6). The thought was simple: if the L1 did not require any explicit grammar teaching, neither did the L2 (ibid., p. 6). This idea was somewhat reinforced by the often tedious and annoying label given to grammar teaching; as a matter of fact, this is not an attitude from the past, but quite current, as Chvala observes in a study on Norwegian English teachers’ ideologies. Marcus, one of the participants in the study, describes grammar instruction as “boring” and “tedious” (Chvala, 2020, p. 6). One is left to wonder whether his words are an isolated case or the reflection of a quite spread view among English teachers in Norway.

Research seems to give credit to the students’ hunches: “There is by now ample evidence to show that form-focused instruction ... has a positive effect on second language (SL) acquisition” (Ellis, 2002, p. 223). As for today, the prevalent view is that grammar instruction results in better learning than “zero-grammar” approaches (Ellis, 2002, 2005; DeKeyser, 1995; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada, 2007, Spada & Lightbown, 1999). It is also assumed that instructed learners - those who receive explicit instruction on language rules - progress faster and reach higher proficiency levels (Ellis, 2008) than those who receive implicit grammar instruction (DeKeyser, 1995; Norris & Ortega, 2000). Questions remain, though, on how to teach grammar, the kind of grammar to teach -notice that teaching also includes the correction of forms- and the specific moment in the students’ language development to teach it.

Despite the “vigorous revival” (Derewianka, 2007, p. 842) of grammar instruction, a return to the old practice of drills in decontextualized exercises seems doubtful. Derewianka touches upon the old-fashioned nature of such a practice by stating that:

While this method can still be encountered (particularly in some EFL contexts), it is more common these days to take an approach more finely tuned to the needs of the

learner and informed by what we know about learning an L2” (Derewianka, 2007, p. 845).

Another great defender of grammar inclusion, Ellis, specifies the direction grammar teaching might take: “incidental attention to form in the context of communicative activity” (Ellis, 2002, p. 225). His insistence on communication is of the utmost importance; he is very adamant on what language lessons must still be about: “instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning” (ibid., p. 225). This combination of communicative-oriented practices and grammar teaching is, after all, what Spada describes as the original idea behind CLT approaches, one that was corrupted by a series of circumstances: “CLT was not conceptualized as an approach that was intended to exclude form but rather one that was intended to include communication.” (Spada, 2007, p. 275).

2.4 Other languages in class

The multilingual shift is visible in both the old and the new teaching plans. The old one stated that learning English also involved the ability to "see the relationship/correspondences between English, the mother tongue and other languages (å lære det engelske språket, og å se sammenhenger mellom engelsk, morsmål og andre språk) (to learn the English language, and to see connections between English, mother tongue and other languages) (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013). The idea is almost identical in the new teaching plan: "language learning implies seeing the relationship between English and other languages the student knows," (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019).

Multilingualism directly opposes the exclusive use of the target language in the L2 classroom. As such, this so-called "monolingual principle" (Howatt, 1984) is no doubt an alluring one, hence its success among teachers and students alike: it just feels right – Cummins calls it "common sense" – (Cummins, 2009, p. 320) that learning a language should require immersing oneself in the language to be learnt (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013; Cummins, 2007; Haukås, 2015).

A prevalent by-product of the monolingual principle is that native speakers are considered the sole recipients of a somewhat pure language form, one that non-natives must aim at: “native speakers assert power over their language and insist that only they can control its destiny” (Cook, 2007, p. 240). As for today, this myth wobbles given the few examples of native-like

fluency in L2 learners and the internal oxymoron it contains: "by definition, you cannot be a native speaker of anything other than your first language" (ibid., p. 240). Even more important has been the realization that a native-like use of the language is unnecessary in a world where English has stopped being a language to speak with English native speakers to become a code to speak to everybody. Statistics are there: "In fact, the majority of communication in English does not involve native speakers" (ibid., p. 240).

Although apparently a minor step, throwing the native speaker off their pedestal has vast implications for L2 learners: they no longer have to fear their language background; instead, they can use it to their advantage (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013). As it happens, multilingualism – for the sake of this research, bilingualism is included under this term- has been associated with higher motivation and self-confidence (Creese & Blackledge, 2010), increased speed of acquisition (Butzkamm, 2009), general enhanced metalinguistic skills (Cromdal, 1999; Hardin, 2001; Reder et al.; 2013), and better outcomes in learning a third language (Edele et al.; 2018). The study by Edele is of particular interest for this dissertation because it looks at three variables found in MIS in the present research: the existence of an L1, represented by these students' mother tongues, an L2, Norwegian, and an L3, English. One must observe, however, that other studies looking at the same variables cast doubt on the value of bilingualism in L3 learning. Maluch et al., for example, though also observant that "language minority students significantly outperform their monolingual peers in English as an L3" (Maluch et al.; 2016, p. 116), quickly point out that these advantages fade away as learners move into their secondary school years.

Another question to ponder is how teachers in Norway might react to these rather innovative practices. As a matter of fact, some scholars warn about the long road ahead for the full implementation of multilingualism in the Scandinavian country (Beiler, 2020; Dahl & Krulatz, 2016). The way multilingualism is implemented in two sheltered classes in Oslo proves this point. The students in these classes "took advantage of the school choice to affirm multilingualism as a resource" (Beiler, 2020, p. 24), a finding the author deems positive; yet, these multilingual practices were mostly student-started: "Nevertheless, the most frequent and widespread biliteracy practices were in fact student-initiated" (Beiler, 2020, p. 19). A second weak point observed by the author concerns the heavily Norwegian-centred multilingual approach, one that might be detrimental to other languages. Teachers explain their Norwegian leaning through a meeting of three points:

(a) Norwegian was seen as more useful for structural transfer than many other languages, based on its typological similarity to English; (b) it was a shared language for the whole class; and (c) it was an educational target (ibid., p. 19).

Despite its slow implementation, multilingual approaches might still be the path to follow in Norway given the existence of successful multilingual practices abroad. Cenoz and Gorter's (2011) study in the Basque autonomous region of Spain shows the positive effects of using Spanish and Basque for English learning. In Ireland, a rap music project with English speakers studying Irish has enhanced language learning and triggered a greater student engagement (Moriarty, 2017). The focus on language comparison has also been successfully implemented in Finland (Illman & Pietilä, 2018).

2.6. Meeting a variety of forms of expression

This core element is more developed in the new teaching plan than in the old one. In the current plan, particular emphasis is put on the multimedia nature of the texts that students might encounter in the subject. These texts can be written, of course, but also digital, graphic, or artistic. They can include pictures, sound, drawings... and other forms of expression (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). In the old plan, however, the same idea was reduced to a relatively short “kulturelle uttrykksformer fra ulike medier” (cultural expression forms from different media) (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013).

Among the most popular forms of expression available to students and teachers in Norway, Vulchanova mentions audio-visual materials: “Audio-visual material is a frequently used resource for teaching and learning English as an L2 and it provides learners with natural spoken dialog in the target language” (Vulchanova et al., 2014, p. 1). Her immediate reference to subtitles quickly indicates she mostly thinks of movies: “Audio-visual material can be presented to learners without any subtitles, with native language (L1) subtitles, or with target language (L2) subtitles” (ibid., p. 1).

Movies are indeed more accessible than ever because of the internet. As it happens, the practice of movie-watching has branched out to cover an immensity of genres, topics, and lengths; what in the past was a sporadic task is now an always-at-reach possibility, also outside school hours.

Research on the learners' perceptions around movie-watching is scarce, though data point at a general satisfaction towards this activity. The participants in a study by Albiladi (2018) expressed an overwhelming liking for movie watching in class. They believed that movies helped them improve their language skills, specifically their speaking and listening abilities, vocabulary range, writing, pronunciation, and cultural awareness, precisely the same benefits that Li and Wang (2015) encountered with Chinese students of business English. The students' perceptions in both studies align with research pointing at the benefits that movie watching has for listening abilities (Qiu, 2017), though in this case, improvements in aural proficiency do not correlate with a decrease in listening anxiety.

The visual devices used in class are often subtitled or captioned, but not always. The effects of these two types of texts on the students' language abilities, as they combine with either the students' L1 or the target language, and the role that the inexistence of subtitles can play have been topics of research for years, often showing contradictory results.

Stewart and Pertusa, for example, in a study with English speakers learning Spanish, found that vocabulary gains from subtitled and captioned movie watching were limited, independently of the language used in the text (Stewart & Pertusa, 2004). Of interest, however, was that students opposed the researcher's observations. Asked about the use of Spanish closed captions, the students deemed the practice favourable; they also expressed positive comments on the use of interlingual subtitles (subtitles in English). These students' opinions, at least concerning the use of English texts in a Spanish-spoken movie, are supported by other data (Markham & Peter, 2003). In this study, the participants showed enhanced language learning by using interlingual subtitles, that is to say, subtitles in a language different from the one spoken by the characters in the film.

Finally, there is the question of whether subtitles might distract viewers from focusing on the aural message; consequently, some scholars have investigated whether the lack of text in movies might be linked to increased language gains. Research on this issue seems to point at the relatively scarce benefits of unsupported movie watching. In the same study where interlingual subtitles were hypothesized to have beneficial effects on learners, Markham and Peter (2003) observed a negligible influence of zero-texting. This finding aligns with data obtained by Vulchanova (2014) in a study where a control group with no access to captions

whatsoever systematically showed lower language acquisition than two groups respectively exposed to L1 and L2 subtitles.

Independently of the type of subtitles leading to the best results, there are also questions on how to exploit visual-aural devices to the fullest. Movies, short clips, Youtube videos, Ted Talks, documentaries, and the like are entities with possibilities that go beyond their mere passive visualization and hearing. However, they need a systematic disposition so that they get assembled “carefully and intelligently” within a whole, not as loose ends without any connection whatsoever to the rest of the lesson (Stempleski, 2002, p. 367). It helps if teachers are aware beforehand of the videos’ contents; this way, they can prepare students on the upcoming topics, motivate them and activate their background knowledge and interests, the latter a well-known “bridging-approach” (Walqui, 2006, p. 171) and an essential first step for the scaffolding of learning (Baynham, 20006; Cummins et al., 2015; Dooley, 2009). These warm-up activities are also useful to explain challenging language aspects that students might encounter during visualization. Finally, both the acts of viewing and post-viewing can be turned into highly active stages by rewatching sequences, asking students to focus on creative aspects, discussing, debating, or role-playing, as well as writing about what they have seen (Stempleski, 2002, p. 367).

2.7. The sorts of topics dealt upon in the subject

The newest teaching plan explicitly emphasizes the importance of English texts to "absorb knowledge on the culture and the society" (tilegne seg kunnskap om kultur og samfunn) (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). Although the plan is rather diffuse regarding which cultures and societies, one can infer that the English-speaking ones are at its core, especially as the plan mentions the culture, life, and beliefs of native peoples. The teaching plan from 2006-13 was clearer regarding the central role of English-speaking societies: “Det tar utgangspunkt i engelskspråklige land, og dekker sentrale emner knyttet til samfunnsliv, litteratur og andre kulturuttrykk” (it is based on English-speaking countries, and covers key topics related to social life, literature and other cultural expressions) (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013).

The topics covered in the English textbook stem from a number of factors. They respond to the society's values and norms (Engen, 2010, p. 169) and have, as such, a cohesive mission, the

"canonizing" of particular epistemologies as "valid" knowledge" (Thomas, 2017, p. 1). Parallely, they are topics based on issues around the English-speaking countries, as language learning and the cultures where the language is spoken are indissociable: "Textbooks play a central role as learners' primary source of information with regards to target language speaker" (ibid., p. 2). Traditionally, these cultures have included the UK and the USA: "In the curriculum requirements for each grade level... the scope is limited to "the English-speaking world," with a particular emphasis on the United Kingdom and the United States," Ragnhild Lund had said on the 1997 teaching plan (Lund, 2019, p. 259). Almost 25 years later, the foundations of the English curriculum do not seem to have changed much. In a 2020 study, for example, Chvala observes that the "learner awareness of the UK and the US is considered central" (Chvala, 2020, p. 6). The author later adds that, in general, "there is little room for experiences outside English-speaking countries" (ibid., p. 6).

For students originating in significantly different cultures, such topics can be located far from the students' backgrounds and daily realities (Thomas & Breidlid, 2015). As a result, MIS might develop feelings of exclusion (Jun, 2009; Kanu, 2008), or can perceive the subject's content as boring or uninteresting (Altinkaya & Omundsen, 1999; Jun, 2009), what Benseman calls "the irrelevance of the teaching contents of many courses" (Benseman, 2014, p. 94). Research has shown that the activation of personal background can help counteract these feelings (Butzkamm, 2003; Cummins et al., 2015; Dooley, 2009).

2.8. Feedback practices

Correction practices are teacher-dependent and therefore not explicitly referred to in neither the old nor the new teaching plan. Heavily related to correction; however, assessment is commented on, though more detailed in the 2019 plan. This assessment and its associated feedback are formative, thus contributing to the enhancement of learning and the development of the competencies in English.

Studies on Norwegian students' views on the corrective feedback and assessment they receive in written texts in English show a certain dissatisfaction with the practices implemented. Tony Burner (2019) found that students complained about the feedback "being too negative" (p. 87) and asked for more text revision in class, the latter being a practice that, according to them, did not happen often. Of particular interest is the claim by some students that "they do not follow

up feedback on their texts" (p. 88); as a result, they do not incorporate any of the feedback into future assignments. Asked about their reasons, they refer to the comments' negativity, problems to "understand the content of the feedback" (p. 88), and to the general difficulty of grammar.

Grammar is indeed an often-stated area of interest by students, more so than teachers themselves seem to be interested in. As far back as 1993, Drew observed that "lower secondary pupils writing in English focused on editing language errors and not on revising content" (Drew 2019, p. 61). Almost 30 years later, preferences are pretty similar; feedback on language use (Horverak, 2019, p. 108) seems also to be the norm, though indeed combined with comments on structure - mainly how texts conform with the 5-paragraph essay format (ibid., 2019, p. 107) -and which "elements to include in each paragraph" (ibid., 2019, p. 113).

How grammar errors should be treated is a broad topic of debate that traditionally has shown a discrepancy between teachers and students, with the latter leaning towards corrective practices in which comprehensive error correction is the norm (Leki, 1991). As early as 1988, a study carried out on freshman American students showed that a considerable number of learners were overconcerned by correctness or refused to say something they (had) not practiced, both trademarks of the communicative teaching methods in vogue at the time. The author predicted that some students would "probably have difficulty accepting, being comfortable with, and participating in the communicative approaches now common in many foreign language classes" (Horwitz, 1988) by which Horwitz referred to the rather common "laissez-faire" attitude regarding errors in communicative designs. Later studies came up with data supporting Horwitz's assumptions. Schulz commented on a generally favourable attitude by students toward error correction as opposed to a less enthusiastic stand by teachers (Schulz, 1996), an observation that is also shared by Brown (2009) and Lyster (Lyster et al., 2013).

Preferences for comprehensive correction, however, are not always the case, at least when it comes to rectifying oral mistakes. Lasagabaster, for example, observed that students asked: "to communicate more freely rather than being continuously corrected" (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005, p. 124). Discrepancies between teachers and students are also found regarding the timing for oral correction: whereas students have a feeling "that effective L2 teachers should correct oral mistakes immediately, teaching professionals are not nearly as convinced, a stance ... that is generally reflective of communicative approaches to L2 pedagogy" (Brown, 2009, p. 54).

Teachers' choices for less invasive paradigms, especially when correcting oral utterances, are based, among others, on the all-pervading assumption that corrective feedback causes an evil more considerable than the mistake itself: the interruption of the communicative flow (Brown, 2009; Yoshida, 2008). This is an assumption that some scholars oppose:

However, our classroom observations, as well as the data analysis, revealed that none of the feedback types stopped the flow of classroom interaction and that uptake- that is, the student's turn in the error treatment sequence- clearly does not break the communicative flow either; on the contrary, uptake means that the student has the floor again (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 57).

By avoiding explicit and direct oral corrections, teachers also expect to minimize possible drawbacks caused by overt corrective practices. There is a line of thought that views explicit feedback as leading to intimidation (Yoshida, 2008), increased anxiety due to the learners "feel(ing) inhibited" (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005, p. 124; Lyster et al., 2013), and the activation of the "affective filter," thus preventing students from "actually acquiring communicative ability" (Schulz, 1996, p. 344). Not surprisingly, at least concerning the correction of oral mistakes, recasts are the most used teaching technique, as these are one of the less invasive corrective options (Bell, 2005; Rahimi & Zhang, 2015). A question remains, however, on their efficacy to make students notice their errors and eventually interiorize the correct usage of a given item (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). As a matter of fact, recasts have been equalled to zero feedback "students receiving recasts or no feedback performed similarly" (Lyster, 2004, p. 427).

Research around the effectiveness of both oral and written corrective practices is often a slow and inconclusive one. As Lyster and Ranta exclaimed almost 25 years ago: "Nearly 20 years later, we are hardly any closer to knowing the answers to these deceptively simple questions" (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 38). Yet, one almost sure thing on correction practices can be said: Zero-correction, which was advocated by proponents of natural methods to language teaching, is no longer considered a valid option (Spada & Lightbown, 1999). Claims around the efficacy of comprehensive input, also against the impossibility that feedback can lead to acquisition (Truscott, 1996), are now debunked by an abundance of data -of which only a minimal portion is mentioned here- on the effectiveness of corrective feedback for language learning (Bitchener, 2008; Ellis et al., 2008; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Lyster & Ranta, 1997, Panova & Lyster, 2002).

How this corrective feedback should look like is a different matter. Leki (1991), analysing written comments, observes that L2 students preferred feedback on grammar before content, a conclusion also reached by Ferris, who staged students' inclinations: "Students reported receiving and paying the most attention to feedback on grammar, content, and organization, in that order (Ferris, 1995, p. 48). A different matter is whether teachers must directly explain the errors' genesis or just engage in their indirect signalling. Regarding this point, Bitchener et al., (2005), for example, praise the effectiveness of direct corrective written feedback, especially in combination with one-to-one (teacher-student) conferences. However, they also acknowledge the value of students proactively fixing the mistake they have committed. Two strong defenders of the latter, Lyster and Ranta (1997), advocate for not providing the correct language form so that students themselves must generate a repair. This is an option that participant learners in some studies prefer (Yoshida, 2008) and that some scholars view as especially beneficial when used in an ongoing process of text creation "where texts are not finished after receiving feedback but incorporate students' response to the feedback" (Burner 2019, p. 94)

2.9. The role of the teacher

As with the corrective feedback above, the teacher functions per se are not part of the teaching plan for the subject; as a matter of fact, they are not mentioned in the outdated one. A between-the-lines reading, however, acknowledges the facilitative role of pedagogues. This function is stated in this sentence: "Teachers have to facilitate student participation and stimulate the desire to learn" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). These are goals teachers can aim at by using "varied strategies" and "learning resources" (ibid.). Besides their facilitative role, teachers are also expected to advise students through dialogue to develop their skills in the language.

Relationships between students and teachers are embedded in cultural assumptions and pedagogical expectations for both roles, which can differ from those MIS carry from their homelands. In general, MIS seem to perceive teachers in Western countries as friendlier than those in their countries of origin, who are often associated with fear and distrust (Kanu, 2008). In addition, western teachers are deemed more helpful than the teachers in these students' countries of origin (Hilt, 2016; Jun, 2009; Popov & Sturesson, 2015). Because of different conceptions of the teacher's role, MIS might also tend to equate teachers with infallible knowledge (Benseman, 2014; De Jong & Harper, 2005), an assumption that can have

consequences for the classroom dynamics; in general, MIS are more prone to take up passive learner roles, handing over their part of learning responsibility to teachers (Hilt, 2016). Not surprisingly, Benseman (2014) noted that learner-centred pedagogies could be challenging to implement in heavily minoritized classrooms.

Teaching minority students differs from teaching mainstream ones, and as such, the task demands specific adaptations. Among the hands-on measures available, teachers are advised, for example, to "adapt their curricula, instruction, assessment, and interaction patterns to this changing population" (Kanu, 2008, p. 926), measures that the author herself notices are rarely implemented. Teachers in charge of MIS might also benefit from training in language acquisition (Elfers et al., 2013), multilingual pedagogies (Krulatz & Iversen, 2019), and cross-cultural awareness (Freeman & Freeman, 2007; Elfers et al., 2013; Perry, 2013). Besides the pure methodological aspects, teachers of MIS could also find advantages in "having had certain experiences"... and "specific dispositions" (Perry, 2013, p. 36), for example, being reflective, having sensitivity towards these kinds of students, or being aware of the challenges they face (ibid.). Educational authorities can lend a hand; they can increase, for example, "the presence and extent of specialized staff support in the classroom" (Elfers et al., 2013, p. 170) or give teachers higher flexibility to move through the curriculum since they can "experience(d) a tension between the high level of support that many students in the class need(ed)... and the pressure to quickly move through the syllabus in time with "mainstream" classes" (Windle & Miller, 2019, p. 44).

Some countries have opted for short -one- or two-years length- preparatory courses, Norway among them. The idea behind these pre-upper school transitional lessons is to act as a bridge between the knowledge levels these students bring with them, also in English, and the curriculum demands they are going to encounter later. Whether these courses manage these goals is of lesser interest than the observed feelings they stir in the students. In Quebec, for example, the segregation brought about by preparatory courses "was found to be the reason for a negative perception of self, anxiety, and depression among immigrant youth and to cause their resentment towards the language-based preparatory program" (Allen, 2006, as cited in Makarova & Birman, 2016, p. 7). Similar feelings have been observed with Sudanese students in Australia, "who construe this form of provision as exclusion from mainstream curriculum or isolation from local students" (Community Relations Commission, 2006, as cited in Dooley, 2009).

2.10. Other considerations

MIS' experiences with the instructional practices they encounter in Norway cannot be detached from these students' specificities, which put them apart from mainstream pupils in the classroom. Unlike their Norway-born or raised partners, MIS in this research show at least one of the singularities below. Their opinions and perceptions on the instructions they receive are better understood as one puts them against the light of these factors.

2.10.1. Age and a critical period for language acquisition

MIS diverge from their mainstream colleagues as for the older age at which they receive their first English lessons; consequently, one can reasonably hypothesize that MIS's underperformance in English is due to the effects of age on their language learning abilities. Such a view would agree with the alleged negative correlation between age of acquisition and final attainment in the target (Johnson & Newport, 1989; Long, 1990; Munro & Mann, 2005).

2.10.2. Linguistic background and language transfer

A second difference between MIS and majority students in Norway concerns their respective linguistic backgrounds. In this study, MIS are native speakers of one or a few typologically distant-from-English languages, which they share with variable levels of Norwegian; in the meantime, their Norway-born contemporaries approach English from the monolingual mindset of a Germanic, English-akin, mother tongue.

Research on language influence has indeed stated the importance of linguistic proximity as a facilitative of positive transfers. Ringbom's often-cited study on Swedish and Finnish speakers studying English in similar conditions showed that Swedish speakers outperformed their Finnish counterparts, a phenomenon due, he believed, to two factors: the relatively short distance between Swedish and English and the rather long gap existing between English and a non-Indo-European language as Finnish (Ringbom, 1987). A question, thus, arises on why MIS would not resort to their Norwegian language knowledge to better succeed in learning English. The answer might lie in their bilingualism characteristics; this is often an unbalanced one, yielding an imperceptible advantage, if at all, in metalinguistic awareness (Reder et al., 2013).

2.10.3. Length of English instruction and the extent of extramural learning

As it is often the case, many MIS have not had any contact with the English language before arriving to Norway: «Mange minoritetsspråklige elever har begrenset kunnskap i engelsk når de kommer til Norge, eller ingen kunnskap i det hele tatt» (Holmesland & Halmrast, 2015, p. 63). Once in the country, contact with the English language is often limited to two years, as this is the maximum amount of time MIS can sit in foundational classes (Norozi, 2019, p. 240). As some scholars notice, two years might be a short time to properly learn a second language, especially its academic register (Collier & Thomas, 2007).

A second consideration concerns the amount of extramural contact MIS had with the English language prior to their arrival in Norway. This essential factor is connected to a wide range of diverse aspects, though perhaps the most interesting one nowadays is the access to the internet and the associated use of the smartphone: “Young Norwegians are frequent users of entertainment and social media, from which they are exposed daily to English” (Rindal, 2019, p. 336). Scholars have pointed at the fundamental role the new technologies play for the newest generations of learners. Ewa Golonka mentions some of these perks: the new technologies might increase the learners’ “interest and motivation,” “provide students with increased access to target language (TL) input, interaction opportunities, and feedback.” (Golonka et al., 2014, p. 70). She is quick to point out, nevertheless, at the pool of non-conclusive results and asks for more research on the issue. Her gut feeling on the benefits of extracurricular virtual devices gets somehow backed up by a series of relatively small studies on the effects of smartphones. These devices are associated with “expand(ing) the space for the autonomous learning of English” (Yang, 2017, p. 697), a pretty broad statement that includes the improvement of reading skills (Al-Muwallad, 2020) and listening comprehension (Nah et al., 2008).

3. Methodology

By conducting this research, I intend to explore how eight minority students in Norway experience English instruction at the upper secondary level. The small number of participants and other variables such as the lack of previous studies on the issue, a relative scarcity of related literature, and the somewhat unfocused direction of inquiry have all been decisive in shaping the kind of research and the methods for data gathering and analysis.

3.1. Quantitative or qualitative?

Quantitative approaches are better suited to revisit previously studied topics as the abundance of literature helps identify "specific and narrow questions" (Creswell, 2018, p. 14). Consequently, quantitative approaches are more endowed to test predetermined hypotheses (Charmaz & Thornberg), less so to inductively find hidden variables within a haystack of "rich and complex details" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 38). Qualitative approaches, on the other hand, are more holistic and better fitted to studying broad and unexplored phenomena. This crucial difference tilted my choice: I thought that, given the lack of previous research on minority students' views on English instruction, a qualitative approach would offer a more solid base for data collection and analysis.

Because of the relatively scarce information on the research topic, I had to resort to the participants' subjectivity to make sense of the phenomenon under scrutiny. This situation reaffirmed my choice because I needed a design able to represent the views and perspectives of the participants (Yin, 2011, p. 7). As stated by many authors, qualitative approaches are better endowed to interpret subjective opinions, experiences, and feelings on a given phenomenon (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 38), while quantitative approaches are fitter to determine what took place precisely (Maxwell, 2012, p. 231).

Other considerations added up to my qualitative choice, of which the relatively small participant sample in my study was the most important. As indicated in the literature, quantitative methods of data collection are preferred to reach out to many informants, while qualitative ones are more befitted to target a small number of individuals (Creswell, 2018; Dörnyei, 2007, p. 127).

3.2. Interview as my method of data collection

I needed a participant-friendly data collection method that could help students with a low level of literacy express the rich "and sensitive description of events and participants perspectives that qualitative interpretations are grounded in" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 105). One-to-one, synchronic interviews stood out as the obvious choice because they could counteract the limitations that qualitative written data collection methods – that in themselves already yielded "rather superficial" data (ibid., p. 115) – could bring about in combination with the respondents' reduced language skills. Moreover, the method's conversational nature allowed respondents to ask for clarifications, or as Yin puts it, "to query the researcher" (Yin, 2011, p. 134). Undoubtedly, this was a welcome by-product of interviews as I expected my respondents to be utterly unfamiliar with the topic under study.

3.3. Choosing the right kind of interview

3.3.1. Structured interviews

In the long continuum joining objectivist views on data gathering, on the one end, and constructivist ones, on the other, closed interviews are seen by positivists to be the less polluting dialogue-based device of data collection. They are, therefore, the method that can better convey the "mirror reflection of the reality that exists in the social world" (Miller & Glassner, 2016, p. 125). The theoretical assumptions behind such an interview type are apparent: "there is (only) one correct version of reality" (Rubin, 2012, p. 3), a version that can be spoiled by co-constructing. This can be avoided by keeping the interaction between interviewer and respondents to a minimum "often limited to a set of responses predefined by the researcher" (Yin, 2011, p. 133).

3.3.2. In-depth, semi-structured interviews

I doubt an objective product can ever result from an interaction, no matter how standardized and devoid of fluidity this interaction might be. Instead, my interest lies in the space between the different actors in a conversation, a vacuum that can be filled with narratives that originate in and transform through the very interactional processes that take place (Miller & Glassner, 2016). On one side of the room, an interviewee, driven by his or her baggage of multi-layered

narratives, and constrained by the specific architecture of the interview format, inevitably creates “meaning, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 221). On the opposite side of that same room, the interviewer asks questions that are never sterile as their background taints them, what Strauss calls the “experiential data” (Strauss, 1987, p. 11).

Some may see unconstrained questioning as leading to bias; to me, digression is a window “onto the interviewee’s interest and knowledge” (Johnson, in Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, as cited in Cicco-Bloom, 2006, p. 316). Some may judge a single spark of subjectivity from the interviewer to be a stain in the research; still, the dominant view on the issue understands the value of an agentive presence as a “major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 225).

3. 4. Interview implementation

3.4.1. Building the interview

I used an interview protocol (see appendix) to guide my steps during the whole process of data collection (Creswell, 2018, p. 17). An essential part of this protocol was devoted to the questions I intended to ask. I used these questions as a “mental framework” for areas of interest (Yin, 2011, p. 104), less so as obligatory inquiries within a rigid model. Questions were open-ended and hence formulated to yield as much data as possible. All interviews began by asking students to describe a regular English class from start to finish. Questions were then directed to each of the practices they had commented on. Other common questions in each interview wondered about the students’ perceptions on the best and worse activities -according to them- to learn English. In general, “the line of questioning (was) not controlled by a questionnaire” (Yin, 2011, p. 135). Instead, I favoured a sort “of responsive interviewing model” -inspired by Rubin (2012)- which allowed me to direct my questions based “on the answers they provide” (Rubin, 2012, p. 5).

3.5. Practical considerations

Interviews were carried out in a “quiet, suitable place” within the informants’ educational institution (Creswell, 2018, p. 221). There was coffee, tea, water, biscuits, and fruit available all the time; the aim was to create a “welcoming, non-threatening environment in which the interviewees (were) willing to share personal experiences and beliefs” (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009, p. 280). Measures were taken so that meetings could take place without breaks and outside interferences. Following Creswell’s advice (2018), I engaged in small talk with my respondents before the interviews. I hoped that, by doing so, I could contribute to shaping an atmosphere of trust.

Interviews were held in Norwegian as this was the common dominant second language for both the participants and me. Only the interviewer and one respondent were present when the meetings took place. All the interviews were audio-recorded but not videotaped. I took written notes sporadically so as not “to disrupt the interview process” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 139). I used those notes to write impressions, such as non-verbal cues. I also used them to open new lines of inquiry as the interviewees spoke; this way, I made sure I could remember to ask those questions later. Interviews lasted between 16 minutes -the shortest one- and 42 minutes – the longest-.

3.6. Ethical considerations

All research must be subject to strict ethical control measures. The extent of these measures depends on the characteristics of the design and the specificities of the research group. Given that the participants in my study were an especially vulnerable group, I strived to secure their well-being during and after completing this study.

My first ethical concern was a consequence of the method used for data collection: I had interviewed a series of people; these conversations had been audiotaped and transcribed. Later, I had drawn conclusions from the opinions these people had stated. This data collection method represented a "threat to anonymity" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 65). I took, therefore, steps to protect my respondents' identity and the confidentiality of their opinions.

Besides the right to remain anonymous, respondents also had a right to be informed on the research intentions. Consequently, I made sure participants in my study understood the research's primary purpose (Creswell, 2018), namely the description and evaluation of instructional practices in the English subject. However, I refrained from sharing further details on the research's goals (ibid.). I took this decision aware that "certain information can influence or bias the participants' responses" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 69). I did not perceive this action to be deceptive but to safeguard the authenticity of the opinions stated. My goal was to avoid participants taking a prescriptive stand, away from the descriptive tones I was interested in obtaining.

Finally, I prepared myself to provide psychological support, even stop the interview altogether, should the need arise (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). I saw this as an obligation since the topic dealt with in my research had the potential to stir feelings and memories in individuals who, in some cases, had undergone challenging life situations.

3.7. Informed consent

The present research was approved by the "Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata" (NSD). After approval, I elaborated an information sheet - based on the one available on the NSD website - to be distributed to all the participants in the study. By reading and later signing the information in this informative paper, respondents agreed to take part in the project and acknowledged their voluntary participation. Nevertheless, I expected some dropouts, something I was determined to interpret as "the wishes of individuals who choose not to participate in the study" (Creswell, 2018, p. 169).

I emailed a copy of the information sheet to every participant. Before the interviews, I made sure they had read and understood its contents; I also checked they still were willing to participate in the study, a reassurance I sought again at random moments during the interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Since all the informants were 18 years or older when the interviews took place, there was no need for parental or legal tutor consent.

3.8. Confidentiality

Besides their right to anonymity (see section 3.2 above), all participants were also informed of the confidentiality of their opinions. Their names were changed, their surnames were not stated, and even the two secondary schools in the study became "school A" and "school B." By hiding the school names, I ensured the students in the interviews could not be linked to their respective educational institutions.

Participants were also informed of their right to "disengage" from the study at any time (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 319), their right to refuse to answer questions (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 68), and their legal authority to retrieve any provided information within a given deadline. They understood this Master thesis, once finished, would be made public, at which point I would erase their recorded voices: "The best way to prevent the abuse of data storage is to destroy the data after a while" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 68).

3.9. Validity and reliability in qualitative research

Qualitative studies are subject to validity and reliability checks, the same way their quantitative counterparts must account for having "properly collected and interpreted their data" (Yin, 2011, p. 78). However, because of the characteristics of the qualitative paradigm, validity and reliability must "be evaluated on its own canons, not on those imposed by the dominant quantitative tradition" (Charmaz & Thornberg, p. 310). As Dörnyei points out, validity and reliability criteria in qualitative studies must be flexible enough to provide scholars with space for the artfulness that is common in qualitative frames. Yet, this artfulness must be constrained enough to assure the rigor needed in any scientific study, what he calls "disciplined artfulness" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 245).

3.9.1. Validity

Out of the varied – and often vague- recommendations found in the literature, I choose to follow what seems to be a recurrent piece of advice: to gather as much rich data as possible (Charmaz & Thornberg; Hatch, 2002; Tracy, 2010). This technique, known as "thick description," has the invaluable advantage of reducing the interpretative weight borne by the researcher (Yin, 2011) by moving it onto the data. The logic is that the more information available, the more evident,

unambiguous, and at-reach data will be, thus counteracting the “insipid” occurrences Dörnyei warns about (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 57).

The triangulation of voices also guarantees validity in this research. Triangulation is the most efficient way of fighting off bias in qualitative research (Dörnyei, 2007). Triangulation occurs when the data obtained are put against the mirror of new collection methods, other types of data, and different participants (Creswell, 2018). The apparition of convergent points is a sign of “strong validity evidence” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 61). Divergent data, on the other side, might warn about flaws in the design.

I attempted triangulation by confronting the experiences and opinions of two geographically differentiated sets of respondents, those in school A and those in school B. I thought this setting change would increase validity by reducing – at least in four cases - the hierarchical space between the interviewer and the students. Furthermore, I hoped a change of location would come with an added perk: by approaching informants in a second school, I might be able to catch meaningful opinions triggered by the unique circumstances, should there be some, of one particular school setting before the other.

Triangulation was also carried out by engaging in “multiple comparison groups” (Charmaz & Thornberg, p. 314); the goal was to listen to other voices, not just to the eight students in this research. Teachers were the obvious choice to include in the interviews. Consequently, four upper-secondary English teachers with experience with MIS were asked to take part in the present research. Their voices were put against the data provided by students. As a matter of fact, these pedagogues have sometimes opposed the students’ views; their “negative evidence,” far from hinting at a flaw in the design, reinforces its credibility because of the honesty they suggest: “explicitly pointing out and discussing aspects of the study that run counter to the final conclusion is usually not seen as a weakness but adds to the credibility of the researcher” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 60).

3.9.2. Reliability and generalizability

Similar answers from students in groups A and B point at homogenized views regarding English teaching practices in Norway; one can expect, therefore, MIS in similar school contexts all over the country to hold similar opinions to the ones stated by the students in this research. Still, had

my study failed at extrapolating results “to make sense of other situations” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 59), the overall reliability of this research would have remained intact. As stated in the literature, the projective value of qualitative studies, though indeed necessary, fades into the worth contained within “the uniqueness of events” they represent (Yin, 2011, p. 14).

Reliability was also addressed by using a pilot interview with a participant 0. Although such “pilot” tests are better fitted and more necessary in quantitative studies, qualitative approaches can also benefit from their implementation (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 75). Actually, the interview protocol in the present study was substantially modified after carrying out interview 0; this protocol went from a question-laden interview form, in which short answers were expected, to a shorter interview type, but consisting of broad questions leading to further inquiry.

3.10. Other quality criteria in my study

3.10.1. Researcher integrity

Carrying out semi-structured interviews within a qualitative paradigm “unavoidably subsume(s) a second set of meanings of the same events – those of the researcher” (Yin, 2011, p. 11). As a result, the interviewer’s tangent position can contribute to a study “eliciting more honesty because the interviewer is seen as an ally” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 141), and in some cases, a certain degree of “reciprocation” from which respondents can benefit (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 317). Some scholars, however, see this involvement as leading to bias and therefore advocate for a more neutral interviewer. Manuals on neutrality offer a “myriad procedures for obtaining unaltered information” (Gubrium et al., 2012, p. 2). Typical prescriptions include “avoid shaping the informations” that participants provide, “controlling one’s opinions,” and adopting a “facilitator” position in front that of a “coproducer” of meaning (Gubrium et al., 2012, p. 33).

I embraced all these measures as they guided my research away from “blatant biases” (Yin, 2011, p. 138). At the same time, however, I acknowledged the impossibility of being absolute neutral as a researcher (Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2011) and welcomed the opportunity to become a “working narrative partner of the active subject behind the respondent” (Gubrium et al., 2012, p. 33). This stand demanded “critical subjectivity” (Reason, 1988), or as Tracy (2010, p. 840) expresses it, “self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations.” Should

influence have happened, I can but relate to Maxwell's advice: "understand how you are influencing what the interviewee says, and how to most productively (and ethically) use this influence to answer your research questions" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 243).

3.10.2. Respondent validation

In the specific case of this study, I feared contamination could be brought about by the respondents themselves as they reacted and adapted to my dual position as interviewer and teacher. As Miller and Glassner (p. 127) put it, "the issue of how interviewees respond to us based on who we are (...) is a practical concern as well as an epistemological or theoretical one". I had to admit it: the topic under investigation, namely why these students obtain worse results in English than their fellow pupils, lent itself to retellings, embellishments, and justifications, all bias falling under the umbrella of "social desirability" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 54).

I also expected my respondents' answers to be tainted by cultural conceptualizations on the relationship between teachers and students. Partial responses due to fear of retribution or white lies in an attempt for face-saving could indeed happen, no matter how much effort I put in implementing "a less hierarchical and more reciprocal, transparent framework" (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009, p. 285). I tried to minimize these possible interferences by selecting informants with whom I had no relation, either because they went to a different school or because they had never been my students. Still, I understood that respondents could place me within a teacher sphere – perhaps viewing me as a potential "snitch" – thus choosing to give fragmentary explanations or directly omitting them, a reminder that, after all, "control and ownership of the data seem to be in the hands of the participants" (ibid., p. 282).

3.11. The sample

3.11.1. Criteria for selection

I selected my respondents under several criteria related to the research question. These criteria set them apart from other groups within the educational institutions they studied. My informants were, therefore, part of purposeful homogeneous sampling (Creswell, 2018, p. 207).

Respondents in the study had to be immigrants in Norway, though not all immigrants were valid for this research. An important criterion was the lack of schooling in the country prior to being accepted in the upper-secondary. As a matter of fact, any school experience these students might have had before coming to Norway was analysed. Thus, students with a school history within Norwegian-like educational systems were automatically disqualified. On the other hand, students with disrupted schooling, or no school experience whatsoever, together with those who had only been schooled in their home countries, were accepted. I thought this criterion was vital because I wanted to hear the unnurtured, culture-unbound voices of those with no experience whatsoever within the Norwegian school.

A second consideration worth noting concerned these students' attendance to pre-secondary school preparatory courses (Innføringstilbud). Given the peculiarities of these courses - exclusively aimed at minority students - I did not label them as school experience in Norway; instead, my interest lay in the participants' views on English teaching practices directed to mainstream Norwegian students and to which they had now been immersed.

Language background was also taken into consideration. Thus, students speaking or knowing languages typologically near to English were not allowed to participate in this study. This criterion was based on the hypothesized benefits of language proximity in English learning. In that vein, speakers of other Germanic languages and Romance languages were also left out. Later, I expanded my choice to speakers of Slavic languages. For a while, I was tempted to simplify this criterion by simply excluding all speakers of Indo-European languages. However, this criterion was quickly abandoned given that some participants, who otherwise fulfilled the rest of the criteria, were speakers of Kurdish, an Indo-European language.

In the end, I defined the target group as follows: immigrant speakers of non-Indo-European languages (except for Kurdish), with no record of school assistance in Norway or a similar educational system before their admission to the upper-secondary. Respondents who had received English instruction in their home countries were allowed to participate in the study as I judged their former experience to have comparative value.

3.11.2. Participants

In total, I interviewed eight students, four from one upper secondary school and the other four from another. I decided to focus on a few participants as small samples usually “yield the saturated and rich data that is needed to understand even subtle meanings in the phenomenon under focus” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 127). I was also careful to select an equal number of men and women so that genre-based variables, should they exist, could be given a chance to reveal themselves.

All the participants had English lessons during their first year in upper secondary education in Norway (Videregående Skole). Those who had just begun at the school took English lessons as interviews happened; those in their second or third years had not had English for a while; still, they were deemed capable of meaningful insights on the experiences they had had with the subject in the past. None of the participants selected for this study took part – as interviews were conducted- in any non-compulsory English course (Engelsk Litteratur og Kultur, Samfunnsfaglig engelsk, Internasjonal Engelsk...).

Four of the students in this project were in vocational courses (Yrkesfag), while the rest were enrolled in preparatory programs for higher education (Studiespesialiserende). All of them were between 18 and 25 years old at the time the interviews took place. In an attempt at maximum variation sampling (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 128), I favoured a geographically varied group of respondents, though the stated criteria for selection were always above nationality or geographic provenance.

3.12. Data analysis

3.12.1. Transcription

The big challenge for any transcriber lies in juggling between accurately representing what has been said in a conversation and the unavoidable corruption of any oral message in a written format (Dörnyei, 2007). Being aware of that, I chose to follow Dörnyei’s advice to “include as many details as possible in the transcript” (ibid., p. 247). By doing so, I hoped to enhance accuracy by subduing my “own social evaluations of speech” (Celia, 1997, p. 168).

Given the pidginized nature of the interviews in this study, I expected any detailed transcription to include negotiations of meaning, repetitions, misunderstandings, and requests for clarifications, among other examples of linguistic eventualities, such as pauses and hesitations. I chose to include them all as I thought they might help convey the informants' identities (ibid.) and thus contribute to a more comprehensive interpretation of the meanings expressed. At the same time, however, I supported specific text adaptations that would not substantially modify the message expressed by the respondents. The first one was to turn the interviewees' dialect into the standard form of the Norwegian language, the way Celia (ibid., p. 170) recommends. I also decided to correct salient grammar or pronunciation mistakes and rephrase syntactically obscure sentences. I hoped these measures would make the transcriptions easier to follow. I also hoped they would further camouflage the participants' identities, and as a result, protect them from possible stigmatisation (ibid., p. 170).

3.12.2. Coding

Data analysis occurred concurrently with the interviews, a strategy that "has become widely adopted throughout qualitative inquiry" (Charmaz & Thornberg, p. 306). This parallel process allowed me to "shape the direction of future data collection based on what (I was) finding or not finding" (Hatch, 2002, p. 149), a procedure known as theoretical sampling.

My first contact with the data involved a preliminary reading, unbound, as much as possible, from previous ideas and expected directions. At this point, I let intuitions and feelings take control. My approach to the bulk of opinions and meanings had a leisurely leaning; I read to "obtain a general sense of the data" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 251), as much free of constraints as possible, but still aware of possible hunches. I recorded them all by highlighting parts of the interviews I deemed interesting or that contained some striking or odd feature (Rapley, 2007).

This step gave way to a more systematic phase in which a disassembling of data in search for basic units of meaning took place (Yin, 2011); I used memos "about (my) codes and the questions (I) had on them" (Charmaz & Thornberg, p. 307). At this point, suspected categories often overlapped with the very words that interviewees had expressed (Yin, 2011). Eventually, as I engaged in an iterative reading and old categories were put against new interview data, I split former broader themes into narrower ones, reaching higher conceptual levels (ibid.) to which more detailed descriptions were attached. This process continued uninterruptedly until

the data -both on their surface and in “the meanings and actions suggested” (Charmaz & Thornberg, p. 307)- yielded no more units of meaning or could not be reduced any further. This phenomenon, known as saturation, marked the beginning of phase three.

Yin calls this phase the “reassembling phase” (Yin, 2011). At this point, similar items that shaped themes and broader patterns (ibid.) had to be put together. Some items, though alone, were significant enough to be kept as a category of their own. Others turned out to convey less meaning than expected in the beginning, so they were discarded. This selection was made by keeping categories open for revision and even rejection (Charmaz & Thornberg, p. 322) so that the last-standing themes could be “robust” enough to yield a theory on the phenomenon under study (ibid., p. 322).

3.12.3. Interpreting and concluding

Interpretation is, as the very name indicates, an individual process, no matter how grounded this process is on the data. As such, an essential part of my interpretation relied on my intuition and the “inherent importance attached to the subjective and reflexive involvement of the researcher” within qualitative studies (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 244). At the same time, however, I was aware of the risks associated with personal interpretations; Dörnyei summarizes them all with a crushing phrase: as the sole interpreter of data, I could be “wrong” (ibid., p. 245).

His words took notable prevalence as I got ready to write my conclusion and hopefully answer my research question. Independently of my interpretive skills, I chose to lie experience, expertise, and intuition on the shoulders of more “formalized analytical procedures” (ibid., p. 244). I borrowed one of them, perhaps the most important one, from Yin and Hatch, and strived, as they recommended, to fairly represent my data, to be “empirically grounded” (Yin, 2011, p. 219).

3.13. Possible methodological flaws

In hindsight, I believe that the data collection and analysing processes of this research, though still reliable, could have benefitted from a stricter protocol and a more experienced researcher. Despite taking all the measures indicated above, I am afraid a series of weaknesses can be attached to the present study.

3.13.1. The actual quality of the interviews

As indicated above, interviews were designed to be semi-structured. With that frame in mind, I wrote a protocol with comprehensive questions to which other sub-questions had to be attached as students spoke. Although this was the *modus operandi* during the whole research, the reality posed by a group of students who -quite expectedly- had low reflexive capacities on the issues under study made long answers an exception. As a result, I had to step up in the conversation more than I had wished. The semi-structured interviews that I had envisioned initially might have been, at times, nearer to unstructured ones. Yet, I do not think I ever stepped out the main topics of inquiry; as a matter of fact, such an interview model yielded a lot of interesting data, though through questions I had not thought about in the beginning.

3.13.2. Lack of data on reading activities

Once the first two interviews were analysed, I realized the participants had not expressed any views on the role of reading activities in class. Not wishing to open a new line of inquiry for the remaining six interviewees, I did not add any specific question on the practice of this skill. Needless to say, had some participants commented on reading activities - and had their comments been meaningful enough - I would have included them in the result's section for this study. However, this was not the case. As such, this circumstance can be understood as a research flaw; I choose to view it, though, as a result per se: from the very broad and general questions that students were asked, lack of mention of reading tasks hints at a rather uninteresting activity, or to the more meaningful-laden character of other practices.

3.13.3. The four teachers come from the same school

Because of time constraints (summer holidays), all the interview teachers are from the same school, a factor that might affect some of the study's reliability. The students' comments, however, hint at similar practices among teachers, independently of the school they work at. One example is the use teachers at both schools make of CNN10 videos, which students in both schools A and B mentioned.

3.14. Some information about the participants in this research

Four of the participants in this research belong to school A, while the other four are students in school B. When it comes to the teachers, all of them work in school A. Students are spread between ST courses (university preparatory courses) and YF courses (vocational courses). Only students in the HO line (health line) were interviewed. Here comes a summary of these students' identities and backgrounds; their names, as well as the teachers' names, have been substituted by a pseudonym.

3.14.1. Students

Karim

Karim is 19 years old and is on his third and last ST year. He does not know what to do after he finishes school. He is from Syrian Kurdistan but also speaks Arabic. In addition, he speaks Turkish because he lived in Istanbul for two years, Norwegian, and according to him, reasonably good English.

Ibrahim

Ibrahim is 21. He is in his third year at ST. He is from Syria, though he quickly points out that he is from Kurdistan. He understands and speaks Arabic, but not very well, according to him. He has done well with his studies at the upper-secondary but admits having had hard times with English. He is keen on history and social sciences.

Yazmin

Yazmin is 19 years old. She is from Syria, "Arabic Syria, not Kurdish." She is a motivated and very hard-working student, a view that teachers confirm. She is taking her second year at ST and would like to study medicine, though she is not sure she will have a mark high enough to fulfil her dream.

Khalid

As Yazmin, Khalid is also from Arabic Syria. He is 18 and is studying his first year at HO. He says he did not really want to go this line, but once he is in it, he likes it. He does not know what to do in the future. Being a nurse is a possibility, although he would prefer to drive an ambulance.

Abdul

Abdul is from Afghanistan. He is 18 years old and goes through his first year in HO. He is the only participant who lives alone in Norway. He is delighted with his life in Norway and the possibility of studying in this country. English is a challenging subject for him.

Aranya

Aranya is 18 and is from Thailand. She is a shy student. She studies HO but is not very motivated. Nevertheless, she is happy about her improvements in both Norwegian and English. She has not lived long in Norway and misses her country. She would like to go back to Thailand.

Sukhorn

Like her countryman Aranya, Sukhorn is a shy student who does not like to stand out or be seen. Unlike Aranya, however, she likes it in Norway and does not want to go back to Thailand. Sukhorn goes the ST line. She is in her first year at the upper-secondary and has no plans regarding possible further education in the future.

Shermake

The only participant from Somalia, Shermake, is another shy student who admits to hiding and avoiding being asked by the teacher. After leaving Somalia, she stayed for one year in Ethiopia, where she attended a private school. She is in her second year at ST. Shermake had plans to study medicine but has now accepted that she will not have a high enough mark to follow this path.

3.14.2. Teachers

Per

Per has worked as an English teacher for 12 years; he also teaches psychology. Per teaches English at ST and YF. He also teaches International English, an optional subject for students in their second year.

Kari

Kari has been teaching English for eight years. She teaches English at YF, mostly HO and BY (Byggfag). She supplements her English lessons with some Spanish.

Jan

Jan has been teaching English for five years; he is the only teacher out of the four who holds a MA in English. He mainly teaches English at ID (Idrettsfag) and various YF that change from year to year. He has often been given courses at HO, in any case.

Linda

Linda teaches English and religion. She teaches English at ST; she also teaches a third-year optional course called "English Language and Literature." She has been a teacher for nine years. Optionally, she can have English courses at YF. She has been in almost all YF sections but EL (elektro).

4. Results

Independently of the number of students who touched upon them, I believe all the findings presented here are valuable as they contribute to a better understanding of the research questions. Data analysis has disclosed meaningful views on oral, written, and visual activities and the role of grammar in class, the value of corrective practices, or the help students receive from pedagogues, among others. As analysis unfolded, however, I felt the need to include – sometimes just as a slight sidenote- these students' opinions on non-practical elements of English instruction. These results, though circumscribed to a supportive role, are important as they might shed light on the space between these students' feelings and the objective happenings in the classroom.

4.1. Effective language learning is equalled with grammar teaching, yet students admit to learning

In his interview, Karim mentions learning more English in the preparatory courses (innføringsklasse) than in his first year at upper-secondary school. He says that preparatory courses focus on "learning the language" while courses at VG do not. A similar idea reverberates through Shermake's words. She remembers signing up for a course called "International English;" however, she soon quit as she realized this course was not about "learning English." A third student, Yazmin, refers to the English language as a tool to deal with other areas of knowledge. Her words point at the relatively linguistically tangential nature of the English subject: "one learns English through stories" – notice she might have referred to "history" as both "history" and "story" are homographs in Norwegian-.

Inquired on what authentic language teaching is, Ibrahim mentions a "focus on the basics." On whether he learned "the basics" in Syria, he states that he learned them "at preparatory classes" in Norway. Ibrahim does not describe the methodology at the introductory level, though some of his comments indicate he sees preparatory courses as grammar-centred. He says: "I cannot tell apart adjectives from adverbs," inadvertently suggesting that he would have learned the difference at the introductory level. Shermake confirms Ibrahim's hints. She describes introductory courses as pivoting around grammar and explains that she learned a lot of English at the introductory level. She describes MIS in Norway as "lacking grammar" and Norwegian mainstream students as "good at grammar." She ends her grammar defence by tacitly asking for

more focus on form: "I learned much grammar in the preparatory class, but I have more to learn."

Explicit grammar teaching is not commonplace in neither of the two schools. Some participants blame it on the holistic nature of the English subject. It is the case of Aranya and Yazmin; one of them says: "The teacher does not focus on grammar, but more like in general." Teachers confirm students' views regarding the secondary role of grammar. Linda describes an old-gone praxis of grammar teaching for a couple of weeks at the beginning of every school year. Kari states having more grammar focus before; now, grammar activities come in "small drops as questions and doubts pop up." A third teacher admits only teaching grammar if he sees "a mistake that many students make;" as a rule of thumb, he shies away from grammar as he admits to not being himself good at it.

Paradoxically, despite comments pointing at the preference for other language courses, students celebrate their language development. Yazmin, Khalid, and Aranya are examples of students who express their satisfaction with hyperbolic sentences: "I have learned more English in Norway in one year than in Syria in 14", Yazmin says. Of especial interest are those students who perceive an improvement in their language skills despite not having had any English instruction for some years. On a hypothetical retake of the English course, both Ibrahim and Karim proclaim that they "would have gotten a better mark now." They do not give concrete reasons for that, though they have referred to the omnipresent nature of English in Norway, often linking it to free time and entertainment: "English is everywhere in Norway....", one of them says. Students see English learning as an organic development; Khalid, for example, points at Facebook, "all in English," as the main reason for the language level displayed by his fellow Norwegian pupils. Ibrahim also mentions the use of social media. Asked whether he uses Facebook to learn English, he unconsciously touches, in his answer, upon theories of natural language learning: "I do not go into Facebook to learn English, but when I go into Facebook, so I learn English." He uses the opportunity to dwell on an already commented issue: he speaks better English than he writes it, a circumstance that he blames on his virtual life at home. According to him, "one can learn more English outside school than in the school."

Some participants also mention the role that the Norwegian language plays in English learning. An interesting comment comes from Karim. He describes himself as "better at Norwegian now," a circumstance he believes affects his English level: "so English is much easier." He does

not go into details on how Norwegian helps him learn English. Yazmin is more concise; she finds the English language more manageable for a simple reason: she can dedicate more time to it as she already speaks Norwegian. Learning Norwegian might also help students learn English for a simple reason: they feel capable of it. Norwegian fluency is, therefore, a motivator: "When you learn a language, like Norwegian, so you know you have learned something, and then English gets easier" (Abdul).

4.2. Students react against writing activities, which they perceive as ubiquitous, distant, and difficult to carry out due to their lack of language skills

Both Shermake and Ibrahim refer to extensive writing in class: "the only thing we focused on was writing." To reinforce his discontent, Ibrahim describes essays as "boring" and confesses he cheated on one occasion because he "just wanted to be done." Other students refer to ubiquitous writing in less explicit ways. Sukhorn mentions a decrease in the number of assignments; her observation hints at the weight compositions had in the past. Aranya says homework always consists of unfinished essays; she does not mention any other type of classwork, which suggests the importance the teacher gives to text creation.

Linda agrees with students on the all-pervading nature of writing: "the most common activity is that each student must hand in something written." Except for her, the rest of the instructors do not state overloading pupils with compositions; on the contrary, they see lessons as diverse and believe they aim at the totality of language skills. To prove it, Kari describes a regular lesson plan: "first we watch a short video and speak about it, and then we go to the plan for the day; it can be whatever: reading, writing, doing exercises, gathering new words...".

Essay topics are often the object of criticism. Ibrahim speaks of "adult topics" and gives an example: "Coal in Australia." Yazmin describes topics as "boring" but does not provide any specific title. Karim remembers a disconcerting composition; he denounces its formulation: "write an essay on how to write an essay." Despite describing topics as dull or non-adequate, Karim, Khalid, and Shermake do not blame thematical choices on the challenges they experience; instead, they point at their language level as the origin of the difficulties: "activities are not especially difficult, but for me who could not speak English, so they were difficult." (Karim). Abdul expresses the same thoughts with the same lack of concreteness; he admits not being good enough at English to write essays. Shermake is another student who does not think

activities are complex. The problem lay, she says, in the language: "activities were great, but it was mostly the language. She mentions not being able to use "advanced words."

Teachers agree with students. Jan says: "MIS have huge challenges with the language... lack basic vocabulary and do not know how to build sentences." A second teacher drills on the same idea: "these students have not the conditions to write essays" (Per). Commenting on these students' language level, Linda says: "MIS are not at all there where they should be. Kari expands this thought: "the course plan builds on ten years of English language teaching." She implies, of course, that many MIS have not had so many years of contact with the language.

Students also refer to challenges with text structure, the binding of ideas, or orthographic signs. Karim admits he does not know "how to start a new paragraph... or end a text". Other students compare essay length in both Norway and their home countries. Yazmin says: "what we wrote in Syria only makes up the introduction here." Another problematic area is punctuation. Abdul finds commas challenging to use, "I do not know when to use a comma, full stop...".

Interestingly, teachers are less concerned about text organization and punctuation than students suggested. Only one interviewee, Jan, explicitly refers to text arrangement as an essential point. The remaining teachers value content and intelligibility before text organization or the proper use of commas and full stops. On that issue, Kari comments: "lack of communication is the red line students cannot cross."

4.3. Students state their preference for oral practice

Many participants in this study see speaking as the best way to learn a language. Ibrahim is the foremost defender of oral activities in class. He makes his stand clear with a rather funny reply: Asked whether speaking is the best method to learn English, he answers that speaking is the "only method to learn some English." Aranya is another speaking enthusiast. She says: "what one speaks about is not important as long as one speaks." Other students also cheer speaking, though in less boisterous manners. Yazmin, for example, says that "using the language" is the best way to learn. She does not explicitly mention speaking though a later comment in which she describes conversing with her Latvian friend might indicate her reference to oral training.

Not only do students see oral activities as helpful, but they also deem them as pleasant. Sukhorn remembers a funny practice consisting of "telling each other what (they) have done during the weekend." She says this activity comes with the added perk of helping students make new friends. Aranya describes the oral practice as "chill," though she quickly points out shying away from speaking in open class. She shares her fears with Shermake, who admits to "hiding" so that the teacher would not ask her. Despite the generally good comments regarding oral activities, not all the participants are thrilled about them. Karim overtly criticizes speaking in class. One can tell his stand is more the product of frustration than the result of open criticism; ultimately, he does not like oral activities because he cannot, as he states, "participate in them."

All the teachers in this study admit having regular oral practice in class. Linda starts her lessons with a speaking activity; Per and Kari allow their students to answer orally many of the book's exercises. Jan has a relatively flexible approach to speaking in class; he tries to have a short debate every day, always on actual topics. He views speaking topics as almost never-ending. None of these teachers, unlike students, explicitly expresses that oral practice is the best method to learn the language. Only Kari refers to the importance of actively using English: "the best way to learn the language is that they use the language actively, both at school and in their free time." One can guess that she refers, at least in part, to the oral use of the language.

4.4. Students are critical of short video watching but satisfied with the use of movies in class

A shared practice (teachers in school A confirm agreeing on their joint implementation) involves watching a short video and its discussion. CNN10, a ten-minutes long summary of the previous day's highlights, is the preferred one, with YouTube videos and Ted Talks following short. Because of the lack of interviews with teachers at school B, it is difficult to say what implementation -if any- such practices have. Comments by the students in school B, however, do refer to short clips watching the same way their colleagues in school A.

In general, students are critical of this type of activity. They often mention that short videos are difficult to understand and comment on their dull and uninteresting content. Karim is the most emphatic voice; he says that he "did not understand anything in one year." Sukhorn is another student who speaks of the difficulty of knowing what the news is about. Comprehension challenges are also mentioned by Khalid, who admits to "disconnecting" sometimes. Yazmin

does not give an opinion on the difficulty level, though she expresses her dislike for Ted Talks. She complains about their excessive length and describes them as boring.

Not only are short videos hard to understand, but so are the activities surrounding them. Karim best describes their unstructured nature. Asked whether he and the rest of the students commented on the news in class, he says: "I do not think we did, and I think this is a bit weird because we used to watch the news, but we did not speak about them." Abdul, Ibrahim, and Khalid's descriptions of typical post-viewing oral exercises offer more glimpses on the somewhat random character of these activities: "we can discuss with the teacher why this has happened, or why they have done this," both questions with a broad scope. These students' words are backed up by Per, who suggests a high degree of spontaneity with oral activities around the news: "They are very few in class, just nine, so we speak about the news all together... sometimes we do little, sometimes they wonder about something, so we speak about it". This inconsistency can also be observed at preview levels, with no teacher preparing students for the videos about to be played. As a result, students perceive short videos and the activities surrounding them as detached from the rest of the lesson: "after speaking, we start with the lesson." (Khalid).

Unlike the spread, albeit low-toned, criticism of short clip watching, participants warmly comment on the use of movies in class. They appreciate the fact that movies, as opposed to short clips, are often captioned in Norwegian. Asked whether they would prefer movies to have subtitles in their mother tongues, Ibrahim, Karim, Aranya, and Sukhorn reply that they like subtitles in Norwegian: "Norwegian text helps me understand English," Sukhorn says. Karim also mentions this facilitatory role of Norwegian. He says: "when I... watch a... movie... in English, when the subtitles are in Norwegian, so I understand much more of what they say because it is almost the same words".

Besides their function as language teaching devices, movies are also the door to unknown topics and a source of contact with Anglo and Norwegian cultural references. Abdul, for example, learned a lot about rugby through a movie on Nelson Mandela (*Invictus*). Although she does not recall the name, Shermake remembers learning about Australia through a movie called *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. Teachers are aware of the integrative power of movies; they are also careful with the type of content they show in class. Jan chooses movies with a "considerable focus on American and British cultures," adding that no student has ever reacted to that so far.

On the other hand, Per has witnessed some highly emotional situations in class after showing "The Kite Runner," a movie about the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Unlike short video clips, movies are linked to more systematic activities. Students refer to a combination of speaking and written exercises, usually involving a movie rapport or an oral presentation. These descriptions agree with the practices teachers mention. In open class, oral, unstructured discussions are commonplace, typically followed by written activities, usually movie rapports. Kari even gives a number; her students write two rapports every year, one per semester. Only one teacher states providing students with questions on the movies beforehand; the goal is to answer those questions as they watch. None of the students mentions this type of warming-up activity.

4.5. General satisfaction with oral presentations

Oral presentations are common, though they are more spread in pre-university courses (ST) than in their vocational counterparts (YF). The latter tend to substitute oral presentations with a podcast or video recording.

MIS views on oral presentations are mostly favorable. Ibrahim likes them because he sees himself as "better at speaking than writing English." Abdul admits having learned a lot of Norwegian through oral presentations; he says he must "search for information to find the answer to a research question, "he would like, therefore, to have some more oral presentations in his English class. Karim and Aranya deem oral presentations a fantastic way to learn the language and a given topic. Aranya, however, does not like having oral presentations as they negatively affect her "overall mark in the subject." Shermake was also wary of oral presentations; she dreaded standing and speaking in front of her colleagues. Her fears were so big that she even rejected having an oral presentation in the past: "I do not dare to speak in public," she says. Luckily for her, she could record a podcast as a substitute activity.

These primarily positive views on oral presentations are not supported by the teachers. Kari is the most explicit pedagogue regarding a general dislike for the activity; she refers to "all the extra stuff around." She comes with a few examples: "people who do not dare, people who have anxiety...." Similarly, Per describes oral situations as "embarrassing"; he says that "pupils shake and have trembling voices." As a result, both teachers have turned to pseudo-

presentations, mostly video and voice recording, especially in vocational courses (YF). They acknowledge, however, the need to have oral presentations in class so that they can rate their students' oral skills.

4.6. Ambivalent views on the subjects covered in class. Generalized preference for personal topics

Topics in class are either contained in the textbook or based on actual events as they unfold worldwide. The focus is, nevertheless, on the history and society of the English-speaking countries or the technical aspects of the different vocational courses.

Views about the subject topics are split. Some participants in the interviews state their interest in the themes covered. They appreciate getting to know on never-heard-before fields of knowledge; they also refer to the clarifying function of the book regarding non-solidified issues. As indicated above, Abdul mentions having learned about rugby through a movie on South-African modern history. For Karim, one shaky topic had to do with native Americans. He likes topics in the English class because he is keen on history; then he thoughtfully adds: “maybe other students are not.”

Yazmin is one of those students. As stated in a previous section, she thinks topics are boring. She rhetorically asks: “maybe the way they teach us the topics, it is not so good.” Ibrahim also criticizes topics; he says that they “have nothing to do with our lives.” As an example, he mentions a couple of lessons on “coal in Australia.” After his criticism, however, he comes up with some ideas on more enjoyable class subjects: “we could have had funnier stuff on the young people’s lives, gaming or social media.” He is not the only one asking for nearer subjects: Sukhorn also begs for “more Norwegian topics.”

No interviewee is interested in having a more agentive role in the course; that is why the participants’ exuberant reaction to such a suggestion is worth noticing once presented with it. Students are willing to dot lessons with personal accounts and welcome the chance to include their own culture and traditions within the English class. Abdul says: “it could have been exciting to speak about Afghanistan because there are many (people) who do not know what happens there.” Karim, Yazmin, and Ibrahim also refer to mainstream Norwegian ignorance; one of them says: “I would like to explain about my culture and what we Kurdish people

experience because as it is today, there are many people who do not know.” Ibrahim adds that, by focusing on more personal topics, he “could have gone deeper, more concrete, maybe find new things I did not know from before.” He finishes his enumeration of perks by saying: “and I would not have cheated.” Aranya, Khalid, and Karim also link personal topics with less difficulty and better language outcomes: “it is easier to talk about something that one has experienced,” Karim says.

Teachers come up with somewhat adverse opinions regarding the topics dealt with in class. Linda says they are “not designed for MIS; they are thought for students who have studied all their lives in Norway.” More proactive, Kari admits having included issues on countries and societies at the outer core of the English-speaking sphere, a call based on the changing student population in class. She assesses her own decision positively; she says that MIS can now “show their strong points” as “they have a different understanding of historical, cultural and social situations.” Another teacher, Per, asks for a syllabus MIS “are going to have a use for.” His call for pragmatism does not directly criticize current topics but implies a mismatch between the curriculum and the reality these students will experience outside school.

4.7. Students appreciate the help they get from their teachers but feel it is not enough

A significant number of participants have mentioned intensely appreciating the help they receive from teachers. They cherish their availability, proximity, and the genuine interest they have in teaching them English.

Khalid explains he was afraid when he first started with English at upper secondary school; his fears disappeared once he found out who his teacher would be. Ibrahim appreciates that his teacher checked on his compositions in class so that texts were “almost finished” when he handed them in. Sukhorn says she can ask her teacher any time. Abdul also refers to his teacher's professionalism: “she does not give up; she insists until I learn.”

This overall satisfaction does not hide some cracks in the system. A few students state that help, though indeed appreciated, is not enough. Shermake remembers being told the whole class would soon get an assistant teacher, but “after a while, it became clear that they did not have anybody to help us.” Karim admits he got help whenever he asked for it but still needed more.

Khalid, who previously admitted his satisfaction with his English teacher, now mentions the inexistence of special arrangements aimed at the weakest students.

Comments by teachers lean towards the group of unsatisfied students. Kari is critical of herself and speaks of not "reaching all students"; she blames the many challenges and the "different levels in the class." She admits speaking with each student individually but not being able to "lift the totality of the class." She tries to fill these students' language gaps with somehow detached grammar brochures but complains that "students must work on their own" as she can rarely find the time to help them.

Linda mentions the need for extra help -by which she refers to the use of a second teacher in the classroom - then adds: "we do not have means to provide these students with extra instruction or basic English courses." Jan has tried individual adaptations, but "it was too difficult to implement." Per speaks about lack of time: "I do not have the time for differentiated instruction." As an alternative, he provides students with two tests on examination days, one easier than the other.

4.8. Students and teachers prefer exclusively using English in class, but both resort to Norwegian

One issue has seen broad agreement among the participants in this research: many of them are very satisfied with their teachers' extensive use of English in class, a practice that is not as common in their home countries. Moreover, many participants in this study have mentioned their Norwegian teachers' good English levels, something they deem positive.

Yazmin says her teachers in Syria could speak English but "spoke Arabic because it was easier for us to understand." Another Syrian student, Khalid, describes a rather careless English teacher who did not mind that his students "spoke Arabic." Moving further east, Sukhorn comments on one big difference between private and public schools in Thailand: Teachers in private schools can speak English while those in public schools cannot. She went to a public school and had two teachers. The first one "could not speak English at all"; the second one could speak English -thus refuting her previous statement- but in a "Thai way, not in an English way." Asked whether her English teacher speaks in a Norwegian way, she says yes, then adds "but a Norwegian way is better than a Thai way". Abdul is the only student who speaks warmly

about his former English teacher. He says teachers in Afghanistan speak good English because they have lived and studied in India. Later in his interview, however, he also implies a somewhat limited use of English in class; he says that his teacher "read in English" but "answered in Pashto." Data analysis shows that vernacular use in the classroom is a convention many students disapprove of. Yazmin and Karim express it clearly: "they (the teachers) spoke Arabic because it was easier for us to understand, but then it gets harder after a while." (Yazmin).

Paradoxically, this preference for English does not prevent students from turning to the Scandinavian language if given the opportunity. Khalid, Shermake and Yazmin admit to using Norwegian in small-group or pair oral activities; also answering in Norwegian. Asked why, Yazmin admits that she does not have an answer; she "just" uses "Arabic at home with my family, and Norwegian in class."

In general, teachers are not thrilled about the use of Norwegian in class. Linda reacts to the changes experienced throughout her career. Her words point at a gradual change in the Norwegian school; they also contain a dose of self-criticism: "In the past, students spoke English to me in the corridor, even if I met them in the street; now they do not; they speak Norwegian, because I often speak Norwegian to them in class." Other teachers accept the use of Norwegian as the lesser of two evils. Kari places comfort before anything else: "It is important that they feel safe; therefore, they are allowed to use Norwegian." She also uses Norwegian as a clarifying resource: "I use Norwegian to speak on difficult things, for example, how something in society works." Of interest is her contradictory feelings: "I should insist more on them speaking English." Teachers' comments ooze a certain degree of hopelessness. Per states that "lots of instructions get doubled," meaning he must explain things twice, first in English, then in Norwegian. His words hide a touch of exhaustion; his past dissatisfaction has given way to bitter acceptance. Jan also seems to have given up; his enemy now lies on another front: "I do not like they use a language nobody else understands," he says about the use of languages other than Norwegian and English.

4.9. Language correction is mainly written. Students have doubts about its effectiveness

Oral correction in class is minimal. According to Aranya, "teachers do not have time to correct oral mistakes because if they do, the rest of the students cannot speak." Teachers agree with the students; they do want to keep communication flowing; at the same time, however, they give

other reasons to avoid oral correction. Kari mentions participation and group cohesion. She says: "To me, the most important thing is participation. I fear students who throw the towel, I want them to speak; if they make mistakes that do not hinder communication, that is fine for me".

Two other teachers refer to sporadic recasting practices, but only in situations involving very salient mistakes or total intelligibility. Their practice would not please Yazmin. She is unequivocal on that she likes being corrected all the time: "I like the kind of people who correct me because then, next time, I say things the right way." She gets corrected, but not by her teachers: "I have a friend that, when I speak, so she always corrects me."

Written correction, on the other hand, is extensively used, though practices do not vary much. Teachers agree on the impossibility of correcting all grammar mistakes. Linda says: "If I had to correct all mistakes, the text would be completely red." Consequently, teachers tend to focus on a few grammatical items, those they deem "worse" (Kari).

This relatively relaxed attitude towards grammatical correction gets compensated by a stricter approach regarding the text's content. Jan wants his students to "be reflected, show they are mature when they write." In a related vein, Kari mentions intelligibility as "the red line students cannot cross," suggesting that communication is even more important than the message expressed. The correct use of genre conventions is the last aspect mentioned by teachers: "In the exam, they might be asked to write a mobile message, a poem, an e-mail" (Per).

MIS's opinions on the correction they receive are not clearly stated in the interviews. In general, however, they accept whatever practices the teachers throw at them. Both Karim and Sukhorn describe these practices as consisting of "grammar correction and the choice of words, then a short comment on my competence achievement." Khalid says comments always include "good points and points that can be better." Per confirms Khalid's statement. He explains that he uses the "one star and two asterisks system." In this system, the star, with all its points, must include good comments, while the asterisks represent improvements to be made. He avoids at all costs the direct signalling of mistakes.

Criticism on correcting practices is difficult to find. Only Yazmin calls for some changes. She likes being corrected and shows some frustration at not "knowing what to do to be better," even

after reading through the feedback. She explains that her teacher gave her some links to practice grammar, but they were "too easy" and unrelated to her mistakes. Yazmin's view agrees with Kari's self-criticism: "every year I have this feeling that I have failed my students; I must admit it, I am not good at guiding students, I do not know what to tell them so that they will learn English."

5. Discussion

5.1. Critical of instruction but satisfied with the outcome

Two of the participant students in this research react negatively to the rather practical, learner-centred, and grammar deemphasized English teaching approaches in Norway. Their reactions align with observations by other scholars on minority students' perceptions towards language teaching paradigms with a focus on meaning. Already in 1988, Horwitz observed that communicative approaches to language teaching could be daunting to those never exposed to them before (Horwitz, 1988). A bit nearer to the present time, Benseman also points at the difficulties teachers might have to apply such learner-pivoting paradigms (Benseman, 2014).

The participants' rather slack accusation, namely that the "English subject is not so much about learning English," can be understood in a twofold way. The sentence might hide these students' impossibility to concretize their complaints in technical terms; simultaneously, it can hint at these students' inability to come up with more efficient teaching designs. Come what may, their words bring an unavoidable realization: By stating that the English subject "is not so much about learning English," these students tacitly imply that the subject could indeed be about learning English. The logical derivation soon takes shape; one must just add a coda to the sentence: The English subject could be about learning English if the proper method was used. Once faced with the real underlying message of the heading in this section, the conclusion is a hard to digest for English teachers: MIS do not believe in what happens in class.

More unexpected are the comments made by the participants - a few of them students who had not received any English instruction for one or two years- affirming having learnt a lot of English in Norway. One question arises as the paradox is apparent: how can these students learn English after describing the subject as "not being about learning English?" One answer might lie, as Rindal (2019) explains, in the weight extracurricular English learning, mainly through the internet, has on these students' lives. A quick review of the most current literature on this issue links the internet and smartphone with increased target language contact (Golonka et al., 2014), bigger chances for self-learning outside the school (Yang, 2017), better reading skills (Al-Muwallad, 2020) and enhanced abilities to understand the spoken language (Nah et al., 2008). The students' comments in their interviews as they speak about their virtual life at home and learning English through Facebook seem to support these studies' results.

5.2. A beneficial factor in the Norwegian language?

Besides the possibility of a passive and highly natural language acquisition process brought about by the new technologies, it might also be the case that Norwegian fluency or the gradual process of becoming a Norwegian speaker could play an important role in triggering English learning in this cohort of students. The facts are there: all MIS in this research had limited Norwegian language skills as they began at the school; three years later, they all show near-native levels in the Scandinavian language.

Out of the data yielded by the interview analysis, the acquisition of Norwegian seems to be one of the most notable variables between these students' first and last years at the school. "I am better at Norwegian now, so English is much easier", Karim had said in his interview. It is, thus, this fluency that is hypothesized to be the triggering factor in English learning.

What the mechanisms behind this facilitative function are, is a more complex issue. It might be, quite simply, that students show enhanced motivation for language learning just because they already know that they are capable of learning a language. Some comments in this research, as students speak of being better in English because they already can speak Norwegian, point in that direction: "When you learn a language, like Norwegian, so you know you have learned something, and then English gets easier" (Abdul).

An alternative explanation would link these students' increasing bilingualism - as they get better in Norwegian – with an "enhanced development of linguistic analysis" (Cromdal, 1999), one that could also be used for L3 learning. Edele et al. (2018) posited that balanced bilingualism - understood as proficient use of both the L1 and the primary language of instruction – could benefit L2 speakers in learning an L3. Their results would oppose Maluch et al., which point at the attrition of any alleged advantages brought about by bilingualism as students grow and enter secondary school (Maluch et al., 2016). A deeper look at both studies, however, shows that Maluch and Edele looked at different things. While Maluck explored the role of L1 in metalinguistic awareness and L3 (English) learning, Edele looked at the role played by the L2 to accomplish the same goal, namely to learn an L3. Thus, while the students in Maluch's study (L2 speakers of German fluent in an L1) probably lost any L1-derived advantage to learn English, - Maluch observes that their L1 is not "explicitly reinforced and promoted in the monolingual classroom setting" (Maluch et al., 2016, p. 116) -, the MIS in the current research

might have followed the opposite direction, thus gaining an English-learning advantage: Norwegian fluency. Far from opposing each other, both Edele and Maluch's studies might converge on the same point: bilingualism can help learn an L3, though its help will be enhanced or slowed down by a multitude of intermingled variables.

5.3. Grammar instruction: supported by research, less by the teachers

A question remains on what the proper methods of learning English are according to these students. Although not explicit in their answers, the participants' comments and their description of needs seem to point in one direction: they want more vocabulary training and demand a more significant focus on general grammar rules. Their views concur with other students – some also unfamiliar with CLT approaches- who view communicative teaching methods with scepticism and prefer direct translation activities, exercises focusing on grammar rules, and the explicit correction of errors (Brown, 2009; Horwitz, 1988; Schulz, 1996).

The students' views get reinforced by their recurrent reference to foundational classes, which they associate with a less meaning-oriented teaching style. Positive mentions to these classes are of particular interest because they stand opposite to the meanings expressed by other MIS in other educational contexts. MIS in Australia (Community Relations Commission, 2006, as cited in Dooley, 2009) and Canada (Allen, 2006, as cited in Makarova & Birman, 2016, p. 7) openly show their discontentment with preparatory courses, which they view as derogatory and the first step for segregation. The fact that the MIS in the current study do not express the same concerns seems to be charged with meaning. At first sight, their good words for these two-years long courses might account for some differential factor, whatever that might be, in the two schools' disposition of these classes. As such, this is a worth investigating phenomenon.

Although not conclusive, data seem to side with the students' hunches regarding the explicit teaching of grammar; apparently, their feelings towards teaching rules were not as "irrelevant, naïve and scientifically unfounded" (Brown, 2009, p. 47) as many teachers had affirmed. In the great debate between the direct and explicit teaching of grammar and the impossibility to consciously learn language rules, an abundance of voices fuels these students' views on the benefits of explicit grammar inclusion in the classroom (Ellis, 2002, 2005; DeKeyser, 1995; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada, 2007; Spada & Lightbown, 1999) also through the comparative use of the mother tongue (Butzkamm, 2009). One must wonder, however, whether MIS

demands for grammar teaching would imply a total return to the old methodology of isolated focus on grammar, to which some decontextualized exercises followed. Based on their comments on other activity types (to come), the students' call for more grammar seems to be a soft one, more in the line advocated by Derewianka (2007) in which grammar teaching happens as meaning-oriented activities unfold.

The participants' preferences do not seem to concord with the four teachers' actions. As commented before, the four pedagogues seem to shy away from heavily grammar-based exercises. One must admit their answers do not clearly point at a reason for their decision. A comment by one of the teachers, in which he states not being good at grammar himself, might be understood as a hyperbole showing his despise for grammar, though it might also be, quite simply, that he is not good at subjects, objects, and the like. The second possibility is not unlikely; after all, as Chvala points out, some Norwegian English teachers lack experience with metalanguage because they are not used to the terminology, not even in their L1: "we don't speak about Norwegian (language) that way" and therefore "lack examples from our mother tongue to talk about it" (Chvala, 2020, p. 6).

Finally, it might also be that teachers support overt grammar instruction on MIS, just to realize that time constraints do not allow them to include grammar teaching in the lesson plan. Kari's complaints about the disappearance of the "grammar weeks" at the beginning of the school year because of time shortages hint at that possibility. Alternatively, grammar teaching avoidance in Norway can be explained by the existence of a very high degree of natural English acquisition in the country, one that would make an explicit focus on form a somewhat redundant undertaking. This is not to be seen as the agenda of teachers or educational authorities, but the logical, organic development of the heavy presence of English in society. As DelliCarpini (2012, p. 98) puts it while mentioning Truscott: "essentially, if second language acquisition is compelled by the same underlying process as first language acquisition, then there is no need for explicit grammar instruction."

5.4. Writing: Little support to overcome a challenging undertaking

It did not come as a surprise that students did not like writing; it was, indeed, an expected outcome, one that other scholars had also noted: "But I hate to write, Miss!" one student said to Margo DelliCarpini, making their dislike for text creation, as many of the participants in the interviews, quite evident (DelliCarpini, 2012, p. 97).

Asked why they do not like writing activities, the participants in the present study often refer to reduced language skills and lack of knowledge in orthographic rules. The literature supports their views: Weigle (2002) speaks about a certain language knowledge to manage to convey a written message adequately; DelliCarpini, (2012) views lack of vocabulary a significant hindrance; as Weigle, she also speaks of a minimum threshold, though a lexical one, for "ELLs to be successful in their academic classes." (p. 100). Her judgment aligns with Shermake's opinion: "I can't use advanced words," this student had said. Another scholar, Shahid, has pointed at the difficulties brought about by language structure. He mentions general low language skills to explain the challenges these students experience in writing: "students face difficulties in writing English language, due to several factors involved in the act of communication." (Muhammad et al., 2012, p. 185). Orthography is another culprit Muhammad mentions, one that Abdul also has pointed at in his interview. Higher-order, non-linguistic challenges, such as text organization, the expression of ideas, or paragraph transition, are the last difficult areas mentioned by scholars (DelliCarpini, 2012; Muhammad et al., 2012; Poch et al., 2020). Difficulties at this level are also observed in students in Norway (Horverak, 2019). Again, the experts' views agree with the opinions expressed by the participants in the present study: "I do not know how to start a paragraph or finish a text," Karim had said.

Many treatment practices have been proposed and tested (Graham et al.; 2013, DelliCarpini, 2012; Silva, 1993; Drew, 2019). Yet none of the students in the interviews, nor any of the teachers, mention any special arrangement when it comes to text creation; on the contrary, a view onto daily practices shows that these students, all of them struggling writers, are thrown into an individual "swim-or sink" mission: they do take part in advanced writing assignments but must write under the same assessment parameters and topic and time constraints as their fellow pupils (Silva, 1993). As such, this might be an unfair practice as Norwegian speakers approach the blank page "in a language that is closely related to one's native language in terms

of grammar, vocabulary, and writing system," a circumstance that the author views as "clearly easier than writing in a language that is vastly different" (Weigle, 2002, p. 7).

5.5. A look behind the stated importance of writing activities

Besides the pure linguistic reasons accounting for the students' dislike of writing, the participants in this research also express their discontent for the excessive weight that compositions have in class. Their claim cannot be proved without direct observation, but it is plausible in communicative-based lessons, as Weigle (2002) mentions. She adds that extensive writing is instinctively the best way to practice this given skill, a view that she shares with Graham (2013) and to which teachers in this study seem to be attached.

Writing has many advantages indeed: it provides pedagogues with solid samples of language, facilitating, therefore, feedback, but also grading; moreover, it is also excellent training for the commonest of the test types, consisting of text creation, usually on different topics, within different genres and a varied range of fictional audiences: "when high-stakes testing is part of the educational landscape, and when many of these assessments include a writing assignment ... it becomes tempting to drill students on the form of this particular type of writing (DelliCarpini, 2012, p. 99). DelliCarpini's words might help interpret one teacher's mention of the final exam. Although this teacher does not explicitly say that he prepares students for the activities they will encounter on that day, his words might give away the actual importance he puts on writing.

This claimed use of extensive writing, however, stands in direct opposition with Drew et al. appreciations regarding English classes in Norway. According to this author, English lessons in the Scandinavian country are highly oral, to the extent that writing and reading are relegated to a second position (Drew et al., 2007). Drew's views align with a well-observed phenomenon, no matter it is one based on a misconception: CLT-based lessons tend to be highly oral (Bax, 2003; Thompson, 1996) often to the exclusion of reading and writing (Spada, 2007).

This primarily oral understanding of communicative lessons does not mean that MIS in this study are exposed to oral lessons themselves. Still, the fact that the students react to a methodology that does not teach them English, coupled with their demand for more grammar focus, reinforces the possibility that the lessons are indeed rather oral. The contradiction jumps

out immediately: There is little place for extensive writing if time is devoted to debates and discussions. Far from intending to discredit the students' opinions, I am obliged to ask whether other considerations might colour their perceptions. Perhaps the fact that writing is, in general, a formidable undertaking: "writing effectively in a second language can be one of the most challenging tasks second language learners must undertake" (DelliCarpini, 2012, p. 101) can account for the considerable size the prospect of writing takes in these students' minds.

5.6. A need for bespoke writing topics

MIS have also commented on the distance and lack of attachment they feel with the topics they must write about. This is not a completely unexpected result. Thomas and Breidlid had already warned on "school textbooks in Norway, which currently contain topics alien to the cultural universe of these students." (Thomas & Breidlid, 2015, p. 365). In the same vein, Altinkaya (1999) and Jun (2009) noted that students from culturally distant backgrounds might, on occasions, show difficulties understanding the value of the topics in the textbook. Although none of these authors explicitly refers to writing topics, the connection between the course's thematical choices and the writing assignments in the subject is evident.

Students and the literature seem to agree on possible remediation formulae. The students embrace the suggestion of adding more personal topics to the curriculum, a proposal that research data support. A varied sample of studies speaks on the benefits of personal knowledge activation (Baynham, 2006; Cummins et al., 2015; Dooley, 2009; Walqui, 2006) and identity affirmation (Cummins et al., 2015, Krulatz & Iversen, 2019).

5.7. The importance of the context in oral activities

Speaking is probably the most demanding of the four skills because of the high degree of spontaneity the task involves (Luoma, 2004). Of particular interest is that students, though undoubtedly aware of its inherent demanding nature, like speaking and view oral activities as highly beneficial in learning a language. As such, this finding might be unexpected because of another group of possible challenge-spurring characteristics of oral activities: speaking, more than any other skill, might bring about feelings of self-consciousness and high anxiety in students because they must express themselves in a foreign language in front of others (Horwitz et al., 1986). As a matter of fact, this second extent was observed in a couple of students who

admitted to “hiding” from the teacher. Of interest is that these two students overtly express their preference for small group and pair-work in oral activities, the way Saeed (2016) mentions in his study. Their preferences are meaningful because they align with some pedagogues’ decision to split the classroom into such small units (Ewald, 2007).

Asked about the reasons for their voluntary retreatment, none of the two oral-sceptical students refers to a single “communication apprehension”-related factor (Horwitz et al.; 1986); in the same way, none of them is afraid of making mistakes or being looked down on by their fellow pupils (Yoshida, 2013). A third student, Ibrahim, is more definitive in his negative view of speaking; he does not like oral activities because he lacks the necessary language skills to participate in them. Again, he does not mention anxiety, nor the avoidance of mistakes or a zealous disposition for perfection; on the contrary, his words give a picture of a committed and fearless student, one that is willing to take part in oral activities, even as he commits mistakes, but who is unable to do it, due to his low language level.

A question arises on how these two students’ fears and frustrations, on the one hand, and the positive comments expressed by other participants, on the other, do reconcile. One answer looks at both groups of students separately. From this perspective, those students who like speaking and those who dread it belong to two different cohorts. From that point of view, speaking is an enjoyable and beneficial activity for students with the minimum language requirements to take part in it and a nightmare for students with low English levels. A quick look at the students’ interviews, however, shows a bit more complex picture, as at least two of the students who do not like speaking state the importance and the positive effects of the practice. Their criticism, when it happens, is not put on the practice of speaking but around what they perceive to be an overwhelming use of open class activities.

Whether these students’ views are correct or tainted by the stress of speaking in front of others is difficult to say; a deeper look at the data provided by teachers does not help much either: The four teachers in this study refer to daily speaking practices, thus confirming the presence of speaking, though only Jan directly points at open class activities as he mentions having a short debate every day. One must, nevertheless, admit the possibility that speaking activities might often happen in rather big gatherings, a finding that would be consistent with previous data pointing at the scarcity of segmented practices -pair-work and small groupings- in lessons oriented to the speaking practice (Ahmed, 2018).

More solid evidence can be put to support the rather unstructured and unsystematic disposition of speaking activities. Besides the comment by one teacher referring to the “never-ending” source of debates as long as one is aware of current topics – suggestive of a certain degree of improvisation - one must also refer to these students’ views on speaking activities around short-video watching (more on that in the next section).

5.8. Movies in class: the value of Norwegian subtitles

Many of the interviewees have expressed positive views on the use of movies in class, a belief they share with participants in other studies (Albiladi, 2018; Stewart & Pertusa, 2004). How these movies help them improve their language skills is more challenging to say. After going through stacks of data, it is not yet clear whether the combination of visual, aural, and written formats help students in target language comprehension (Qiu, 2017; Vulchanova et al., 2014) or develop abilities such as pronunciation, vocabulary, or writing (Albiladi, 2018). What students explicitly refer to, however, are the extra-linguistic benefits of movie watching. One is particularly mentioned: quicker acculturation and adaptation to mainstream cultural frameworks. This finding is in line with observations by Li and Wang (2015) and Albiladi (2018, p. 1572): “one of the most surprising findings that emerged from the data was cultural awareness. The participants shared the beliefs that watching movies increased their cultural awareness and gave them insights on American culture”.

Of particular interest is the participants’ overwhelming preference for Norwegian subtitles as this language sits in the middle ground between the target language and these students’ mother tongue(s). This Norwegian preference might account for this language’s higher status within the learners’ linguistic mind map, a finding that does not come as a surprise given that learners are immersed within a Norwegian-speaking context. Norwegian is a “de facto” L1 for those students, thus supporting data linking interlingual subtitles with enhanced L2 learning (Markham & Peter, 2003). More shocking is that students reject watching movies with subtitles in their mother tongue(s), should they be allowed to it. This inclination for Norwegian subtitles might suggest -again- the effects that a good commandment of the Scandinavian language can have in English learning. Having said that, one must admit that the alleged facilitatory effects of Norwegian have instinctively little reason to exist in Thai, Kurdish, or Arabic speakers. In other words, these students, though relatively good in Norwegian, are still better in their mother tongues.

Their at-any-rate- choice of Norwegian can perhaps be explained by the facilitatory effects this language has to help these learners understand the aural message, an advantage that Thai, Kurdish, or Arabic do not offer because of their lexical and syntactic distance. Still, one is left to wonder why these students do not opt for English subtitles so that the phonetic and written message completely overlap. The answer to that question might lie in the fact that English, like Thai, Kurdish, or Arabic at the other end of the continuum, cannot offer -not yet - any positive transfers. Norwegian, thus, appears to be the only language that can act as a bridge between a known code, Norwegian itself, and a targeted linguistic system like English.

5.9. Short videos: the need for a more systematic approach

The fact that short video watching, unlike movie watching, is criticised takes especial significance; after all, short videos seem to be the equivalent of short movies, despite a less entertaining oriented plot. One is tempted to think that if movies work in class, short clips should work too.

Failure to use short clips in class can be due, as participants have pointed out, to their lack of subtitles or captions, making input harder to understand, a finding that would support the results obtained by Markham and Peter (2003) and Vulchanova et al. (2014).

A second explanation for the higher disapproval of short videos might lie in the kinds of activities associated with their visualization. While students refer to systematic practices around movie watching (another consideration is whether they deem those practices boring or unexpected), short videos seem to be subjected to more whimsical fluctuations. On occasions, clips can be commented on beforehand in motivating and topic awakening previsualization activities (Stempleski, 2002); other times, they are just skipped altogether. Some days, short videos can be part of a more comprehensive lesson plan and thus integrated “with other areas of the language curriculum” (Stempleski, 2002, p. 364), other days, however, they are just satellite items with no relation whatsoever with the rest of the teaching plan. Even as post-visualization activities happen, there is no guarantee they are met with approval. Criticism usually revolves around the rather broad and unspecific nature of questions, as if speaking skills could be developed simply by assigning students general topics to discuss or by getting them to talk on certain subjects” (Shumin, 2002, p. 205).

5.10. The oral presentations' paradox

Oral presentations seem to be all the rage in class; many students have praised their effectiveness at two simultaneous levels. To begin with, students feel oral presentations help them develop their language skills. Again, interview data do not offer many details on what skills get improved and in which manner. One can quickly ascertain some lexical widening as some participants speak of "finding the vocabulary" for the presentations. Other than that, the sorts of language development are a matter of speculation; after hearing the participants, however, one deduces improvement happens at a general language level, one that combines, as Sundrarajun and Kiely point out, "pronunciation, grammar, lexical range and word choice with related aspects such as register and discourse skills" (Sundrarajun & Kiely, 2010, p. 102). Simultaneous with language improvements, oral presentations provide students with a slow-paced opportunity to investigate a topic, an advantage also mentioned by Hadjikotaeva (2015).

The popularity of oral presentations among the participants is indeed an unexpected finding given the wide range of skills to be simultaneously activated by the students, a complex undertaking indeed. This surprise ramps up as some students also comment on their fears of public speaking and their conscious avoidance of oral presentations. Shermake, for example, has consciously rejected to deliver them (Shermake), a reminder of Horwitz observation that some students may even skip classes "in an effort to alleviate their anxiety" (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 127).

One could have expected supporters and adversaries of oral presentations to belong to two separate groups, a finding that would have stolen validity to the effectiveness of oral presentations as a language teaching method. The reality, however, lifts the value of the practice: those who like oral presentations and those who fear them do overlap, as data analysis has shown. As such, there is no contradiction in these seeming antagonist positions; the chances are that the students' positive words for the practice do not indicate anything other than its effectiveness as a teaching device.

As full of meaning as this finding might be, something does not tally up. The teachers do not feel the students' euphoria; they do not sound too enthusiastic about a type of activity that has, as Kari states, "much drama" around. Quite understandably, teachers seek to compensate for these shortfalls. They mainly turn to a series of pseudo-communicative tools whose effectivity

is, however, quickly put in doubt. Podcasts, videos, voice recordings, and one-to-one presentations might be unfit for actual oral practice as they are not interactive and interpersonal speech events requiring "clarifying questions" (Bunch, 2009, p. 83) the way their non-virtual counterparts are (Bunch, 2009; Hadjikotaeva, 2015).

Ultimately, the impression is that teachers would avoid oral presentations altogether if they had the chance; there is only one reason teachers stick to them: they work well on oral proficiency tests (Sundrarajun & Kiely, 2010). However, the teachers' wish contains the ultimate paradox as they would like to liquidate a task that students deem effective.

5.11. Culture-detached English lessons

No informant in this research has mentioned having rejected any of the topics in the subject, an observation that the teachers support. A different matter concerns difficulties stemming from topic unfamiliarity. As indicated in the result section, some participants find topics challenging because they say they have "never heard" of them. These students' reactions are similar to the ones observed by Dooley in MIS in Australia: "I found that helping students make sense of socially and culturally unfamiliar texts was most difficult" (Dooley, 2009, p. 15).

Adverse reactions against the thematic landscape in the English subject can also be due to more banal grounds; students might just find the topics uninteresting, dull, or culturally irrelevant (Altinkaya & Omundsen, 1999; Benseman, 2014; Jun, 2009). As a matter of fact, some of the participants in this study have labelled the themes covered in class in those very same adjectives. However, one must note that such an attitude might be transversal, not just exclusive to minority language students.

Whatever the causes of topic disdain, immediate solutions are difficult to spot as the general perception in Norway associates English language teaching and learning with British and American topics, precisely the kinds of thematical choices students complain about. One comes quickly to a hard eye-opener: Given that language and culture are indissociable, topic choices are likely to remain within this same sea of possibilities, constantly revolving around similar cultural-social and historical wakes. A look at some of the newest English books promptly confirms this idea; even the current subject renewal (fagfornyelse, 2019) does not eliminate the topics around the inner-core English-speaking societies, thus supporting Lund (2019) and

Chavla's (2020) claims on the essential role that these cultures play in the construction of the English language learning experience. Inspired by Lund (2019, p. 261) and her search for "place names, names of well-known people and culture-specific terminology," a quick sweep through the newest of the English textbooks digs up topics like "Shakespeare," "English as a world language," "For and against fox hunting," "This is London" or "Amy Winehouse," among many others.

English textbooks are not so different from Spanish or German ones; if one finds it normal that students of Spanish should learn about weird traditions in Mexico, or that students of German should read texts about the beer festival in Munich, one should not be surprised that English textbooks contain any of the topics above. There is, however, a radical difference that puts English apart from any other language: English has long ago stopped being the language of the English or American people to become the communicative tool of the whole world. For many MIS and Norwegian mainstream students alike, English has value per se as it helps people to work in a building site with their Polish and Italian co-workers, or to travel around the world and book hotel rooms in Thailand or Spain. Culture-related topics might still be valid in Spanish, French, or Russian textbooks, the pidgin-like nature of English, on the other hand, might have brought the language so far away from its cultural roots that any mention to Birmingham, Piccadilly, the Queen, or Las Vegas might not be necessary, nor even wished, for a great majority of learners worldwide. A logical question thus is whether the growing minorities in Norway might get along with these primarily American and British-centred topics; after all, a weekend trip to Liverpool to attend a football match or an exchange year in an Irish university, though indeed part of the live frame of Norwegian mainstream students (even if they do not plan to watch a game or to be exchange students) are distant realities for many MIS in Norway.

An answer to that question is provided by Kanu (2008) and Jun (2009). Both have commented on the feelings of exclusion MIS might develop due to the lack of more personal topic alternatives in the classroom; the participants' unhidden joy as they are offered the possibility to speak on their lives, countries, and traditions account for those feelings. Their enthusiasm might be interpreted as a call for a more interest-based lesson design and a more multicultural curriculum, one in which these students can see themselves. As an added perk, a multicultural curriculum could prompt the inclusion of these students' personal experiences and background knowledge, both well-established motivating and facilitating language learning factors

(Butzkamm, 2003; Cummins et al., 2015; Dooley, 2009). Kari's comments on an increased MIS participation in the classroom, as she admits to having included more topics from societies at the outer circle of English-speaking countries, prove the benefits of such a measure. She is the only one of the four teachers in this research to include these students' realities in the curriculum voluntarily. This situation is a reminder of Kanu's words as she touches upon the scarce willingness that, in general, English teachers show to adapt lessons and grading to the needs of minority students (Kanu, 2008, p. 926).

5.12. Teachers and students agree: they need help

MIS in Norway are thankful for the help they get from their teachers; they also react to the effort and interest pedagogues put in them, an attitude often contrasted to the lack of attention they felt in their homelands. This finding agrees with previous studies in Norway (Hilt, 2016), but also in other educational contexts, such as New Zealand (Benseman, 2014), Canada (Jun, 2009; Kanu, 2008), and Sweden (Popov & Sturesson, 2015). Students are also happy with their teachers' English level; according to them, Norwegian teachers speak much better English than their former teachers in their countries of origin; of interest is their perception of their Norwegian teachers' accent, something they deem better and more acceptable than the accents their home teachers had.

Criticism from the students, when it happens, is never put on individual teachers but instead on themselves and the idiosyncrasies of the Norwegian educational system. Students refer, for example, to the older age at which they started learning English; their perceptions align with theoretical views on the role age of onset plays in proficiency attainment (Johnson & Newport, 1989; Long, 1990; Munro & Mann, 2005). Somehow related, a few students mentioned the relatively limited language instruction they have received (Holmesland & Halmrast, 2015), especially as they compare their time studying English with the many years of contact their classmates have had with the language. Without knowing it, students touch upon research on the relationship between the length of instruction and language proficiency (Collier & Thomas, 2007).

Besides blaming themselves and their circumstances, data analysis also reveals instances of discontent towards the Norwegian educational system. This criticism is, however, a soft one, often wrapped with resignation and a feeling that "this is the way things are". Quite simply,

according to these students, the system restricts the amount of help pedagogues can provide. MIS are straightforward with their complaints: they explain that they did not get any extra teacher in the classroom, despite being promised one, a measure that was imperative given the amount of help -and therefore time- they admit requiring. Their complaints and their conscious awareness of their delicate language situation line up with the views expressed by some teachers in other heavily minoritized contexts, such as Canada (Jun, 2009; Kanu, 2008).

One might wonder why MIS's criticism is veiled under a layer of cheerfulness. Several reasons can help explain this a priori contradiction. It can be, of course, that interviewees have not been entirely honest in their answers; softening of opinions is known to happen because of cultural conceptions of the teacher-student role. Teachers can be, for example, revered, which makes them immune to reproof (Benseman, 2014), or feared and distrust, precisely because of their position of authority (Kanu, 2008).

Another explanation, however, views the two positions as mutually inclusive: when compared to their countries of origin, students are indeed satisfied with the help they get in Norway, a finding that mirrors the meanings expressed by some refugee students in Canada -they speak of winning the lottery (Kanu, 2008, p. 923). Such a satisfaction, though indeed sincere, fades away as those same individuals reflect on their needs in their new educational context. Once in Norway, MIS compare themselves with their Norwegian classmates, hence their call for help to catch up with their current fellow pupils.

Whatever the reasons for this unveiled criticism, the important finding relates to the need for extra help, despite their excellent comments on the amount and quality of the help they already receive. This is a perception that data triangulation supports. Teachers refer to a scarcity of time (Windle & Miller, 2019), the impossibility to even out subject content – a reminder of Kanu's (2008) call for teachers to adapt instruction to these students-, the need for extra help in the classroom (Elfers et al., 2013), or the difficulty to attend each case individually. As one can see, their demands are mostly instructional, with no mentions whatsoever of a need for increased understanding of cultural differences (Freeman & Freeman, 2007).

5.13. The permanence of the monolingual principle despite glimpses of multilingualism in class

This finding reflects long-established, almost universally accepted thoughts, probably because of their "logical" nature (Cummins, 2009): first, effective second language teaching makes exclusive use of the target language in class (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013); second, learning a language requires total obliteration of the mother tongue (Cummins, 2007; Haukås, 2015) and third, the best examples of the target language are provided by native speakers exclusively (Cook, 2007).

Comments by the students have aligned with the three points above: they have expressed their liking for the exclusive use of the target language and have mentioned their frustration at not always managing to stick to English. Even the native speaker myth is observed in their comments as one dives deeper into the interviews. MIS praise their Norwegian teachers' English level but criticize their teachers in their homelands. One must wonder whether they accept their Norwegian teachers' English, despite sounding Norwegian, because their accents are acceptably close enough to the native ones and reject their former teachers' English because of a too salient difference, whatever this may be. Come what may, these students' preferences perpetuate a stuck idea: "The best teacher is, therefore, a native speaker who can represent the target the students are trying to emulate" (Cook, 2007, p. 239). Evidence of this claim might be seen in Sukhorn's criticism of her Thai teachers: they spoke English with a Thai accent, she says, which according to her is worse than a Norwegian one.

In the end, despite short glimpses of a mentality change, the students' and the pedagogues' comments in the interviews witness that, almost half a century later, the monolingual principle still enjoys incredible penetration levels in the society and the teaching field (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013; Cummins, 2007). As such, this monolingual prevalence is an interesting finding given the instances of multilingual benefits the students themselves have stated, though apparently, they do not perceive these practices as "multilingual." For example, Abdul's positivity towards the English subject "because he has learned Norwegian" is evidence of his increased motivation and self-confidence (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Another student, Fatima, speaks of Norwegian and English resembling each other, thus aligning with scholars like Hardin (2001) Cenoz, and Gorter (2013) on the facilitative effects in metalinguistic skills of knowing a few

languages. None of these students, however, it becomes apparent, is aware of the possibilities to translate these advantages to the classroom.

A look at multilingual classroom practices, more specifically code-mixing, code shifting, and translanguaging, shows very satisfactory results in studies with relatively distant languages to English such as Basque, Spanish, Finnish or Gaelic (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Illman & Pietilä, 2018; Moriarty, 2017). However, one must wonder whether the same results would be replicated in contexts with converging languages and a higher degree of spontaneous, extra-scholar learning. Research on the issue, though yet scarce, seems to indicate that a too closely related L1 yields few or no advantages in the consciously noticing of L2 structures; one deduces, therefore, that multilingualism practices would be of little use in a context like the Norwegian one, at least with Norwegian native speakers or MIS with high levels of the language. A closely related L1 would still offer a multitude of advantages to the L2 learner, as Ringbom (1987) indicated, but would be detrimental for the conscious noticing of structures, as Reder et al. hypothesize (2003). For beginner speakers of Norwegian, though, overt comparisons and metalinguistic discussions between English, on the one hand, and an incipient Norwegian language or their L1, on the other, could be a more beneficial teaching approach. The teachers' comments on Beiler's study (2020) and the results by Krulatz and Iversen (2019), obtained in multilingual classrooms in which Norwegian played a crucial cohesive role among very linguistically diverse, and Norwegian unbalanced, students - might indicate this possibility.

5.14. Oral error correction is an error

The participants' comments have pointed at a dearth of oral correction. The teachers have confirmed this extent and given the reasons behind their actions: They avoid oral correction because they do not want to affect their students negatively. Their reasons align with researchers like Yoshida (2008), who believes simultaneous feedback can be intimidating, and Lyster (2013), who blames concurrent correction for increasing the students' anxiety levels.

Physical evidence of the teachers' beliefs can be seen in the generalized use of recasts in class, a corrective technique linked to learner-centred and non-intruding pedagogies (Bell, 2005; Rahimi & Zhang, 2015). Whether recasts manage to convey the corrected message to the learner, however, is a parallel question, though some studies have cast doubts on their efficacy.

Data suggest that recasts do not provide the kind of overt noticing of ungrammaticality deemed necessary for the internalization of corrections (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

Doubts around recasts increase as the students in the present research do not perceive them as corrective feedback at all (let us remember they say that oral activities do not get corrected). Notwithstanding the benefits of speaking practice, one must still wonder whether recasts within unconstrained oral activities - the most common type in class according to the participants- have any noticeable positive effects on the mistakes students commit.

Asked about why they are not corrected when they speak, students refer to the consequences that oral corrective feedback would have for the smooth running of the classroom. They share these views with the four teachers in this research and with the professionals in Brown's study (2009). It is worth noticing the massive success of this argument. This "do not disturb" philosophy is accepted by pedagogues as a principle of good teaching and by students as an avoidable evil; this transversal acceptance might explain why students do not press harder in their demands for immediate, extensive, and explicit oral corrections. Their preferences do not come as a surprise, though; they get assembled within a long line of research suggesting that language learners prefer immediate, metalinguistic corrections of every mistake (Brown, 2009; Horwitz, 1988; Schulz, 1996).

5. 15. Written feedback yields little gains

Unlike oral correction, written feedback is extensively used, an expected outcome after all given the number of written activities during the year. This is a practice that pleases students. Their opinions line up with findings from other scholars regarding the general satisfaction students obtain as they get corrected and receive feedback, especially on grammar (Leki, 1991). However, one must notice that the participants' generalized preference for comprehensive correction is somehow tainted by a few instances of criticism towards the effectiveness of the written feedback, an observation also made by Burner (2019). A bit calmer look, however, shows that the students' complaints, which generally point at the impossibility of extracting any learning out of the feedback, do not necessarily contradict a high demand for correction; instead, they might point at the inefficiency of specific corrective practices. This is a thought some scholars hold: "this does not mean ... that they do not wish to be corrected. What they prefer is a more selective correction" (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005, p. 124).

The authors' last sentence clearly hints at focused correction; this type of correction, however, though perhaps a valid alternative in Spain, would not seem to provide a solution in the specific context of MIS in Norway. Based on the students' comments, the written correction they receive is already focused and always completed with extensive narrative feedback. Teachers could, of course, provide MIS with indirect error correction strategies, a corrective technique that some scholars believe to be "more effective than direct feedback in helping learners improve the accuracy of their writing" (Bitchener et al., 2005, p. 202). Nevertheless, it is difficult to ascertain whether this "more effective" practice could make a difference with students at a lower stage of language development. One might need to refer to the effects of written corrective feedback as it blends with these students' particularities. What these learners might lack, according to some studies, is the maturity – a linguistic one- to notice and acquire certain grammatical items (Truscott, 1996).

6. Pedagogical implications

Instructional practices directed towards MIS might benefit from alternative modes of action; common to all of them should be the improvement of motivation in these students - thus reducing the number of dropouts - increased gains in language learning, and the associated higher marks in assessment. The path to those goals is undoubtedly a multifaceted one in which many actors are expected to contribute to shed more light on the problems minority students show, their genesis, and the possible remediations.

Investigators within SLA and L2 teaching will surely continue to feed each other, as will voices within other branches with a say within an issue also involving important social and cultural elements. As all these fields of knowledge intermingle, however, it might be important not to leave aside these students' takes; their views, their feelings, what they experience in the classroom, what they like or dislike, and especially, those activities and practices they deem engaging, often as they fight their insecurities, and those they view as less valuable in their learning.

The present research, though small and rather circumscribed geographically, has nevertheless come across possible beneficial factors in these students' learning. It is not my intention, at any rate, as I enumerate these elements to point at any inefficient praxis. Some of the possible pedagogical implications that can be derived from this research are, in fact, already implemented; as such, any comments on them must be seen as an acknowledgment of their facilitatory function regarding English learning and a call for a wider, more frequent use.

6.1. Explicit grammar teaching

Students have stated their interest in explicit grammar teaching, though their voices are not conclusive on whether they wish a traditional grammar teaching approach or a more integrated one in which form is taught as doubts pop up in the classroom. More important than that seems to be the need to make grammar teaching noticeable so that it has a niche within the lessons. As for now, because of a variety of reasons, grammar instruction often goes unnoticed because it often happens under the weight of the rest of the activities.

6.2. More systematic oral interactions

Despite the primarily warm comments that oral activities have received, it is still important to refer to those few participants who deemed speaking an arduous undertaking. Two of them admitted to enjoying speaking in class, though only in reduced groups or in pairs. Their views are a warning call towards the rather intimidatory nature of open-class oral activities. These students ask for more protected settings; this is an idea teachers might want to consider when designing speaking tasks.

It is also important to mention the single student who found oral activities difficult because he did not have the necessary language skills to participate in oral interactions. His situation asks for a rethinking of mainstream practices aiming at speaking. As derived from the interviews, oral activities in both school settings might sometimes be too free, partially a consequence of the high level of English the students have, partially the result of the activities used by the teachers, which can often be broad and unplanned. Although these unconstrained activities can provide proficient students with opportunities to shine, the harsh reality is that some learners might require more “systematic procedures and strategic ways” (Ahmed, 2018, p. 97) to develop discussion skills within more effective and safer formats.

6.3. Anxiety decreasing measures in oral presentations

Oral presentations seem to be a beneficial asset within the classroom, yet their possibilities are held with a thin thread because of the teachers' rather negative opinions. It seems, therefore, that oral presentations need a different approach, one that can help teachers see them in a new light.

Oral presentations could be built so that the students' feelings of anxiety were smoothed away or eliminated. Oral presentations could also benefit, for example, from less invasive correction techniques, lack of grading, a higher degree of topic familiarity or a different teacher role, more as a moderator than a judge.

6.4. Enhancing the interest for short clip watching

Being aware of their shortcomings, teachers might want to lift short clips to the level movies enjoy. This task should not be difficult to accomplish given the number of tips unconsciously provided by the students. To begin with, students view short clips as detached from the main lesson; the literature, however, emphasizes the need to make short videos a meaningful part of the course so that they are included in a broader unit of meaning. Simultaneously, teachers admit to seldom watching the videos before playing them for the classroom; again, scholars would advise against this practice: it is widely acknowledged that videos yield more gains if they are dissected beforehand. Pre-visualization warm-up practices are associated with increased awareness of difficult language points, better topic knowledge, and more intrinsic motivation for language learning (Stempleski, 2002).

6.5. Inclusion of topics based on personal interests and background

The broadly accepted pedagogical value of including more personal topics stemming from the students' lives and thus bringing up authentic language realizations combines with sociological and cultural changes worldwide regarding the status, function, and symbolism of the English language. Viewing English as a work tool rather than as an exclusive – and most important - a cultural artifact from the Anglosphere could have enormous consequences in lesson design and objectives. A first expected derivation would see language teaching reduced to the students' own interests, thus linking English with the students' more likely future linguistic needs (in line with the thoughts expressed by some of the teachers in the interviews). This option - a much preferred one judging by the students' comments – mirrors the results from other studies:

Asked what they wanted to achieve by attending their class, all expressed slight variations on learning enough English to be able to carry out daily tasks, whether it be shopping, speaking to their neighbours, or making enough progress to enrol in a higher-level course (Benseman, 2014).

The students' comments, backed by other expert voices on the issue, might indeed suggest a more personal, more practical, and nearer English than the one many textbooks and subject plans are based on.

6.6. The role of the Norwegian language in class

The ongoing shift from monolingual approaches in L2 classrooms to multilingualism teaching might be particularly beneficial for MIS in Norway, the reason being the suggested facilitative role that a balanced fluency in Norwegian could have in learning English. This somehow tangential finding -it is not directly related to this research's aim- seems nevertheless crucial because of the profound implications it could have in the curriculum design and subject distribution throughout the school year.

If, as suggested by the data, Norwegian fluency could facilitate English learning, MIS in Norway would benefit more from a school system that helped them improve their Norwegian skills first so that they could be better prepared to face English instruction later. A tentative teaching plan could, for example, focus exclusively on the Norwegian language during the first and second years at the school - usually, a time when MIS show low levels of the country's vernacular – just to move onto the English subject later, once these students were in their third and last year at the school. One would expect that, at that point, that their advanced Norwegian, possibly aided by a certain degree of extra-curricular English after two years in Norway, would trigger English learning in a way that the actual dual and simultaneous English-Norwegian instruction, all of it concentrated in the first upper-secondary year, does not.

6.7. Increasing the amount of help teachers can provide

This is one of the most solid findings of this research. MIS ask for help, and teachers agree with their demands. Help can take different forms depending on each case: more allotted time for homework and tests, more individualized assistance, an adapted curriculum, or the inclusion of a second pedagogue in the classroom. Any MIS-directed instruction is likely to fail without implementing helping measures, a job that requires the cooperation of all actors involved in education, not only pedagogues.

7. Conclusion

This research has explored how eight students with minority backgrounds perceive English teaching in two upper-secondary schools in Norway. Interviews have yielded an abundance of data, some of them pointing at the students' total or partial satisfaction with some of the practices they are exposed to, other pointing at their dissatisfaction or scepticism. There has also been some inconclusive data and a possible meaningful finding which would require further research.

Oral activities, and the somehow related oral presentations, are appreciated by the students. Yet, students have raised concerns about how activities targeting oral skills are implemented. Data analysis has also revealed a generalized dislike for writing activities, a demand for more grammar teaching, an appreciation for movie watching, a generalized preference for monolingual approaches in class, and an often-mentioned demand for extra help.

Some of these results, however, show extra shades of colour as they are broken down into smaller bits. Thus, writing is not appreciated because of difficulties stemming from text creation and topic choices but could be a better-liked activity if nearer and more personal topics were included. Movies are greatly liked, but short clips are not, a difference probably due to the two formats' idiosyncrasies, their different relationship with subtitles, and the somewhat unstructured character of activities around short clip watching.

Comments on other practices have not yielded conclusive results. Meanings on corrective feedback, for example, despite one critical voice, have not contributed with any possible remediations; actually, most of the students have shown a high degree of conformity regarding the kinds of comments they receive. Similarly, the students' demands for more grammar teaching have failed to pinpoint alternative grammar instruction practices.

Finally, comments by the students have implied the existence of a possible beneficial factor -or a conglomeration of them- in the Norwegian language to learn English. Further research should investigate whether these posited benefits are real, and if so, what the best conditions for their apparition are so that students with a minority background could use them to their advantage.

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Annex 1. Interview protocol

1. Can you explain, from start to finish, a regular day in your English class?

- Follow-up questions

2. What is good with the English lessons (helps you to learn English)?

- Follow-up questions

3. What activities would you change (do not help you to learn English)?

- Follow-up questions

(If not commented on in 1-3)

4. What do you think about the topics in the English subject?

- Follow-up questions

5. How do teachers correct your English?

-Follow-up questions

6. How do teachers help you learn English?

- Follow-up questions

(Only if the student had had English lessons in their homeland)

7. What activities do you miss having in class?

- Follow-up questions

8. Can you compare English lessons in Norway with English lessons in your country?

- Follow-up questions