

MASTEROPPGAVE

Vocational English in Norway: A study of attitudes

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1. Introduction

At present, there is an on-going discussion in Norway about whether or not the curriculum in English should be different for vocational students compared to that of students at general studies. It is argued that the curriculum, with a strong focus on literature, culture and other content-related matter, makes it more difficult for vocational students to succeed, and that there should be more focus on technical English. However, it is also argued that vocational students need to know not just technical English, but need knowledge about, for instance, the cultures of many different English-speaking countries, like the USA, Canada, Australia, and India. It is safe to conclude that whatever focus one chooses, it is essential to know English well, since we become more and more globalized, and everyone in the global workplace is expected to have a certain level of communicative efficiency in English.

My interest in this topic started when I began as a coordinator for the FYR-project initiated by the Norwegian government. In addition, my own teaching in English at vocational studies served as another source of inspiration. The issue of whether or not the curriculum should be revised is a complex one (much debated in Norway today), and it needs to be looked at from different perspectives, before going to the point of actually changing the curriculum. Many of the students who are unable to pass the English subject often have problems passing in other subjects as well. In addition, many students lack the sufficient background in English to be able to pass, something that adds to the complexity. A recent study of Norwegian teachers' orientations towards the assessment of oral English found that some teachers focus less on content knowledge with vocational students than they do with general studies students (Bøhn, 2015). Moreover, they also judge these students more leniently, since they think it is unfair that vocational students have to follow the same subject curriculum as the general students, who are supposedly theoretically stronger (Bøhn, 2015).

Against this background, with the present debate about the English curriculum, I have developed my research question for this master thesis:

What are the attitudes to vocational English in school and working life?

In order to answer this question, I have developed three sub-questions, all related to a different group of informants.

- 1) What are the attitudes of English teachers?
- 2) What are the attitudes of vocational teachers?
- 3) What are the attitudes of representatives of trade and industry?

In what follows, I will first present my methodological approach. Second, there will be a theoretical chapter, including a brief overview of the curriculum and, third, my results follow. Fourth will be my discussion, and the paper ends with a short conclusion.

2. Method and materials

In general, it may be argued that there is a division between qualitative research and quantitative research, although the differences are not completely clear-cut. In this study, I have chosen to use a qualitative approach. In order to map the situation, and to learn about teacher attitudes, I chose to conduct individual interviews, since interviews may be a relevant way of capturing the “life-world” of the informants (Kvale, 2007). Qualitative research generally has the following characteristics: the phenomenon being studied is typically complex and should be investigated holistically, the research question is arrived at inductively and the researcher observes and formulates the questions. Moreover, in a qualitative study, one usually selects a limited number of participants, and data is typically gathered through field notes, interviews or written documents. The data collected undergoes an interpretive analysis, often in terms of categorization, and the language used is usually descriptive (McKay, 2006:5-7).

Interviews can serve different purposes and Sandra Lee McKay divides interviews into three categories. The first purpose is to find out about the background, the second is to find out about reported behaviour and the last to find out about opinions and attitudes (ibid:51). M.Q Patton (1990) differentiates between three main types of interviews; first the informal conversational interview, second, the general interview guide approach and lastly the standardized open-ended interview. I chose individual interviews to explore the teachers’ attitudes and opinions towards the English subject, in particular for students in vocational studies. I also wanted to explore the importance of English in the students’ occupations from the perspectives of both English teachers and teachers in vocational studies. Further, I wanted to interview people in trade and industry about what English skills they believe is required in their line of work, but also their opinions about the subject of English in school. I choose a standardized open-ended interview which is very structured and in which all participants are asked the same questions, in the same order. As Patton points out, this type of interview does not provide any flexibility, but since every participant is asked the same questions, all of the data gathered are comparable and the data analysis process is easier (ibid:51-52). In addition, by conducting individual interviews it would be possible to ask follow-up questions, if any questions or answers were unclear. In this setting I decided that it would be wise to talk to the interviewees in person, because essential information might be lost if they were just given the

questions and asked to answer them, without the possibility of addressing any problems related to my questions.

I interviewed six teachers from vocational studies and six teachers of English over a period of five months. I managed to get interviews with teachers from three different upper secondary schools in one specific Norwegian county. It was more difficult than I would have thought to organize the interviews and to find suitable teachers willing to be interviewed. It would ideally have been better to have spread the interviews to more schools for better variation, however this was not possible. In addition, I interviewed five informants from trade and industry in the same county. I mostly interviewed managers but also people who were directly involved with apprenticeships from the various schools. The setting up of appointments for interviews turned out to be a very time consuming process, while setting up interviews with teachers was more straight-forward. Many of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, but for some of them I had to resort to telephone interviews for practical reasons, it just was not possible to meet some of my informants on account of very busy schedules. Telephone interviews usually lasted for a shorter period of time than face-to-face talks, and it may be that I, in some cases, missed some essential information that I would have been able to pick up in a regular meeting. However, interviewing by telephone is still a better tool than just distributing a questionnaire without the possibility of follow-up questions.

For my project it was important to talk to both English teachers working with vocational students, and to vocational subject teachers from study programmes such as building and construction, technical production and so forth, in order to get a better understanding of the views they have on teaching of English to students in vocational studies. It would also be interesting to see whether there were different opinions about the English subject between teachers of English and teachers from the vocational studies. I interviewed teachers from different schools in the specific county, in order to ensure some variation in the teacher sample. Although it may be claimed that ideally the sample should have included teachers from other counties, it can be argued that the inclusion of teachers from different schools at least ensures variability to some extent, because even within a county there can be differences in approaches to English teaching. It is also important to have in mind that schools which only offer vocational subjects might have different policies when it comes to English teaching.

Each interview took approximately one hour, and the teachers themselves decided whether they wanted to speak English or Norwegian, as I wanted them to feel as comfortable as possible during the interview. Even though respondents were English teachers it could be that they were more comfortable talking in their first language. All of the teachers started talking in English, but later all switched to Norwegian. This may be because they felt more comfortable speaking Norwegian when they became engaged by the topic, and also because they started to talk about curriculum and learning goals, which are in Norwegian.

According to Patton (1990) the success of an interview is closely related to the wording of the questions, and he further claims that it is particularly important to let the interviewees be allowed to respond on their own terms (ibid:52-53).

The interview guide was divided into three parts (see appendices 1, 2 and 3 for details); one for the teachers of vocational studies, one for the teachers of English and one for the participants from trade and industry. The reason for making the interview forms different for the individual groups was because they would, most likely, have a different perspective on the need for English in society and the information about English teaching in school. The guides listed eight to ten questions for the different participants. Further, the guide included basically open-ended questions to make it possible to open up for discussions about the respondents' own thoughts and ideas to establish differences and similarities between the three groups and their thoughts of school and English teaching. In addition, I was also interested in what type of English expertise that was sought after in trade and industry, and the views of English teaching that my interviewees from this sector would voice.

All interviewees were given written information about my background and a short explanation about my research project (see appendix 4). In addition, information about the FYR-project was provided, as it could not be assumed that the project is generally well known. The written information also included a reassurance of complete confidentiality and the possibility to ask questions before the interview started. I e-mailed the information to the participants beforehand to several of them in order for them to be able to prepare. Before reporting the results of the study, I will now present the theoretical background of my work.

3. Theoretical background

3.1 The English Curriculum at upper secondary school

3.1.1 The importance of English as a subject in Norwegian school

English is an important subject in the Norwegian school and the curriculum concludes that students need skills in English in most areas of life. The curriculum from 1997 had a stronger focus on English as an international lingua franca, and how students, through English, could get in touch with people from all over the world. However, the curriculum from 2006 expanded the focus and also included the importance of knowing how to communicate with different cultures. Both curriculums state that it is important to develop understanding and respect for people with a different cultural background than your own. It goes without saying that this is also important for students at vocational studies since they too will meet people from different cultures in an increasingly globalized world.

3.1.2 A need to change the curriculum for vocational students?

In 2011, The Ministry of Education and Research received a request from teachers in the sector for Education and Research for a reduction in the number of hours in English, and an application for local examinations, and sent these issues out on a hearing. However, the responses from the consultative bodies were negative because, it was concluded, there was certainly a great need of competence in English in many of the vocational programs. However, in 2011 the examination was changed in order to try to separate better between tasks for vocational students and general students in terms of the content of the tasks. In addition, the number of tasks to be handed in was reduced from three to two tasks. The effect of this was that the percentage of failing marks was reduced from 15,6 percent to 8,7 percent in the spring of 2012. There has also been an increase of students at vocational programs gaining the grade four or five (top grade six), simultaneously as there has been a reduction of students receiving the grade two.

With such results the Ministry of Education and Research does not wish to change the curriculum of English in vocational studies. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and

Research also finds it important that vocational programs have a certain dimension of common core subjects because it is part of the competence needed for those professions, and also because it is important in a lifelong learning perspective. However, the Ministry of Education and Research has made demands that common core subjects should be vocationally oriented and therefore make the vocational students see the relevance of what they are learning. Further, the educational system is more flexible with common study plans for vocational studies and general studies as it allows for access to higher education (Det Kongelige kunnskapsdepartement (2012-2013): 129).

In addition, the curriculum includes basic skills in all subjects. Literacy is the concept most often used in relation to language skills, and is used in all subjects. It is important that students write in all school subjects to realize that the common core subjects are not something completely separate from their choice of future occupation. It is important that they acknowledge this as something that they need to practice and use in all forms at school, and, most importantly, that they will need literacy skills when they go out into working life.

3.1.3 Curriculum – vocational students and general students with the same competence aims

Irrespective of general or vocational studies, students study the same common core subjects, have the same number of lessons, and share the same subject curriculums. The only difference is that vocational students are supposed to reach the goals over a period of two years instead of one as is the case for the students at general studies. Thus, they finish on equal terms. They also have the same written examination, something that has been widely discussed since the introduction of the subject curriculum (The Knowledge Promotion) in 2006.

According to the Ministry of Education and Research, subjects are meant to be as relevant as possible for all students. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Research has taken different measures in order to strengthen the vocational approach towards the common core subjects. For instance, the study plans have been changed to make the competence aims better suited to the various vocational studies. The Regulations to the Education Act have been changed and now stipulate that teaching should be as relevant as possible for the students, and should be adapted to the different educational programs. This is also why the Ministry of Education and Research started with the project FYR (ibid: 128).

3.2 Too much theory in vocational education and training – a question of conflicting objectives? European educational regimes and the Norwegian model

3.2.1 Too much theory for vocational students

Several studies show that one student in three does not finish upper secondary school and that the drop-out rate is significantly higher at vocational studies (Kristin Hegna et al. 2012:217) One explanation offered from critics of The Knowledge Promotion (introduced in 1996) for this high drop-out rate was that there is too much theory in vocational studies.

On the one hand, it is argued that the demands in subjects like mathematics, Norwegian and English, are too high for students who do not have the required analytical mind-set to work with this type of theory, or lack the theoretical background to do so, and that this again results in low motivation to finish or pass the general subjects (ibid:217).

On the other hand, there is a discussion that there is altogether too much theory in the vocational subjects, and too little time in the workshops, which again serves to demotivate students who have chosen a less theoretical career path, resulting in the worst case that they leave without finishing their studies. The reasons for students not finishing upper secondary school may of course be many – however, it is argued that a theoretical overload in vocational studies may be one contributing factor (ibid:217).

3.2.2 Drop-outs – a common European problem

A high drop-out rate in upper secondary is not only a Norwegian problem. How to reduce the drop-out rate has been discussed in the European Commission in 2010. However, the argument about too much theory in vocational studies seems to be more of a Norwegian focus than a general European one (Hegna et al. 2012: 218). Norwegian research indicates that too much theory could be one of many reasons why students drop out (ibid:218). However, there is also other Norwegian research that shows that in both quantitative and qualitative studies of drop-outs, the potential problem of theoretical overload is small (ibid:218). In the Norwegian public debate it is, however, claimed that the theoretical aspects constitute a serious problem, and it seems that the Norwegian politicians and government agree (ibid:219).

In order to try to understand the present European discussion it is important to look at the role of the educational system in each country and how it is organized. Let us take a look at a few selected countries. A common aspect for all the vocational education systems in these different European countries is that they have a double role. First, they give the students competence and qualifications for the labour market, and, second, they contribute to including the vocational students in society and thereby evening out social differences in society.

The French sociologist Eric Verdier states, that the educational systems in the different countries in Western Europe, is determined by social conventions, which affect the content and structure of the educational system. Therefore, these social conventions in the different countries can be important in order to understand problems related to the different educational systems but also what the solutions to these problems can be (Hegna et al. 2012: 219)

Having brought in the concept of “theory” several times above, it is important to state what is meant by the concept in this particular context. Verdier divides the Western European educational systems into four different categories; the meritocratic system, the occupational based system, the market based system and the universal educational system (ibid:220). In this master thesis it is relevant to look at the different approaches to vocational education in Europe, as they represent different political views of education, and may shed light on the ongoing debate in Norway.

3.2.3 France – the meritocratic educational system

In France the meritocratic educational system builds on the belief that competition among students will yield the best academic results. Success at school, or failure, will decide into which categories the students are sorted. In the French system, vocational studies are alternatives for those who have failed academically, and students who fail to reach good results may be guided into these. Furthermore, the number of programs which in France lead toward baccalaurèat professionnel (Bac Pro). However, excessive use of practical learning and relatively low demands in general subjects in these programs have not worked as safety nets for the weaker students, or as motivation for students who are tired of school (ibid:221-222).

3.2.4 Germany – occupational based system

In Germany we find the occupational approach where academic achievements and occupational qualifications are looked upon as different but equal in terms of status. For instance, a number of students in Germany will at a later point attend higher education after they have finished their vocational training. This double qualification is seen as very attractive for many employers in Germany. This is quite similar to the Norwegian new program where students attend four years at school and obtain a certificate of craftsmanship, and then also get the possibility to go apply to higher education for further studies. However, in Germany, it becomes more and more difficult for the weaker students to attend what is called Realschule, an extended upper secondary learning, and they are given a possibility to attend more school in order to improve their grades. The problem is that many fail to do so and disappear out of the system. This dilemma has also been discussed in the media in Norway, and politicians disagree on how to approach this problem (ibid:222-224). Is it a good idea to send demotivated students who have not managed to finish lower secondary school into more theoretical schooling?

3.2.5 England – market based educational system

In England, there is more of a market based educational system where the offer of education is more based upon quality and effectiveness. The British vocational educational system has been characterized as a low skill system with lower demands in general subjects in combination with little exploiting of work placement in working life for obtaining competence of trade. According to Verdier, in England there seems to be little focus on theoretically based teaching in vocational programs (ibid:224-225). This approach gives limited possibilities for further studies for weaker students. However, there is a continuing debate in Britain about new possibilities referred to as Diplomas, which are supposed to be a middle road between the Sixth Form and vocational education. The new change in the educational reform in Britain for vocational students has been criticized for focusing too much upon academic competence, instead of on vocational studies. This discussion has many similarities to the ongoing debate in Norway about the amount of theoretical subjects in vocational programs (ibid:224-225).

3.2.6 Norway – universal educational system

In Norway, one of the aims of the educational systems is to compensate for differences between students with different social and economic backgrounds. The political goal is to create a school system where everyone is given the opportunity to participate. To rank students based on results is more problematic in this type of system. In order to help students achieve the different goals in this educational system, the notion of adapted education is looked upon as an important factor in order for the system to work as intended. Another notion is not to focus only on academic achievements, but also on more general competences, such as for instance working in groups and finishing projects together. Norwegian youth who have finished lower secondary has the right to upper secondary teaching according to the Education Act § 3-1, irrespective of what skills a student has, or has not, acquired at lower secondary school (Utdanningsdirektoratet: 2009) . As already mentioned above, since 1994 students at both general and vocational studies follow the same teaching in general subjects, with the aim of securing educational depth and flexibility with the possibility for students to change directions in their education.

The current Norwegian debate about the theoretical input has to do with the amount of theory, with the form of the general subjects, and with the theory in the vocational subjects. In this system, it is believed that the teaching and not the curriculum should be adapted to the students' needs in order to avoid students being discriminated against. The goal of a universal education is to have the same goal for all students, and this again contributes to the same general subjects demand. For instance, Lars Ove Seljestad argues that Norwegian vocational education is too academically oriented, with little focus on the possibility to gain academic insight by using a practical approach. As opposed to the educational systems in France, Germany and England, the Norwegian educational system is designed to be open to everyone. The question of whether the present Norwegian system actually leads to the strived-for equality is, however, too complicated and too vast an issue for the format of this master thesis.

3.3 Why do some students drop out from upper secondary school?

A strong wish to start working may be an important factor for students who drop out of upper secondary school. However, while it earlier was possible to go from lower secondary school into working life, this is seldom possible today. Now a certificate from upper secondary school is the required minimum in order to enter working life. Therefore, not finishing upper secondary school may lead both to low employability and even to dependence on social benefits at an early age. In a survey made by NOVA, one of the largest social science research institutes in Norway in 2010, 30 percent of the Norwegian youth asked, answered that they would rather work than go to school if they were given the opportunity. This does not necessarily mean that they would have dropped out, but it gives an indication of the lack of motivation that many of them have in relation to school (Von Simson, 2014:1).

Studies of drop-out decisions at upper secondary school conclude that young people tend to drop out to a lesser degree during recessions, compared to when the labour market is booming (ibid:3). In official statistics, the five-year rule is often referred to when discussing drop-out at upper secondary school; meaning that when a person has not finished within five years from starting upper secondary school it is considered to be a dropout (ibid:5).

3.4 The FYR-project

3.4.1 What is FYR?

My research project takes as its point of departure the Norwegian school project FYR: FYR stands for common core subjects, vocational and relevance. The Norwegian Centre for Foreign Languages in Education has been given the responsibility for the English part of FYR. The Centre, together with 19 county coordinators, has established a national network of teachers who teach English in vocational educational programs.

FYR includes two separate, but related, components. Vocational orientation is the first aspect, relevance is the second. It is important to be aware that students should not just be prepared and educated for working life, but they must also become capable of functioning as participating citizens in a democracy. Students in vocational programmes will not only

become professional workers but, as all other students, they will also be participating in local, national and global societies.

Knowledge develops and changes much quicker in the world today than only a few generations back. Working life follows the same pattern, as it must do in order to remain competitive. Any single workforce has to acquire knowledge, communicate this knowledge, cooperate, and plan together with other workforces. Workers must report and document to a much larger degree than earlier, and the basic skills specified in the curriculum have been conclusive for working life, society and the individual human being. The demand of written skills is new, as is the demand for planning, reporting and documentation. In addition, it is important to be well educated when it comes to technology and new, rapidly developing information.

As a backdrop to the discussion about FYR, it is important to mention the NyGiv initiative initiated by the Norwegian government in 2010, as it is important to understand that FYR is a project started in relation to NyGiv. NyGiv started as a project to reduce the drop-out rate in upper secondary school and help students complete their upper secondary education with a pass grade. One of the measures introduced NyGiv was the provision of extra, and adapted, teaching to students who performed poorly in the first semester of 10th grade in lower secondary school. The objective was to improve their reading, writing and mathematical skills (Det Kongelige kunnskapsdepartement (2012-2013: 34-35).

Around 70 percent of the students finish upper secondary school within five years (ibid:42). However, 83 percent of the students attending general studies passed within five years after they started their education in 2006, whereas only 55 percent of the students in vocational studies did the same. The students attending vocational programs have a much lower average mark from lower secondary than students in the general studies programs and therefore a lower probability to finish and pass upper secondary school. However, when students, in general studies and vocational studies, with the same average marks from lower secondary are compared to each other, the risk of drop-out is the same. This is interesting and one can conclude that the background from lower secondary school will have a large impact on performance at upper secondary school (ibid: 42).

3.4.2 FYR – a motivational factor

All students in upper secondary school have the common core subjects Norwegian, English, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences and physical education. The common core subjects are meant to give the students the necessary knowledge and skills to function well in working life, and to be able to participate in a democratic society. In light of the already mentioned substantial drop-out rates, FYR aims to motivate the students who risk dropping out, and to promote an understanding of the common core subjects in order to make it possible for these students to succeed with their studies.

In the FYR project several organizational and methodical steps are taken in order to improve the vocational orientation of the common core subjects. The goal is that all schools offering vocational educational programs should be linked together in networks. These networks are intended to develop the educational resources in the common core subjects for the students to see the relevance of their education in a better way. As explained above, in cooperation with the National Centre for Foreign languages in Education, all counties have appointed a junction school. Each of the junction schools has a subject coordinator in the subjects mathematics, Norwegian, English and natural science, with a time resource of 5 percent each. The main task of these coordinators is to provide adaptable teaching materials and to cooperate with, and facilitate cooperation between, the different networks in the country. The teaching resources made will be published on open teaching platforms accessible to all teachers in Norway (ibid: 128).

3.4.3 FYR – teaching resources

The most widely used teaching resource is the teaching platform NDLA (Norwegian digital learning arena) where teachers can find many resources to use in their own teaching. The aim is to help teachers of, for instance, English, to find relevant and useful teaching materials and methods. This is to support teachers who need to relate their own subject to many different vocational subjects that they sometimes have little relation to. The FYR coordinators also focus upon the importance of increasing the cooperation between common core subject teachers and the teachers of the various vocational subjects.

4. Results

In what follows I will first present the results from the interviews that I did with five representatives of trade and industry. Then I will present the results from the interviews with six English teachers and lastly six teachers from various vocational programs (see appendices numbers 1,2 and 3.) Further, I will present all the answers I received under each question. Technical English and technical expressions are often referred to in the both questions and answers here. This refers to English used in a specific line of work, e.g. the specific vocabulary used in manuals and in particular the names of the various tools of the different vocational programs. These expressions are often very different from general English and a technical dictionary is often a necessary aid to find the right descriptions from different vocational programs.

4.1 Interviews with managers from the business community

The first three questions covered basic information such as age, position and field of work. My respondents' ages ranged from 33 to 63, the majority of them were in their 50s. Position and field of work will not be disclosed here due to confidentiality restrictions. With question number 4, the key issues began to be addressed.

Q4. How important is English for the work your employees execute?

All agreed that English was essential for their employees. The reasons for this were that the company language was English for nearly all of the companies and English was important in particular in terms of ordering parts, calling for assistance when equipment broke down or communicating with colleagues in the same line of work. However, for regular employees on the factory floor, the need for English was more limited, but not redundant. English was very important for communication with colleagues from abroad, and to be able to write messages, for instance e-mails, and in order to receive important messages. A couple of the interviewees mentioned that it was necessary to talk to people daily in English. It was also necessary for the maintenance of factory equipment, and for repairs, since instructions usually are in English. Moreover, for example, when phoning support services for assistance when

machinery broke down or for assistance with monitoring new equipment, it would be necessary to communicate in English. Another important explanation was that good knowledge of English is vital for the understanding of drawings and descriptions. English has become increasingly important in recent years, and some building sites use English as a lingua franca and it is therefore necessary to have some basic knowledge of English in order to be able to communicate with other employees on the building site. When Norwegian employees are able to communicate with foreign workers in English, it will make work easier and the quality of the work will improve, as the risk of misunderstandings and mistakes due to language barriers will be reduced. Further, the managers will be better equipped to quality assure the work that has been done when they can communicate with employees in English.

Q5. How important is good knowledge of English for your employees? What type of English is important?

A couple of the interviewees said that advanced English skills were not necessary, but that it was necessary to be able to communicate on a basic level. The rest stressed the fact that it was important to have a good knowledge of technical terms because these were often used and many of the instructions were only given in English. In terms of hiring staff, it was seen as an advantage for an applicant to be good at technical terms and to have a general understanding of English, and factors like reading and writing skills were said to be important. An example could for instance be when an employee had to call for technical support to a helpdesk located in India, or write an e-mail. English skills, both written and oral were therefore important in order for the workforce to function properly in their daily work. In addition, some of the interviewees mentioned that Polish also is an important language, in particular for trades within building and construction as many workers originate from Poland. Polish workers are often not fluent in English and this can sometimes cause problems with communication at the workplace. The fact that English may not be enough for communication at an international work place is, however, an issue beyond the scope of this thesis and will not be discussed further.

Q6. What is important to focus on at school in terms of your future employees and apprentices?

One respondent argued that schools needed to be more up to date with a more modern use of English. Schools were claimed to be very old fashioned and needed to be changed in order to meet the requirements of today. Further, schools needed to focus much more upon what type of skills in English is beneficial for working life in the 21st century. Another respondent believed that schools needed to focus upon general communication, students needed much more practise in both oral and written situations where the language was used. Further, it was important to give the students case-scenarios for the type of profession they had chosen with descriptions of the different types of work, in order to prepare them better, but also to boost their motivation for learning the language. When vocational students begin at upper secondary school it is important the English teachers start with a focus upon what is considered most important in their lines of work. This would perhaps make the learning situation in English easier and more motivating for those who are not very enthusiastic about theory and struggle to see the need for subjects like English. This respondent used himself as an example and said that he was most motivated when he was allowed to work with authentic examples from the industry.

Another interviewee argued that it would be beneficial if the curriculum in English would be changed to better suit students at vocational studies. This respondent claimed that students were taught many things that they did not need, as, for instance, literature analysis. It would be much better to focus on technical terms since this would be essential for their future professional careers. Yet another respondent was of the opinion that it was very important for the media, and official institutions, to have a positive focus and attitude to school and that it was important that the students saw the importance of learning English. This is important since English would not only be necessary in their working lives, but it would also be important in their lives outside of school in terms of, for instance, travelling or using computers and general participation in society as a whole. One respondent claimed that what the students learnt now was quite satisfactory, but that schools should focus a bit more on technical terms. However, it was also stressed that the technical terms were not very difficult, and that the students learned them quickly in the factory when they started their

apprenticeships. Furthermore, these technical terms differed depending on what area of expertise the students started working with in their factory apprenticeships. It would evidently be very difficult for the teachers at school to be very specific and detailed about these different areas.

Q7. How important is knowledge of technical expressions?

One respondent said that technical terms were not very difficult in the field where he worked, and students learnt them quickly in the factory. However, it was seen as an advantage if employees knew some technical terms before they started working, since the company used English frequently, and many manuals were written in English.

One respondent argued that it was very important to know technical expressions, and that it would sometimes be difficult for employees to manage their work when, for instance, attending meetings without proper knowledge of these expressions. Today there is stiff competition for jobs and apprenticeships. An applicant would be a stronger candidate if English skills, in particular technical expressions, were in place. Another respondent also stressed the importance of knowing technical expressions in English and claimed that the receiving of a certificate of completed apprenticeships was essential for getting a job in the future.

The last respondent agreed with the importance of knowledge of technical expressions. The respondent gave examples of workers who replied “yes” when given an instruction, but unfortunately had not understood what to do. It would be more advantageous to, for instance, hire a supervisor with good skills in English, rather than to hire someone with less skills, since this would facilitate many situations at work, and there would be no problems related to language problems.

Q8. How would you judge the English skills of your apprentices? Do they have a satisfactory knowledge of English?

One respondent said that most apprentices have good knowledge of English. However, according to this respondent, some workers seemed insecure when talking English and tried to avoid speaking it as far as possible. Another respondent said that most students

had satisfactory skills in English, but were still unable to use these skills to write well – their logs were clear evidence of this, their language was not good enough to execute this task. They lacked the skills of expressing themselves correctly, had many grammatical errors and little use of idiomatic expressions.

Yet another respondent said that most students had satisfactory knowledge of English but, that there were problems at times when they answered questions and orders without really knowing what they had answered. This could cause many problems; loss of profit would be an obvious drawback. Having to repeat a work process because of language misunderstandings will increase costs. Even worse, the workforce could make mistakes, execute orders wrongly, fail to produce what is expected etc – just because of not understanding the orders they were given.

One respondent indicated that young people today were quite good in English, and much better than some years ago. The students learnt easily and knew much English because they were used to using it, both at school from an early age and from television, internet, media and so on.

4.2 Interviews with English teachers

The first three questions covered basic information such as age, position and education. There were a total of six respondents, four were women and two were men. My respondents' ages ranged from 28 to 65, the majority of them were in their 30s and 40s. Position and education will not be disclosed here due to confidentiality restrictions. With question number 4 the key issues began to be addressed.

Q4. Please, tell me about your views of the FYR-project?

One respondent was very positive towards the FYR-project for both English teachers and teachers at other programs. To cooperate more with teachers from different subjects is important in the FYR- project. According to this respondent, the cooperation between vocational teachers and English teachers has previously been both positive and negative. To cooperate well with different subjects demands an effort from vocational teachers and English teachers. Unfortunately, English teachers

have often felt too much pressure in improving how to work with English with students from vocational courses and the teachers at vocational courses have at times found the cooperation with the subjects difficult to handle. This respondent also indicated that some English teachers were afraid of using the different workshops related to the vocational studies, because they felt insecure about the profession of, for instance, technical production or building and construction and were therefore insecure about offering interesting, suitable lessons in English based on these vocational fields. An advantage is when an English teacher has a personal interest in the topics of the vocational courses, like for instance cars and car parts. To develop relevant and motivating English lessons for the students is easier with background information.

Another respondent said it is important that examinations in the subject English for vocational students are vocationally oriented – that is that the assignments given at the examinations correspond to what the students have worked with during the school year. In addition, if the examinations, both oral and written, are linked to vocational subjects, this will boost motivation for working with English throughout the school year. One respondent indicated that FYR seemed like a good project and that it showed how important it is for students to see the relevance of what they are learning. This, however, put a lot of pressure on the English teacher, and therefore there should be more focus on what students and teachers at the vocational programs could contribute with as well.

Students should be given a more active role in their learning and teachers in different disciplines should help and contribute with vocational tasks relevant to work with in English. It is not only the responsibility of the English teacher to help motivate and develop vocational lessons in English, it is absolutely necessary with assistance from the teachers who have the relevant competence in the different vocational fields to try to meet the objectives of the FYR-project.

The last respondent argued that the FYR-project concept was very good. However, it needs appropriate organization, and to last for a long period of time. Projects like FYR are time consuming and it takes time to build up the relevant competence. It is important that the teachers involved get the possibility to try out different methods

together in order to find out what is best to work with. Another respondent also stated that it was important not to confuse the students by constantly bringing FYR into every subject, as this would only confuse the students and make them demotivated. It would simply become overwhelming. It is therefore important to also consider the amount of vocational projects that is most appropriate for the students.

Q5. Should there be more cooperation between English teachers and the teachers from vocational programs?

One respondent said that cooperation was necessary and beneficial because of the possibility to learn from each other. This is very important for the English teacher, as it is difficult to have hands-on information about all the various programs. As an English teacher one is therefore reliant upon information and assistance from teachers at the various vocational programs. It is therefore important to build up a good relationship between the different teachers from the different departments. One suggestion was that teachers be placed, for a time period of several years, in the same departments in order to get to know both the teachers and the vocational programs. However, English teachers also find it important to change vocational programs from time to time, as some are more difficult to teach and motivate for than others. For instance, building and construction has had many students with very limited English skills and little motivation as to school. Such a group is often then considered harder to teach than for instance study groups at the department of electronics which tend to have both more motivated students but also students with better educational skills.

Another respondent said that there definitely needs to be more cooperation, in particular in light of the FYR-project. It will open up for more flexibility, the use of workshops, in particular in terms of oral practice in English, and English teachers and teachers at the various vocational programs may become more familiar with each other's curriculum. According to one of the respondents, many of these curriculums overlap, something that again will make it easier for the students to see the relevance. This respondent mentioned that there used to be many more projects, and that English teachers were those who were negative towards this type of cooperation at the time. A possible explanation offered was that English teachers felt inadequate when working with English in the different workshops and they felt that they did not know enough

about the vocational subject. According to this respondent, one can see a difference in the use of the workshops among English teachers based on the fact that they feel insecure in the subject itself. The FYR- project can then be beneficial if English teachers who feel insecure about teaching vocational English can find assistance and support from the teachers at the vocational programs.

Many English teachers, according to one of the respondents, have a tendency to work more with subjects they already are familiar with – such as literature, grammar and culture, instead of working with more vocational subjects that they are unfamiliar with, an additional problem is that some vocational programs may be more challenging than others. For instance, it is easier, claimed one respondent, to develop English lessons about car parts or health related issues – such as child care or skin care – that are easier to find information about, and that teacher may have some general understanding of, than to address technical production or computer programming for example. One of the respondents stressed that it is not that English teachers do not want to teach differently, but that more cooperation is needed with the teachers of the vocational programs in some areas. This respondent also mentioned that about 20 years ago more manuals from the vocational programs were used when teaching English. In addition, the textbooks used before the change of the curriculum were more directly attached to each program, and because the textbooks and the curriculum were more closely linked together, it was also more natural to cooperate with teachers at the vocational programs. Learning objectives were also more clearly explained, according to this respondent, compared to the learning objectives in the curriculum of English today. Important was also that students who suffered from severe dyslexia often did much better when they were allowed to have their presentations in the workshops. Further, it was stated that students in vocational studies knew many more technical expressions earlier, maybe because there was more focus on these at the time.

One respondent said that many teachers are interested in more cooperation, but sadly enough, it only results in the exchange of curriculums and not much actual cooperation. Information about the different vocational programs is also needed since it can be difficult for English teachers to know exactly what to focus upon. Here the teachers at the different vocational programs contribute with relevant updates on the

program, and provide pictures and magazines that could be interesting to use. The same respondent also indicated that the impression is that many of the vocational teachers are not very interested in English as a subject and that these vocational teachers often talk about technical expressions. They forget that English is so much more than technical expressions, and that is very important to be able to read and write properly as well in order to be able to use English. This respondent indicated that many of the vocational teachers had little information and understanding of English teaching and its content. The same respondent also said that it is important that teachers from the vocational programs know that English teachers actually work with many vocational subjects throughout the year.

One of the respondents, however, claimed that English teachers coped well with vocational subjects on their own and did not need as much cooperation as the other respondents suggested. One argument against increased cooperation was that it would take too much time. However, cooperation was good at times, but the same respondents said that there was a difference between the different vocational programs as well in relation to how much cooperation was needed.

Q6. Do you believe the curriculum and the teaching should be different for vocational students? What type of changes do you feel most appropriate?

One respondent said that many of the students handled the curriculum quite well in its present form. However, it is not necessarily suited to everyone. This respondent also claimed that many teachers from the vocational studies are quite negative toward the teaching of English, as they believe English teachers only focus on literature and analysis. As teachers we need to adapt to the students we have, and some of the students who struggle the most in English tend to make the most noise, and therefore get the most attention. Luckily, these students are not in majority, but still crave a lot of attention. The rest of the students function quite well, and the curriculum is therefore not as difficult or irrelevant as one should think. The competence aims of the study plan are quite open and therefore give the English teachers much room to work with different types of students with different types of needs.

This respondent also argued that there should be an admission requirement for entering English classes, as some students have never had English and the teacher in question would have a both unfair and impossible task to try to reach the specific learning goals given. In addition it makes the job of differentiating the teaching nearly impossible when the student group in English consists of students who lack all background in English together with students who have quite good competence in English. It is unfair towards both the weaker and the stronger students.

It is currently believed that everyone should learn English, even when lacking the proper background for that type of course. This needs to be changed, as it is not working as intended according to one of the respondents. One of the respondents looked at this as a waste of resources, the students misbehave and are demotivated by being put in a teaching situation they do not have the background to handle.

One respondent claimed that the situation of teaching at vocational programs is often made worse by putting two classes together in English. Then you have a situation where you as a teacher alone can have as much as 30 students at the same time. This makes the situation harder for the teacher, as these students often are more demotivated and need more support. There should be a maximum of fifteen students in class since a teacher then would be able to help each student much better. This is better for students at vocational programs who often need more help and assistance and are perhaps not as motivated to work on their own as for instance students are at general studies.

According to one of the respondents, the textbooks at vocational studies should also be better adapted to the various vocational programs. One respondent indicated the need for more variation in particular for weaker students attending vocational courses. It is also difficult to move classes physically to the different workshops because of group sizes in terms of safety. Therefore the possibility to work more practically is reduced when vocational courses have classes with 30 students. The students at vocational studies have three hours the first year and two hours the second year in English. This could perhaps be made more flexible, as sometimes one needs more time the second year because of the examinations, but over all, it works quite well.

One respondent argued that the curriculum should be changed because it consists of too many elements which are not motivating or needed for students at vocational programs.

Another important factor is that the study plan should correspond better to the vocational studies, and it would be easier to work with English as a subject if the focus would be more on vocational English. Perhaps such a measure could reduce the drop-out rate in upper secondary school, in particular, in vocational studies where the drop-out is the highest. On the other hand this respondent stressed that a focus upon technical terms would not be enough, also oral and written communication in English would be necessary.

Furthermore, there should be a more distinct divide between year one of English (VG1) and year two of English (VG2) and the curriculum should be more precise in terms of what type of texts a teacher should use. This was particularly important in terms of examinations, because of the added difficulty of having had different teachers over a period of the two years.

Another respondent argued that not everything taught at vocational studies is relevant for these students, but may be important in terms of general knowledge. The same respondent asked for a more detailed curriculum in terms of vocational subjects, and that textbooks could be better adapted including more technical aspects, than for instance Shakespeare and Old English. It is important that what is taught is seen in relation to the students' chosen study programs.

Further, it was argued that the examinations prior to the Knowledge Promotion were better, with both written and oral tests in the same day. A majority of vocational students struggles with a five-hour examination and in addition, the tasks given should be more relevant for vocational students. The study plan can be changed into more specific vocational subjects according to one of the respondents and this respondent claimed this to be something that many vocational teachers would like to see.

A couple of the respondents were worried that if the curriculum was to be changed, it would be changed into something less demanding and more superficial, and therefore such a change would create a sharper divide between students at vocational studies and students at general studies. In addition, a couple of the respondents believed it to be important to keep the present system, because of the final competence of graduation, and the better possibility this gives for students at vocational studies who wish to go on to study at programs that demand that competence.

Q7. Do you believe the students at vocational studies can see the use of education in English?

One respondent claimed that through his/her experience many of the students at vocational programs saw the relevance of English after they had finished school and started working. When they started working these students experienced that it would have been wise if they had paid more attention in the English lessons. They experienced both in working situations and other situations, for instance when on vacation, that they would wish that they had known more English. It is not until then that they can see the use and point of working with English.

One respondent argued that around seventy percent of the students would say that they would see the use of learning English both on vacation, and in their working lives as much information about tools, for example, is in English. One respondent said that most of the students see English as relevant both privately and in working life. In working life it has become more relevant due to a more international workforce, in particular, building and construction. Another respondent indicated that students would see the use because of globalisation. Further, it was said that English skills are important to compete internationally with other countries in terms of work and information, but also for more everyday tasks such as to be able to fill out forms and information sheets, and use the Internet.

Q8. Do you believe the teachers in the various vocational programs are able to see the use of education in English?

One respondent claimed that some teachers from vocational programs had at times problems seeing the relevance of their students attending English lessons, and that some of the teachers at vocational programs had little knowledge about what their students learned in English. For instance, that many vocational teachers do not see the point of working with literature, is an attitude that can easily be transferred to their students. It may be that the teachers themselves have bad experiences with English. It is important with good communication between teachers and a common respect for each and everyone's trade. Consequently, English as a subject should also be respected along the same lines as the vocational subjects.

One respondent argued that some of the vocational teachers see the use of English, in particular, those who have been out in factories recently know that students need to know English in working life today. It was argued that the next generation will understand this better because they are used to English. Further, some of the vocational teachers have not worked in their trade for many years and much has changed during the last 20 years. One respondent said that most teachers were able to see the use of English skills, but that they did not necessarily agree with all the competence aims and the different themes of the study plan in English. This was particularly true for the competence aims in literature and culture. However, it was stated that they knew little about the teaching of English and that they may not always promote the necessity of English skills in their classes. This may depend on these teachers perhaps finding English a very difficult school subject themselves. Another respondent indicated that many of the teachers from the vocational programs saw the relevance, but that this varied from program to program.

Q9. How important do you believe English is in terms of participation in society?

One respondent claimed it to be very important, as it may be used on many different levels. Society "is in English". It is the most used language in the Western world in terms of both culture and products and we use it as a common language. One respondent pointed out that it depends on one's position in society. The use of English is perhaps more

common in occupations that demand higher education. One respondent said that English is needed in nearly all parts of modern life, gathering information, using Internet, and travelling. The necessity could perhaps depend on which occupation, however, it would always be necessary to communicate with people in English, further to read various publications, to follow important debates etc, as they often are in English. Business life is no exception, people move with work opportunities and there is, self-evidently, a need for English here. In addition, English is important in terms of cultural input, as in music and film, and for the ability to follow up children in school and society in general, by reading and gathering information which may not necessarily be available in Norwegian.

4.3 Interviews with teachers from various vocational programs

The first three questions covered basic information such as age, position and education. There were a total of six respondents, four men and two women. My respondents' ages ranged from 45 to 64, the majority of them were in their 50s. Position and education will not be disclosed here due to confidentiality restrictions. With question number 4 the key issues began to be addressed.

Q4. What do you know about the teaching in English for your students?

One respondent was of the impression that there was too little vocational practice of English, and that the students did not know enough technical expressions and vocabulary. Whether this depended on lack of competence on behalf of the English teachers, or the curriculum, was uncertain. This respondent wanted to have at least two hours every week with technical guidance where the students should put the technical expressions into the context of what they were working with in their vocational classes.

Another respondent claimed to know much about the teaching of English and believed that a proper use of the curriculum was important, and that the curriculum opened up for many different possibilities. However, this depended on the teacher's ability to orient the English teaching towards the students' interests and their occupations.

One respondent claimed not to know anything about the teaching of English in the vocational classes but believed vocabulary was important. The last respondent believed things to have been better during Reform 94, than during the Knowledge Promotion introduced in 2006. Earlier there was much more cooperation between the English teachers and the teachers from the vocational programs. English teachers were more often out visiting different business, and reports and presentations were conducted in cooperation among the various teachers. The different vocational programs had also, to a larger extent, the same English teachers each year during the period of Reform 94, according to one of the respondents. The same respondent also indicated not knowing much about the curriculum in English and its focus. However, this respondent's impression was that there were not many vocational subjects in the curriculum.

Q5. What do you think about the FYR- project?

The first respondent knew little about it, but had understood the concept, and was positive towards the project. Further, it was stressed that project needed better structure as teachers need to have the time to work together on this project. There should be more focus on FYR at the entire school, and not be something that only concerned only a few teachers.

One respondent was very positive towards the FYR- project and believed it to be very important in order to help the students finish their degrees. FYR is very important in terms of English, Norwegian, and mathematics which are subjects that many of the weaker students have problems completing. This might be explained by lacking motivation, but, in addition, many of the students have very little background in these subjects and struggle to understand them.

Further, it was claimed that many teachers, both vocational teachers and English teachers, had misunderstood the entire meaning of FYR, by connecting it only to vocational practice. It is utterly important to focus upon R in FYR standing for relevance, namely the relevance of the students' participation in society as a whole, understanding of different cultures, political participation, reading and writing skills for activities outside of work, etc.

One respondent thought that the project was interesting and contributed to make the students more motivated because it was directed more towards the students' occupations of choice and therefore the subject of English automatically became more interesting.

The last respondent knew little about the project, but had understood it to be concerned with some form of cooperation between general subjects and vocational subjects and between the teachers from the different subjects.

Q6. How important do you believe English is in terms of occupations your students have chosen?

One respondent claimed that there had been many changes in recent years, and that the need for adequate competence in English is high. In terms of, for instance, technical production, knowledge of technical expressions and vocabulary is very important in order for the students to function properly in the occupation. For instance, all welding procedures are in English and most of the manuals used are in English. Many computer programs are in English and about 90 percent of written material is in English as, for instance, HSE (Health, Security and Environment) and is a very relevant and important topic for all work situations. The working language is becoming more and more influenced by English in the entire industrial sector.

English is also important as news, debates, hearings, and many important documents are in English quite simply – and good English skills will open up an arena in which students may learn to see things from various perspectives. It is important to understand what one reads, evidently, and improved reading skills are necessary for many of the students. Many of the students find it difficult to understand the content of a text because they are poor readers. This will naturally be a hindrance, both at work and school to learn and understand new information.

One respondent believed English to be very important for the students in terms of their working lives but most of all for their personal lives. English opens up new worlds, and society expects people to understand and to be able to communicate in English.

One respondent claimed English to be very important, in particular in relation to future customers and colleagues. The last respondent said it to be essential to know technical expressions and vocabulary to cooperate well at work, and to be able to find information about work related issues which perhaps cannot be found in Norwegian.

Q7. How important do you believe English is in relation to participation in society?

One respondent believed English to be more important in today's society for participation in various areas of life, in particular for communication on the Internet and for travelling.

Another respondent believed it to be essential that the students knew English and were in favour of introducing other languages as well. This respondent believed that the students would lack an important skill, demanded by society, if they did not know English and would be unable to participate fully in society today. It was pointed out that it is important that English skills are not only for students at university, but also for students who have chosen a vocational approach. For example, in building construction it is of great importance that one can communicate with the different participants on the building sites, and a plumber, painter or a carpenter needs to be able to do the work properly. Another respondent argued that it is of utmost importance to have an understanding of what is being communicated in English in society today.

Q8. What do you think is important to focus upon in the teaching of English?

One respondent believed it to be important to focus on technical expressions, in particular on those used in both computer programs like SolidAge and other areas of that specific occupation. Since the students use a lot of time with technical expressions and the computer program SolidAge in their vocational classes, this would be more recognizable in English lessons. Furthermore, it is important to focus upon subjects that the teacher knows the students will find useful in their future occupations. It is also important to have in mind that some of the vocational teachers may struggle with the English vocabulary and it would therefore be useful for both teachers and students that these expressions are focused upon.

One respondent said it was important to try to play on the dreams for the future of the students, and use what they dream of and want to become, as a point of departure for teaching. Further, it was pointed out by one respondent that it is important to try to avoid teaching through traditional, regular activities like reading and doing adherent tasks, and try to make it more engaging for the students by focusing upon topics that motivate the students more. One example could be to have more teaching in the workshops. This approach could make the same class behave very differently, and it is therefore important that the teacher builds up a positive atmosphere as this will have an impact on whether the students graduate or not. In addition the curriculum gives the teacher the possibility to be more creative, and not just strictly follow the textbooks. It is important to stay more focused on the competence aims, and how they may be worked with outside the textbook. One respondent said that it was important that English teaching focused on vocational topics and oral English skills, the students should feel comfortable with having a conversation in English.

Another respondent thought it was important that there should be a greater focus upon names of tools since this would be of importance when working with people speaking a different language. This respondent believed that if students at least knew the name of the tools it would make communication easier at the work place. In addition, it was important to know English in order to assess new information which not necessarily is given in Norwegian. In addition, the importance of knowing more about the various cultures of English speaking countries in order to be able to understand people from different countries better was pointed out. More information about other cultures would, according to this respondent, reduce bullying and racism. Society today is becoming more and more multicultural, and globalisation brings different types of cultures into our society through media and so on, to a greater extent than it used to. In addition, understanding of cultures would help students in their working life as well and it would reduce misunderstandings and could prevent the development of poor working environments. In addition it would help the students see the differences from a different point of view and therefore know how to behave in different situations – this would go for view of time, behaviour towards managers and so on.

Q9. In your opinion, is there something that should be different in the way the teaching of English is today?

One respondent argued that there should be clearer demands as to what the students should learn of technical expressions and vocabulary in relation to their occupations. This respondent mentioned an example from where he had worked before, where they had taken the curriculum apart, in order to orient it towards the occupations of the students' choice. This respondent believed this to be very successful and was of great help to both students and teachers. The students often struggle to see the connection with English and their study program.

The Knowledge Promotion and the current curriculum of English give the English teacher various possibilities to be creative in their teaching and it is therefore important that English teachers try to take advantage of this possibility. Another respondent had not been able to study the English curriculum in detail enough to give a proper answer.

One respondent indicated that there should be as much practical English in relation to the choice of occupation as possible. This would also increase, according to this respondent, the general knowledge of English oral and written skills, since the students see the use of English in various situations.

Another respondent indicated that English teachers are not very creative and need to focus upon how to use the curriculum of English with each particular vocational group. There is now too much focus upon what is presented in the English textbooks, for instance *Skills, Workshops, Targets* etc, instead of making English lessons based on the competence aims of the curriculum. These English textbooks also follow the competence aims, but it is important to have in mind that texts and tasks presented here are only examples and you as a teacher can change and do it differently as long as the competence aims are fulfilled. The students will be tested in the competence aims and not the textbooks.

Q10. Should there be more cooperation between English teachers and teachers from vocational programs?

According to one of the respondents there should definitely be more cooperation because that would help the students see more of a connection between English and the vocational subjects. It would also be easier to work on the same projects together and it would, according to this respondent, ease the workload of all of the teachers.

Further, it was suggested that the English teacher should be given tours around the workshops, in order to get to know what the students are working with. In addition, it was important that there was some form of continuity for the teachers, i.e., that the same teachers had the same classes and worked with the same teachers for some years. This would make it easier to establish a more solid team and the results would be better. However, this would demand some effort from all sides and it is unfortunately not everyone who is positive towards this kind of cooperation among the teachers.

One respondent believed it to be essential to establish a good cooperation between the different teachers and that it was important that the management of the school put this on the agenda and made room and gave time enough to establish this cooperation. Furthermore, it was important to work together in an organized manner with the competence aims of the different subjects in order to see where one could find the instances where cooperation would work the best, or, for instance, work on the same subject at the same time of the school year.

One respondent believed this to be very important, but it was a challenge to get enough time to actually cooperate with the various teachers on the different vocational programs. Another respondent thought it was important with closer cooperation among the various teachers, both English teachers and vocational teachers, throughout the year with the same common focus areas of vocational topics. This respondent was positive to having joint lessons both in the classroom and in the workshops. It is of importance to find out how the students would like to work, and what will function throughout the school year. In addition the same respondent argued that it is important to give the students different tools to work with in order to improve, for instance, reading strategies, computer skills and so on. It is also important to explain to them

that there is a difference between school and working life, mistakes made because of workers' lack of the necessary skills will be expensive for an employer, and would even be just cause for termination.

5. Discussion

To sum up the results from the interviews I will present the most important findings. To begin with the group of managers, it is clear that they find the English level of their apprentices acceptable. Some of them were also quite impressed by the standard of the apprentices' English skills, and were pleased with the apprentices. This may sound strange to English teachers who often struggle with students who have little knowledge of English. However, in this context it is important to remember that businesses have the opportunity to choose their apprentices, and in most cases the students who receive apprenticeships are also the best students with the best results. That may explain why some of the managers consider the English skills to be adequate. Another interesting aspect when analysing the results of the interviews with this group, was that there was less focus on technical English compared to the teachers. The managers judged it more important to be able to communicate well in English, both orally and in writing, because of different situations where employees needed to communicate in English, using it as a lingua franca. The technical expressions of English would come second, and was also something that several interviewees claimed could be learned in the work place. One reason for this claim was that the managers considered many of the trade areas to be so detailed and specific, that it would be nearly impossible to know what type of vocabulary and expressions for the school to focus upon. This is interesting, as the Norwegian school system and politicians often argue that it is very important to focus on technical English, in particular at vocational studies at upper secondary school.

In terms of the FYR-project there were large differences as to what the individual teacher knew about the project. Most teachers from the vocational programs knew very little about the organization of the project, but became very enthusiastic when it was explained to them during the interviews. Both English teachers and teachers from vocational programs had a tendency to assume that the FYR-project was oriented towards vocational subjects only. In fact, only few of the teachers actually knew that it was also related to other areas of expertise in order to enable participation in society as a whole. However, most English teachers had a tendency to focus on English teaching that takes up other aspects than working life, and that were not related to the FYR- project. There was also a tendency that the teachers from the various vocational programs knew very little about the English teaching in their classes, and many of them believed it to lack vocational orientation, without actually knowing anything

about the content. Nearly all teachers at vocational programs stressed that it was important to focus on vocational subjects when teaching English in order to motivate the students more for learning English, and helping them see why they should learn English in the first place. Some English teachers also used vocational subjects as a reason for motivation when explaining how to work with English in vocational classes.

In terms of changing the curriculum there was a clear divide between the English teachers. Half of the respondents felt the need to change the curriculum, and that there was no reason to have the same curriculum for vocational students as for students at general studies. However, the other half of the respondents believed it to be important in terms of not creating a too large divide between students from general studies and vocational students, and therefore argued for keeping a common curriculum.

One thing that all the respondents from the three groups agreed on, was that English is important for all students in order to participate in society today. Further, many respondents stressed the ability to search for, and read and interpret information and news in the media, and also the ability to understand various cultural inputs which are also important, not necessarily in the work place, but as an active participant in a democratic society. A couple of responding teachers and one respondent from business, argued that schools need up-dating their English teaching with new technology etc.

As English is considered to be vital for all types of students, one question that must be answered is how to create motivation for learning English among students who are not particularly interested in theoretical studies.

There is an increasing concern about the drop-out rate from upper secondary school. There is an ongoing debate as to why, and what to do about the problem, among politicians, teachers and parents around the country. However, the problem is complex, and so are the answers.

5.1 Motivation and school

According to Einar M Skaalvik and Sidsel Skaalvik, learning happens on various arenas in life and one does not solely learn at school. The learning that goes on in everyday activities

often happens spontaneously with a starting point in the child's experiences. The form of learning which goes from experience to knowledge is known as "inductive learning" with the opposite being "deductive learning", an approach often used at school. The deductive form starts with the explanations and the rules. At school it can at times be difficult to start with the students' experiences depending on what they are to learn. When it comes to factual knowledge, as, for instance, knowledge about countries or abstract themes they know little or nothing about, the teaching will by necessity have to be from a deductive perspective (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2005: 19). This is an important distinction to have in mind, especially when talking about why some students struggle at school.

Because the teaching at school needs to follow a pre-determined curriculum for what the students shall learn, and therefore cannot at all times focus upon the interest and experiences of each individual student, the school will be in a situation where motivation may be low.

The teaching of specific knowledge and skills are often considered as the school's most important task. This includes fundamental skills as reading, writing and arithmetic. These skills are considered important because they are needed in all of life's situations, at school, in everyday life and in working life. Knowledge transmitted through the school system repeats a selection of knowledge about society, our history, literature and art, and the nature which surrounds us. For some students these are areas they are familiar with, and knowledge that their parents are preoccupied with. They have books about these themes at home. For other students this is knowledge that is not that easily recognizable, it is not something that is talked about at home and is not believed to be particularly important or interesting in their home environment (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2005: 22).

Schools have traditionally focused on factual knowledge and little has been made of purposeful connections. Knowledge of detail is generally hard to remember, and in addition it can be difficult to know where and when to use that type of knowledge.

However, according to Skaalvik and Skaalvik, schools need to be better at providing students with the various available tools that may be used in order to solve tasks more easily, for instance computer skills for students with reading and writing disabilities, and techniques to boost memorizing skills (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2005:23).

When talking about motivation for school it is also important to mention the students' individual self-esteem and in particular, these students' low academic self-esteem. Students with low academic self-esteem experience more anxiety and stress in learning situations and situations of achievement, than students who have a higher academic self-esteem (Bandura 1986, Covington 1992). Since students generally have a strong need for a positive self-esteem (Kaplan 1980, Snugg and Combs 1949, Yamamoto 1972), there is often a need to defend it. This defence may take many forms – one may be to adopt a fake handicap in the learning situation (Tice 1993). The result of low-self-esteem may be that students become less motivated for schoolwork, make less efforts to succeed, and have less endurance when facing problems. The students' self-esteem affects both their general behaviour and their performance at school. Let us look at this in some more detail.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik demonstrated the significance of academic self-esteem in a survey from upper secondary school. They found that self-esteem in the subjects Norwegian and mathematics in the first semester at upper secondary school predicted the grades to a higher degree than the grades they had achieved at lower secondary school. Skaalvik and Skaalvik therefore conclude that students' self-esteem in Norwegian and mathematics when they started upper secondary school was a result from previous experiences and also the grades they had achieved at lower secondary school. Further, while the students attended upper secondary school, their efforts and strategies in relation to Norwegian and mathematics were to a certain degree a result of their own self-esteem and their own expectations of their own abilities and possibilities in the two subjects (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2005: 74). It would not be a long stretch to assume that Skaalvik and Skaalvik's findings are transferrable to English. They are therefore important also for motivation and self-esteem in an English context, and in particular they are relevant for students at vocational studies because of the high drop-out rate.

In the pedagogic debate it has been claimed that the motivation for school decreases the higher one reaches in the educational system. Instead of promoting curiosity and a willingness to learn, it may seem as if school destroys it. It is reasonable to see this in relation to the teaching approaches and general climate at school. Demands increase the higher one reaches in the educational system, and for many students teaching becomes too bookish and too tedious. Lack of motivation for learning is considered to be one of the most difficult challenges in school by teachers at lower secondary school. Therefore, there is an ongoing

effort to make teaching more relevant and activities more interesting for all students (Ogden 2005: 156-157).

It is important to keep in mind that school achievements are valued differently in different social contexts. In social contexts where good school results are highly valued, a student who does well will meet with positive attitudes, and also boost self-esteem. In a social context where school results are of less importance they will have little impact on attitudes and on self-esteem (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2005:79). There is a clear parallel here to attitudes to theoretical skills vs practical skills at vocational studies. If theoretical skills are less valued than practical skills, this will affect the amount of work that students are willing to put into theoretical subjects such as English. These students further are quite instrumental in their attitudes to learning – they need to see the immediate use they may have for learning English, something that is difficult if the teaching context does not provide such an incentive. Bandura (1981) defines self-efficacy as a person's judgment of whether or not he or she is capable of planning and execute actions in order to be able to master certain tasks (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2005:87).

Some of the interviewed teachers claimed that many students in vocational studies are under-achievers, or they think that they do not need to learn certain subjects, or are unable to do certain tasks and therefore decide not to put any effort into trying, as this would be a waste of time. Bandura states that expectations of mastering are significant for behaviour, set of mind and for motivation. We all have a tendency to avoid situations and activities which demand a competence we believe we cannot master. In face of challenges, students who doubt their own competences will reduce their efforts and give up. We also have a tendency to evaluate much higher and appreciate more the activities we succeed in doing (Bong 2001, Zimmermann and Kitsantas 1999). This is seemingly a perfect description of how vocational students perform when presented with tasks that are more practical (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2005:146-147).

To master what you learn is important when it comes to teaching. This sense of mastering something is often closely connected to the choice of tasks. A positive process can only occur when the student works with tasks that he or she has the potential to master, and when the teaching methods are suited to the student. Bandura claims that the expectation to master something increases when students master things they have not learned before, and these expectations increase the most after they have put efforts into achieving a good result. This is

important and puts a lot of pressure on schools to adapt the teaching to the students' capabilities (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2005: 94-95). This is interesting in light of my interview results, many of my respondents believed that teaching needed up-dating to meet expectations in society in general. Many also claimed that vocational students needed to be taught differently.

In Norway there is, according to Skaalvik and Skaalvik, a cultural pressure to achieve well in school, and theoretical subjects are given priority. An obvious danger here is that students who fail in theoretical subjects may develop low self-esteem in spite of doing quite well in practical subjects. For students with reading and writing disabilities, putting a high value on theoretical subjects may lead to negative consequences (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2005:112). There is a clear connection between academic self-esteem and different goals of motivation and motivational behaviour. Students' academic self-esteem, or lack thereof, is closely linked to their interest for schoolwork. Their work effort and endurance, anxiety and stress at school, the choice of tasks, activities and subjects when they are given the opportunity to choose, the use of learning strategies and the tendency to seek help or avoid it when they need it (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2005: 122-123).

5.2 Change the curriculum of English for vocational students?

Gudmund Hernes's Fafo report (2010) on reduction of the drop-out rate in upper secondary school has interesting findings. The OECD, for instance, concludes that the large numbers of underachievers are the result of a school that does not challenge the individual's intellectual capacity enough. Therefore, it is claimed, that drop-out has little to do with too high demands, but is rather a result of poor teaching methods and management systems (Hernes, 2010:12). Further, one of the main problems for upper secondary school is that some students arrive with few of the basic skills, something that makes a theoretical subject like English very hard to finish. These students have a handicap that can be difficult both to pin-point exactly, and also to remedy (ibid:41). Hernes appreciates the importance of the teacher and the importance of working together with other colleagues in a team in order to attain the best form of teaching (ibid: 48). This is an interesting aspect, as many of the teachers interviewed focused upon better arenas for more cooperation between English teachers and vocational teachers. Cooperation between teachers is also very important in relation to the FYR-project.

Hernes asks two very important questions closely related to the possible need for a change of the curriculum in, for instance, English for vocational students at upper secondary school. The two questions asked are; 1) Is there a need for much theoretical theory in vocational education and 2) is the drop-out problem something that is best resolved by lowering the demands, or would it be better to change the content of the teaching and practical approaches to teaching? In addition, can the students be better prepared before they enter upper secondary school? (ibid:47). Many of my interviewees stated that it would be wise to look at how teaching is organized at school, and that there can be different methods and approaches for receiving better results.

In the same Fafo-report, Eva Sund and Arild Raaheim (2009) discuss why the notion that some students are interested in or have the ability to learn theoretically is accepted. Students with low expectations of their own achievements and not used to mastering tasks at school will more easily drop out when faced with new learning situations based on previous experiences. However, that does not necessarily mean that they are unable to learn. In the discussion between theory and practice, Sund and Raaheim think that we need to look at attitudes and ethical principles on all levels in the educational system. Further, they point out that the discussions need to involve school leaders, politicians, departments, teachers and parents. At present there is a tendency to believe that if we only give the students enough practically oriented teaching all problems will be solved. However, Sund and Raaheim claim that it is not only about these students' lack of "digesting" theoretical knowledge, but about what knowledge and attitudes they have been exposed to previously. In all parts of working life, theory must be founded on practical experiences and practical experiences will always need to be based on theoretical knowledge – what works and what does not. Instead of focusing upon the divide between the different students, one should try to look for more methods which open up for a vision that integrates theory and practice (ibid:52).

Hernes refers to Caspar Hille, responsible for education and training in car manufacturing. Hille warns against reducing the amount of theory in vocational classes, as it is necessary that students need theory when they start their practical learning in the business. He claims that many apprentices are shocked by how much theoretical knowledge that is actually demanded. Hille claims that times have changed, and practical skills are no longer enough. He further argues that a stronger theoretical basis would help the apprentices (as intended by the Knowledge Promotion) as this would free them to spend time on practical tasks (ibid:53).

Even though this is not immediately related to the English subject, there are obvious connections.

Students who have struggled through lower secondary school will likely struggle more when they start upper secondary school, particularly in theoretical subjects like English. These students may wish for more practical subjects, but this will come to nothing as they have to catch up on theory they should have already learned, and simultaneously have to pay attention in new subjects. This will most likely have an effect on the motivation for these students and they will find themselves in a position where they do not succeed or feel that they master the various tasks they are given (ibid:61). Some of the English teachers interviewed stressed the fact that some students did not have enough background to succeed, and that these students often struggled and became demotivated for English. Further, these teachers also stressed the fact that it became difficult to teach in an environment where the competence levels were so different. Some of these teachers claimed that it was not a question about whether or not the competence aims in English were too advanced, it was rather a fact that some of the students did not possess the required competence to ever attain those aim, for a number of reasons.

According to Karlsenutvalget, the Norwegian educational system has a strong advantage through its focus upon basic skills in the common core subjects, as for example, English. In addition, by the strong focus on common content and basic skills in the common core subjects, skilled workers receive a greater possibility to change careers or only to attend further education (ibid:61). According to many of the business managers interviewed it was important that their skilled workers had the possibility to communicate in English, both in oral and written communication, because headquarter language was English and often the corporate common language used was English. To be able to communicate was claimed by a manager as more important than knowing technical expressions since the apprentices would learn the technical expressions needed on the shop-floor.

5.3 The purpose of the curriculum in English

The need to change the curriculum in English for vocational students has been discussed many times and is often the explanation used for the high drop-out rate in upper secondary school, and it is also said that the curriculum for vocational students is too ambitious and that vocational students do not need to have the same curriculum as general studies.

In my interview material, the teachers differed in their views on a change in the curriculum for vocational students. Some teachers felt that there was no need to change it and that it worked well, whereas other teachers strongly felt the need to change the curriculum for vocational students. Many of the teachers interviewed from vocational programs had little knowledge about the content of the English curriculum, and therefore assumed that it was for instance mostly literary analysis and little vocational English. Whereas many of the English teachers claimed that they worked with vocational topics and tried to adapt the teaching situation to vocational students as often as possible, and that the students also liked to learn about other topics than vocational topics. Nevertheless, some of the English teachers also claimed that it is important for vocational students to also have the possibility to continue studying and that it is not necessarily true that every student starting a vocational education would not be interested in further studies.

In this context a new school program is of interest – TAF (technical general studies). In this program the students attend school for four years and they start their apprenticeship the first year with three days at school and two days in a business every week during the first two years, and the last two years there are two days in school and three days in the business. The students will at the end of the period receive a certificate of craftsmanship, and in addition they are eligible for applying to higher education. The students attending are often highly skilled, and TAF has turned out to be a popular alternative for many students who both like to study and to work. It is important to remember that there is no law of nature that stipulates that students who are practically oriented must struggle with theoretical subjects.

Some of the English teachers and also some teachers from vocational programs argue that school needs to think differently in terms of teaching and, that teaching needs to be better adapted to cater to different student groups.

6. Conclusion

The school-system in Norway builds on a concept of the including school which welcomes a diversity of students. The including school is a school where all students, no matter what background and expectations, can feel that they belong and can develop both academically and socially. It goes without saying that this is a concept that is bound to meet challenges in its implementation. How are students, with widely differing interests and skills, to find relevance in the subjects they need to complete in order to be able to graduate? Further, what constitutes “relevance” when it comes to English?

In my thesis I have mapped the status quo by interviewing a number of teachers, both English teachers and vocational teachers. Further, I have taken a step out into the arena for which school is to prepare the students and interviewed representatives of trade and industry. All interviews were performed in one and the same Norwegian county.

My results show that the business managers had a much greater focus upon oral and written communication than they had on technical expressions as opposed to what the vocational teachers focused upon for English teaching. It is interesting to see that what the vocational teachers believe to be most beneficial at school does not coincide with what working life requires or finds more important. The managers were also satisfied with their apprentices’ level of English. However, it is important to have in mind that the students who are offered apprenticeships often also are the best students.

Further, many of the vocational teachers know very little about the English teaching of their students and of the content of this teaching. It is clear from the results that both English teachers and vocational teachers would like to see more cooperation between the different educational programs. In addition, the teachers also claimed that school must facilitate this through organizing more appropriately. For instance, the fact that student groups include both students with a good knowledge of English and students who completely lack any knowledge of English makes teaching challenging, to say the least. Most of the interviewees were positive toward the FYR-project but many knew little about it or believed that FYR only focused upon vocational topics. Further, the need for a more appropriate organization to work with the FYR-project was claimed to be very important. However, most of the interviewees

believed that the FYR- project would help the students to become more motivated and see the relevance of learning English.

In my discussion I have underlined the importance of motivating the students, and in particular I have focused on the role of self-esteem in the learning process. Motivation is important when working with a subject and be able to understand why you are learning a subject like English will increase the motivation for working with the subject. Unfortunately, many students struggle with their motivation for a theoretical subject like English. There can be different reasons for why students do not feel motivated or do not have the interest. However, one important factor can be that these students fail to see the relevance of learning a particular subject and that it is taught in a way they feel uncomfortable with. Self-esteem is also important and will affect the extent to which students believe they can master a task or not. If they do not believe they can master it or do not feel they are good enough, this will again affect their feelings, attitudes and how much effort they are willing to put into the subject. There are numerous different approaches to how to work with English. However, in order to raise motivation, teaching may need to be organized differently. If the curriculum of English needs to be changed for vocational students is difficult to answer conclusively. Maybe it does not need to be changed, but only to be executed differently.

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APPENDIX 1

Spørsmål til programfaglærere

Hvor gammel er du?

Hvor lenge har du arbeidet i skolen?

Hvilken utdannelse har du?

Hva vet du om undervisningen i engelsk til dine elever?

Hva mener du om FYR-Prosjektet?

Hvor viktig mener du engelsk er i forhold til yrket som elevene har valgt?

Hvor viktig mener du engelsk er i forhold til deltakelse i samfunnet?

Hva mener du er viktig å fokusere på i engelskundervisningen?

Er det noe som burde vært annerledes, etter din mening, slik engelskundervisningen er i dag?

Burde det være mer samarbeid mellom programfaglærere og engelsklærere?

APPENDIX 2

Spørsmål til næringslivsarbeidere/ledere

Hvor gammel er du?

Hva slags stilling har du?

I hvilken bransje er du i ?

Hvor viktig er engelsk for arbeidet ansatte skal utføre?

Hvor viktig er det med god kompetanse i engelsk for dine ansatte? Hva slags type kompetanse i engelsk er viktig?

Hva er det viktig at skolen fokuserer på i forhold til dine fremtidige ansatte og lærlinger?

Hvor viktig er det å kunne tekniske uttrykk?

Hvor gode er elever i engelsk som begynner i lære? Har de tilstrekkelig kunnskap i engelsk?

APPENDIX 3

Spørsmål til engelsklærere

Hvor gammel er du?

Hvor lenge har du undervist i skolen?

Hva slags utdanning har du?

Hva mener du om FYR-Prosjektet?

Burde det være mer samarbeid mellom programfaglærere og engelsklærere?

Mener du læreplanen og undervisningen burde vært annerledes for yrkesfaglige elever? I tilfelle hva slags forandringer mener du er hensiktsmessig?

Tror du elevene på yrkesfag ser nytten av engelskundervisningen?

Tror du lærerne på yrkesfag ser nytten av engelskundervisningen?

Hvor viktig mener du engelsk er i forhold til deltakelse i samfunnet?

APPENDIX 4

Informasjon til informanter

- 1) EGEN BAKGRUNN: Marita Myhre, underviser i engelsk og samfunnsfag ved Borg videregående skole og holder på med en masteroppgave i engelsk ved Høgskolen i Østfold.
- 2) TEMA: for oppgaven min er engelskfaget på yrkesfaglinjer. Jeg ønsker å se på behovet i samfunnet for engelskkompetanse hos noen av de relevante yrkesgruppene, og se på hvordan engelskundervisningen i skolen er i forhold til hva som er forventet av kompetanse ute i næringslivet. I tillegg vil jeg undersøke innstillingen til engelskundervisning bland engelsklærere respektive programfaglærere mht yrkesfaglige elevers behov.
- 3) FYR: Regjeringen har initiert et program som heter FYR. FYR står for Fellesfag, Yrkesfag og Relevans. En av grunnene til at det er blitt startet er fordi man ønsker å gjøre noe med frafallet i videregående skole, og da med spesiell vekt på at mange elever stryker i fellesfag (som f eks engelsk). Man snakker her om yrkesrettet engelsk. På min arbeidsplass er jeg FYR-koordinator, og jobber bland annet med å fremme samarbeid mellom programfaglærere og fellesfaglærere. I den anledning har jeg blitt spesielt oppmerksom på dette området.
- 4) ANONYMITET: Du som intervjuobjekt vil være anonym i oppgaven som blir skrevet.
- 5) SPØRSMÅL: Er det noe du vil spørre om før vi begynner? Intervjuet vil ta cirka 45 minutter.