



University of
Stavanger

FACULTY OF ARTS AND EDUCATION

MASTER'S THESIS

Programme of study:

Master in Literacy Studies

Spring semester, 2016

Open

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Thesis title: Changes and developments in teaching and learning oral English in Norwegian lower secondary schools since the 1974 curriculum

Keywords:

Oral English

Lower secondary school

Changes and developments

Qualitative study

No. of pages: 104

+ appendices/other: 16

Stavanger, 09.05.16

date/year

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the teaching of oral English in Norwegian lower secondary schools since the *M74* curriculum to the present. The main research question of this thesis was: ‘How has the teaching of oral English in the Norwegian lower secondary school changed and developed since the 1974 curriculum?’ The thesis also addressed the following two additional research questions: ‘How did the teachers teach oral English in each curriculum period?’ and ‘How did the learners experience the teaching of oral English in each curriculum period?’

The study was conducted mainly through semi-structured interviews. Four teachers and four former pupils were interviewed, one teacher and one former pupil representing each of the curriculum periods. To gain an even broader understanding of how teachers had taught and how pupils had experienced oral English teaching in the lower secondary school since 1974, oral activities in textbook materials from each curriculum period were also analysed.

The review of the *M74*, *M87*, *L97* and *LK06* curricula showed that the focus on oral skills and oral communication had increased since *M74*. The analysis of the textbooks showed the same trend. The interviews conducted with the teachers indicated that the number of different oral activities used by the teachers in the EFL classroom had increased over the years. However, the picture portrayed of oral classroom English by the teacher and former pupil in a given period did not always concur. One oral activity that was heavily discussed and criticised was reading aloud in class. Despite the criticism of the activity, it still seems to be part of English lessons in lower secondary schools.

How teachers’ set pupils’ oral English grades in the four curriculum periods also indicate a large change. It seems that the basis for assessing pupils’ oral skills has changed from being very thin to focusing on several oral presentations. However, that most teachers might set pupils’ oral grades on the basis of a presentation is somewhat worrying as this is not the best method of assessing pupils’ communicative skills, which have gradually been emphasised more in the English subject curricula. The findings also indicate that the teachers’ use of English in the classroom had increased during the curriculum periods.

Although this research has shown many indicators of pupils today (through the sample interviewees and analysis of textbook materials) being better oral English speakers than in the previous curriculum periods, their attitudes toward the English subject do not seem to have changed. The sample revealed that it still seems to be as challenging to get pupils to be orally active in the EFL classroom as it was during the *M74* curriculum period. The English subject is in danger of losing its status and there needs to be a focus on enhancing the subject’s reputation and importance. The subject

also seems to be undermined by social studies becoming a large part of it, in addition to pupils learning a good deal of their oral English outside of school through English-mediated activities.

As most Norwegians are in need of a high level of oral English proficiency, it is of the utmost importance for young Norwegian learners to acquire good English oral skills. It is therefore important to contribute to this field of research. This thesis has contributed to the limited research available on the field of oral English and in a (historical) way which, as far as the researcher is aware, has not been conducted before.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my supervisor Ion Drew for guidance and encouragement throughout the writing process. His feedback has been invaluable and very much appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge the four teachers and the four former pupils that participated in the interviews, for sharing their personal stories and for giving me valuable insight into the teaching of oral English and how this teaching is experienced by pupils.

A special thank you goes out to my fellow students in the *lunch club* for always holding a seat for me in the library, keeping me company during late night writing sessions and for making the entire writing process more enjoyable.

Also, I would like to extend my gratitude to my family and good friends for listening to my continuous MA talk and for providing encouragement, praise and support during the writing process.

Finally, thank you, Ole Petter Stokka, for being positive, making me laugh and for putting up with me over the last ten months.

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1. Introduction

This thesis is a qualitative study of how the teaching of oral English skills in the Norwegian lower secondary school has changed and developed since the 1974 curriculum. Through conducting interviews with teachers and pupils from each of the four curriculum periods since 1974 (*M74*, *M87*, *L97* and *LK06*), and analysing textbook materials from each curriculum period, this thesis sets out to map changes and developments in the teaching of oral English during this period.

1.1 Background

Norway's current national curriculum, *LK06*, states that five basic skills are required in order for pupils to learn and develop. The basic skills are defined as being able to read, express oneself orally and written, develop numeracy, and being able to use digital tools. These five basic skills are included in every subject's competence aims, including English. This means that oral skills are one of the five most important skills for Norwegian pupils to acquire (*LK06*, English subject curriculum).

For young Norwegians, being able to communicate in English is of great importance. As Norway is a country in cooperation with many other countries in various circumstances, it is important that the Norwegian school teaches pupils appropriate communication skills in English. Norway is also a multicultural society where many people with whom one might need to converse do not speak the native language. In addition, teenagers often travel abroad with their parents and being able to speak English will in many cases be valuable when one is in a foreign country. As oral communicative skills are so essential in a teenager's social life and education, it is also important to gain school-based research in this area. This thesis therefore aims to make a contribution to the research on lower secondary learners' oral skills.

The research is primarily based on interviews with four lower secondary school EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers (one from each curriculum period from and including 1974) and four former lower secondary school pupils (one from each curriculum period from and including 1974). After the curriculum of 1974, *M74*, three other curricula followed with the purpose of changing, improving and modernizing the way pupils were taught English: *M87*, *L97* and *LK06*, which was revised in 2013. As an interview is a qualitative research

method and the sample is a relatively small one, one will not be able to generalise about the findings. One will instead be able to gain impressions of the teaching and learning of oral language since the 1974 curriculum period. In addition, written textbook materials will be analysed in relation to the oral tasks that they provide. Since the study, in addition to the interviews with the teachers and the pupils, also focuses on teaching material and the curricula, it will approach the issue through different perspectives on how the teaching of oral English skills in the lower Norwegian secondary school has changed and developed since the 1974 curriculum.

1.2 Aims and scope for the research

The main research question of this thesis is: ‘How has the teaching of oral English in the Norwegian lower secondary school changed and developed since the 1974 curriculum?’ The thesis also addresses the following two additional research questions:

‘How did the teachers teach oral English in each curriculum period?’

‘How did the learners experience the teaching of oral English in each curriculum period?’

With both an EFL teacher and a former pupil representing the different curriculum periods, the thesis aims to answer these three research questions. The study aims to explore how the focus of the curricula and textbook materials on oral and communication skills has changed over the years, as well as if the teachers’ methods of teaching oral skills and the pupils’ development of oral skills have changed.

The author’s expectations are that English oral skills have gradually become more important since the 1974 curriculum because Norway has become much more of a multicultural society since then. In addition, Norway’s involvement in international cooperation and business is continually increasing. Another assumption is that children have gradually become increasingly more exposed to oral English through media, such as music, video games, television and social networks over the years, and that this has resulted in them performing better than before when it comes to basic oral skills, especially pronunciation and vocabulary. This also suggests that Norwegian pupils may be more positive to learning oral skills now than they were before and that speaking in class is much easier for pupils today than it was before.

1.3 Relevance

Because it is of utmost importance for young Norwegian learners to acquire good English oral skills, it is important to contribute to this field of research. In 2009, the Ministry of Education in Norway published a document called “*Språk åpner dører*” (Language opens doors). The document describes a strategy of how to strengthen the basic learning of foreign languages. The main goal of this strategy was to increase school-based research on foreign language learning in order to improve pupils’ foreign language skills. This document shows that research on language teaching in Norwegian schools in general, including research in the field of English oral skills, is needed.

Furthermore, as far as the author is aware, the topic of how the teaching of oral English in Norwegian lower secondary schools has developed since the 1974 curriculum is one that has not been researched before. It will complement, for example, Maier’s (2005) study on changing practices in the teaching of writing in Norwegian lower secondary schools since 1974.

1.4 Outline of thesis

The thesis consists of seven chapters. Following this chapter, Chapter 2, ‘The Norwegian national curricula from 1974 to 2006 (2013)’, provides a short presentation of the contents of the four national curricula that have guided how Norwegian teachers have taught the English subject since 1974.

Chapter 3, ‘Literature review’, attempts to define what oral skills are and what oral speech consists of. In addition, it presents the history of language teaching in Norway and in Europe, the different teaching methods that have been utilised since the early 1960’s, relevant related research, and it presents different ways of teaching oral skills.

Chapter 4, ‘Methods’, presents the methodological approaches employed in this research. The chapter includes theory on the different methods of research applied, as well as on different ways of constructing an interview, the principal research method in the thesis. Additionally, it explains the process of piloting, selecting samples, making the interview guides used for this qualitative study, and ethics and validity. It also explains how the textbook materials were analysed.

Chapter 5, 'Results', presents all data collected from the eight interviews and the analysis of four different sets of textbooks and their corresponding materials.

Chapter 6 discusses the results and Chapter 7 provides a conclusion to the entire thesis.

2. The Norwegian national curricula from 1974 to 2006 (2013)

In order to research how the teaching of oral English in Norwegian lower secondary school has developed since 1974, it is important to examine the document that has intended to guide how EFL teachers teach: The Norwegian national curriculum for each period. The present chapter presents the content of the curricula from 1974, using each curriculum as the source: *M74*, *M87*, *L97*, and *LK06* and its 2013 revised version.

2.1 The *M74* curriculum

The *M74* curriculum was applied in Norwegian lower secondary schools from 1974 to 1986. The English subject section of the *M74* curriculum focused on explaining what teaching methods the teachers were to use and how their teaching should influence their pupils' knowledge, attitudes and comprehension of the English language as a means of communication. The curriculum also contained detailed descriptions of how to teach different methods, as well as vocabulary and grammar lists for all grades.

The main aims of the English subject in the 1974 curriculum were that the pupils should be given an education that gave them practical language knowledge in order to give them increased abilities of communication, both oral and written. The subject was also to provide the basis for further language training. The English subject aimed to enhance pupils' attitudes towards the English language and encourage them to have an interest in developing and increasing their skills and to use the English language as much as possible. In addition, the curriculum stated that the pupils' level of knowledge was to be developed through practising and understanding English speech, being able to express themselves in the target language, reading English texts, and formulating themselves in writing by using level-appropriate vocabulary, expressions and grammar. Finally, it was important to have some knowledge about the history of Great Britain and the USA, as well as the role the English language played in the world as a means of communication (*M74* English subject curriculum).

The 1974 curriculum expected lower secondary teachers to achieve these targets through using listening and speaking exercises based on real-life events, recordings, pictures and reading aloud. They were expected to increase the pupils' vocabulary and their

knowledge of the grammatical patterns of the language by basing the teaching on what the pupils had already learnt.

Listening and speaking exercises, pronunciation, grammar, dealing with writing and reading texts and written exercises, were the teaching methods the curriculum encouraged. The curriculum also contained a section which described how pupils should be assessed and what kinds of teaching materials and aids the teachers were to use for teaching.

When it came to oral English, pupils were expected to practise having conversations with each other, to have free speech exercises, as well as role play and other forms of dialogues. The curriculum stated that the pupils were to speak English Standard Pronunciation, although they should also be exposed to American English. Moreover, a pupil who had been taught an American pronunciation should not be forced to change it to British pronunciation. *M74* encouraged the teacher to use imitation and choral practice as methods for teaching correct pronunciation and intonation. Choral practice was an important part of the *Audio-lingual method* of teaching, which is explained in Chapter 3 (*M74*, English subject curriculum).

2.2 The *M87* curriculum

The *M87* curriculum followed the *M74* curriculum and was in use from 1987 to 1996. The English subject section of the curriculum started off by explaining the value of knowing the English language for Norwegians as it gave one the opportunity and possibility to communicate with people from all over the world in relation to work, education and free time. The fact that Norway had become a state that was active in international affairs was here stated as a motivating factor to learn English. Although communication was an important target in the 1974 curriculum, the focus on communication increased noticeably during the 1987 curriculum.

The main aims for the English subject in *M87* were developing the pupils' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, developing the pupils' interest for the subject, helping pupils realise that the English language was a tool that could give them valuable knowledge and experiences, and helping pupils to accept the challenges one might meet when using another language than the mother tongue (*M87*, English subject curriculum).

The *M87* curriculum, like *M74*, also contained information on teaching materials and methods recommended for teaching. What was new in the curriculum was that *M87* included a section on themes and topics for the teachers to base the lessons on. The topics for 7-9th grades (which were the grades for lower secondary school until 1997 in Norway) were: *Local environment, travel, education and occupation, relationships with others and the world*, with focus on the relationships between different nations, community issues, and international work. The teachers were encouraged to let the pupils be part of selecting the lesson topics, as this might help them become more interested and create a more personal connection to the English subject. The curriculum also stipulated that the teachers should work together with similar topics and coordinate the lessons in different subjects.

While *M74* requested pupils to speak standard pronunciation English, *M87* made it clear that pupils should be taught to speak *either* a variation of British or American English. The curriculum was in general concerned with pupils having knowledge about other ways of speaking than British and standard pronunciation English, authentic speech, and the English language position in the current society. *M87* focused to a greater extent than *M74* on pupils knowing where the English language was spoken in the world, where it was a national language, where it was a common language, and where it was a minority language (*M87*, English subject curriculum).

2.3 The *L97* curriculum

The *L97* curriculum was used as the national curriculum in Norway from 1997 to 2005. The curriculum explained to a larger extent than the preceding curricula why it was important for Norwegians to be able to communicate in English. The English subject curriculum in *L97* explained Norway's increased need for international collaboration as a reason and a motive for the importance of learning English. *L97* presented several new aspects and purposes of the English subject.

L97 did not have any set aims for the English subject, as *M74* and *M87* had. However, the first section introduced a new purpose of the English subject. The curriculum explained that English language training would, in addition to giving pupils an international means of communication through language training, also lay the foundation for respect and tolerance

towards their own and other cultures. This showed that Norway had become more of a multicultural society in 1997 than previously.

Another aspect of the curriculum that was new was that the English syllabus was now based on teaching English through the same language learning foundations as children learnt their first language. The curriculum also explained the reasons why English should be the first foreign language Norwegian pupils learnt. Learning the language using the same principles as when learning the first language set a solid foundation for pupils when they were to learn a third foreign language.

‘Independent learning’ was also a new term introduced in *L97*. Teachers were encouraged to introduce Informational Technology (IT) to the pupils as a way of working independently with the English language. IT, the curriculum explained, was undergoing constant development and would enable pupils to take part in authentic language communities by being able to talk to people all over the world. *L97* stated: ‘The very form of the technology invites independent learning through curiosity and exploration’ (*L97* English subject curriculum). In addition to the pupils taking an active part in learning, the curriculum also focused on self-assessment and pupils being aware of and having knowledge of their own learning. In fact, ‘knowledge of one’s own language learning’ was the fourth point under the heading ‘The structure of the subject’ (*L97* English subject curriculum).

The second point under the heading ‘The structure of the subject’ was ‘using the language’. The pupils were to be able to use the English language independently as much as possible in English lessons, both orally and written. In addition, a term was introduced for the first time in the history of the Norwegian curricula, one that has now become common in English language teaching in Norway, namely ‘presentation’. A presentation means presenting something in English in front of fellow pupils. However, *L97* does not directly use the term, but states that one of the working methods in the subject should be producing oral and written texts that can be presented for others. Moreover, the curriculum encouraged teachers to give pupils creative work in which drama and music would have a natural place. This was to inspire pupils to use the language learnt through creative exercises when producing their own written and spoken texts through presentation and performance.

When it came to oral English and pronunciation, the curriculum did not specify how pupils should speak. Generally, pronunciation was not mentioned in *L97*, which indicates that choosing a certain way of speaking British or American did not seem to be an issue of concern any longer in Norwegian schools. Instead, the curriculum was focused on teachers

giving the pupils as many opportunities as possible to use the English language in class, and being comfortable with speaking English (*L97*, English subject curriculum).

2.4 The *LK06* curriculum

LK06 is Norway's current national curriculum and has been in use since 2006. However, it was revised in 2013, mostly to clarify different aspects of the curriculum. The curriculum starts off by describing in what ways we are influenced by the English language and continues by resembling the previous curriculum (*L97*) when explaining why Norwegian pupils need to be able to speak good English. The curriculum is much shorter than its predecessor, *L97*.

The English subject curriculum is divided into four main components: Language learning, Oral communication, Written communication and Culture and literature. Originally, the curriculum consisted of only three main components: Language learning, Communication and Culture and literature, but the distinction between written and oral communication was made when the curriculum was revised in 2013. Competence aims are provided for all the components, but in the lower secondary school, competence aims are not stated for each year level. Instead there are competence aims to be reached after grade 10 that apply to grades 8 to 10 combined. This means that the teachers need to think further ahead in time when planning lessons. The curriculum does not mention methods and thus the teaching organisation and topics are left in the hands of the teachers (*LK06* English subject curriculum).

In its original version, *LK06* introduced five basic skills that should be integrated in all subjects, as well as the English subject. The five basic skills introduced in 2006 were: the ability to read, the ability to express oneself orally, the ability to express oneself in writing, the ability to develop numeracy, and the ability to use digital tools. In 2013, when the curriculum was revised, one of the biggest changes was in the definitions of the five basic skills. The attempt was to make the use of the five basic skills clearer to the users of the curriculum. For example, the phrase *being able to express oneself orally* was changed to *oral skills* and *being able to use digital tools* was changed to *digital skills*. The revised curriculum also stressed how the five basic skills would fit in with the different competence aims. Whether these changes made in the revision actually helped the curriculum to become clearer is debatable. One might argue that the reformulation did not really improve the *LK06* curriculum (*LK06*, English subject curriculum).

3. Literature review

This thesis sets out to map the development of the teaching and learning of oral English in Norwegian lower secondary schools since the 1974 curriculum. The aim of the current research is to gain an understanding on how teachers have taught oral English since 1974 and how pupils have experienced this teaching.

The present chapter attempts firstly to define what oral skills are and what oral speech consists of. Furthermore, the chapter presents an overview of the history of language teaching in Norway and in Europe, in addition to presenting teaching approaches and methods that have been utilised since the early 1960's. The chapter further presents different types of oral activities and tasks that can be used in teaching oral English. Finally, the chapter refers to some studies relevant in the context of the present one.

3.1 Oral skills

Oral skills are a wide set of skills that involve both listening and speaking. Listening and speaking skills are very much entwined and 'more often than not, ESL curricula that treat oral communication skills will simply be labelled as "listening/speaking" courses' (Brown, 2007:322). Although one might consider listening and speaking as two different language skills, listening being a passive skill and speaking an active skill, they function, most of the time, in relation to each other (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:46). 'When we listen, it is implied that someone is speaking, and when we speak, we usually have a listener(s)' (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:46).

When someone gives a speech or is reading a poem, the oral language is in the form of a monologue. In a language classroom both listening to and producing language in the form of monologue can be practised. However, most often, language is in fact expressed through dialogue and interaction. In a dialogue, both the speaker and the listener are active participants. During the process of dialogue, body language, intonation, variation of speed and rhythm are used by the speaker in order to help the listener to understand the message. During this same dialogue, the listener has the option of asking clarifying questions, or asking for elaboration and repetition if necessary (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:46).

3.1.1 Listening

In order to be a good communicator, one needs to be a good listener. When learning to speak any language, including our native language, one first of all has to spend time listening to others speaking that language. A new-born baby spends most of the first year of its life listening to adults around it speaking, especially listening when language is directed to it. When the child is a year old it starts producing language and the process of becoming fluent in one's native language progresses rapidly. In the same way as the new born child, second language (L2) learners also need to listen to the target language before one can expect them to produce the new language (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:47-48).

The different situations of listening in everyday-life vary from using media such as radio, TV, or websites, to interacting with other people through conversations or through a monologue provided by a teacher or other speaker. In an EFL classroom, listening should have a vital position as it is an important key for learning a second language. One important factor of facilitating listening comprehension, however, is the listener's previous experience and knowledge of the subject at hand. Acquiring previous knowledge will help the listener understand the relevant context, which will in turn make it easier to obtain an overall understanding of the message (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:47)

The Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) describes the communicative language processes and what a learner has to do in order to speak, write, listen and read. In order for a learner or a pupil to listen, he or she has to utilise their auditory phonetic skills, linguistic skills, and cognitive skills. He or she has to perceive an utterance, identify the linguistic message of the utterance, understand what has been said, and interpret what was said (CEFR, 2001:90)

3.1.2 Speaking

Nowadays speaking English is an important part of the English curriculum. However, one does not need to go more than a few decades back in time to find that speaking was much more of a neglected skill. This was due to the fact that fewer people travelled to the same extent that they do today, fewer had to speak English in their workplace, and TV was not as important in daily life as it is today (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:54). 'Learning English was an

academic exercise in which the most important aim was to acquire the skills of reading and writing, in addition to an understanding of grammatical forms' (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:54)

Today, most young Norwegians have travelled a great deal and have experience of using the English language creatively and independently. TV, Internet, online gaming and social media have a big influence on young people's lives, especially when it comes to acquiring English language skills. As many young Norwegians are very proficient in English, the English teacher has several challenges. The most important is to provide a good model of spoken English in class and to speak English mostly or always in class. Another is to mostly or always speak English in order for the pupils to get used to listening to the language and using it naturally. For many pupils, it may be scary to speak in class, and so, creating a relaxed and positive classroom environment is very important (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:55).

In order to produce speech, a learner or a pupil has to utilise his or her cognitive skills, linguistic skills and phonetic skills. The learner has to plan and organise what to say, formulate a linguistic utterance, and articulate the planned utterance (*CEFR*, 2001:90)

3.2 Language teaching methods

English as a foreign language has been taught through the use of different methods over the years. The following sections provide an overview of different approaches and methods to language teaching.

3.2.1 The grammar-translation method

The grammar translation method was developed in the nineteenth century (Harmer, 2007: 63). The method was the primary classroom method for teaching second languages in Europe up until the 1960's (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:23). The method was based on pupils receiving an explanation of individual grammatical rules, followed by sentences which were constructed in order to exemplify these rules. The sentences were to be translated from either the first language (L1) to the second language (L2), or from the L2 to the L1 (Harmer, 2007: 63).

The method was created for the purpose of translating Latin and ancient Greek, the classical languages, into other native languages. In order to do so, scholars needed to understand the grammatical rules of the classical languages, as well as learning many words

of the languages by heart. As ancient Greek and Latin were dead languages and were not generally spoken anymore, scholars were not expected to actually communicate and speak the languages. The grammar-translation method was therefore the method used for learning how to translate written texts (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:23).

As Drew and Sørheim (2009) suggest, the grammar-translation method was not suitable for teaching oral skills, which supports one of Harmer's (2007:63) three comments on the features of the grammar-translation method, which was that this method had 'little if any consideration of the spoken language'. In addition, Harmer also claims that accuracy was considered to be a necessity with this method and that language was treated at the level of only a sentence. It was therefore not considerate of longer texts and the total meaning of the full text (Harmer, 2007: 63). Another argument on the use of this method when applied to children learning English as a foreign language is raised by Chang (2011). Chang (2011:15) argues that scholastic methods, such as this one, should not be used and are not suited to the levels of young pupils. He also argues that this is a self-study method and is not suitable when teaching large classes.

However, some arguments in favour of the grammar-translation method have also been raised. For example, Chellapan (1982) argues that using translation as a teaching activity might make the pupil come closer to grips with the target language. Although one might agree with this claim by Chellapan, many would agree with the arguments of Drew and Sørheim, Harmer and Chang, which suggest that the grammar-translation method is not the most suitable method for teaching a foreign language, and especially not for teaching oral skills.

3.2.2 The direct method

The direct method, or *the natural method*, was a method created at the end of the nineteenth century due to a reform movement, reacting to the limitations of the grammar-translation method. As Harmer (2007:63) points out: 'Translation was abandoned in favour of the teacher and the students speaking together'. The reform regarded speaking as more important than writing and criticised contemporary teaching methods, such as the grammar-translation method (Harmer, 2007: 24).

The direct method was introduced into the USA in the 1860's by Lambert Sauveur and Maximillian Berlitz, two European immigrants with teaching background who realised that there were a large number of immigrants who did not know how to communicate in English.

Their philosophy was to focus on oral language and to teach beginners how to *communicate* in the target language. It was during this period that *phonetics* became established as a science (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:24).

Important aspects of this method were correct pronunciation and the teacher always spoke the target language. Translation and use of the native language were not allowed (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:24). Although ‘the sentence was still the main object of interest, and accuracy was all important’ (Harmer, 2007:63), one could argue that this method is an adaptation of the basic way humans learn to speak as children. Parents, like the language teachers of this method, speak to their child in a natural way with a focus on meaning in the context of first language acquisition. As long as the immigrants are able to put their native language aside, they will learn the second language in the same natural way as a baby learns its first language. To support this view, Drew and Sørheim (2009) state that explanations of language principles were not given to the students of this method until the learners’ oral English was considerably advanced. In contemporary society, children attend school, and often learn grammar and other important principles of a language when they are at an age where their language development is somewhat advanced. The same here applies to learners of the direct method. They would learn more about the language after they had acquired basic oral language skills.

3.2.3 The audio-lingual method

The name ‘audio-lingual’ indicates listening and speaking and the method primarily focuses on learning language by listening and imitating what is heard. The audio-lingual method is also based on a behavioural theory containing a three-stage procedure of *stimulus*, *response* and *reinforcement*.

The American psychologist and behaviourist F. Skinner made language learning and teaching into a science when he asserted that ‘language learning was a process of habit formation’ (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:25). As this method saw language learning as an extra set of habits, new activities called ‘pattern drills’ were invented in large numbers (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:25). Harmer (2007:64) explains these drills as speaking and listening activities with built in *substitutions*. An example of such a drill, given by Harmer, is a listen (stimulus given by the teacher) and repeat (response from pupils) exercise where the teacher utters a sentence, for example *There’s a cup on the table*, and the pupils repeat the sentence.

Subsequently, the teacher utters the name of a different object lying on the table instead of the cup and the pupils repeat the sentence again, but with this new object instead. For example, the teacher says *spoon* and the pupils answer *There's a spoon on the table*, and so on. The drills made with this built-in substitute ensured the teachers that 'in small steps, the student was constantly learning and, moreover, was shielded from the possibility of making mistakes' (Harmer, 2007:64). As the pupils made few mistakes through the use of these drills, the teachers were able to give pupils positive *reinforcement*, which was an important factor of this method.

The audio-lingual method was also known as the Army Method and it was created for soldiers during the Second World War. The principles of the army-teaching method were classes with few pupils, numerous hours of language drills, the teachers were mostly native speakers, and linguistic experts was expected to provide explanations of structures (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:25). The method was constructed in order to teach English to as many soldiers as possible who were to be stationed all over Europe and needed a mutual language in order to communicate. It was a success and many soldiers developed good oral skills (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:25).

Similarly to the direct method, the audio-lingual method recommended that pupils should be taught language in a direct way and the method required the teachers and pupils to only speak the target language.

3.2.3.1 Presentation, Practice and Production

The audio-lingual method was very much based on the principles of Presentation, Practice and Production, the three P's. The principles 'grew out of structural-situational teaching whose main departure from Audiolingualism was to place the language in clear situational contexts' (Harmer, 2007:64).

A teacher using the PPP-procedure would start a language activity by *presenting* and introducing a situation which contextualises the type of language that is to be taught. The teacher might do this by, for example, showing the pupils a picture of people who are at the beach and talk about the picture with the class, whilst practising how to explain what the people in the picture are doing, using the correct grammar. The teacher would then encourage the pupils to repeat the correct sentences describing what the people at the beach are doing, e.g. *The boy is building a sand castle*. The students would *practise* the different sentences in

choral repetition, pairs or individual repetition. In the last stage of the PPP-procedure, the pupils would be requested to use the new language (in this case the present continuous) to *produce* sentences of their own (Harmer, 2007:65-66).

Although the PPP-approach seems to be a good method for teaching grammar and language, Drew and Sørheim (2009:26) point out one major problem with the approach: language learning is simply not something one can acquire through ‘habit formation, imitation and reinforcement, as the behaviourists had believed’, but that using a language creatively is of much more importance. Interestingly, according to Drew and Sørheim (2009:26), the tendency of teachers was often to just focus on *presentation* and *practice* and disregard the stage of production, therefore leaving out many opportunities of practising language skills creatively.

3.2.4 Community Language Learning

In the original form of the method of Community Language Learning, a ‘knower’ (teacher) is placed outside of a circle of pupils and assists the pupils in the circle, making it possible for them to say what they want to say by providing translations, suggestions or amending the pupils’ utterances. An important part of this method is analysing the language afterwards, perhaps by recording the activity and reflecting on how the pupils felt about doing the activities (Harmer, 2007:68).

3.2.5 Suggestopaedia

Suggestopaedia was a method developed by Georigi Lozanov, a Bulgarian educator, and is mainly concerned with the physical environment where the learning is to take place (Harmer, 2007:68). In order to make the pupils feel relaxed and comfortable in the learning environment, the pupils take on different names and creating a child-parent relationship with the teacher is the goal. Lozanov referred to the child-parent relationship between the pupils and the teacher as ‘infantilisation’. With this method, traumatic topics should be avoided and music, often baroque, is played. During the different stages of the methods there are several periods of complete silence. It is an important part of the method that the pupils always leave the classroom silently (Harmer, 2007:68).

3.2.6 Total Physical Response (TPR)

Total Physical Response (TPR) lessons often consist of being given instructions. For example, the teacher asks the pupils to stand up, sit down, or go to the front of the classroom and write their name on the blackboard. When the pupils show that they are able to do and understand all the instructions, they can practise giving instructions to each other. It is crucial that pupils do not give other pupils instructions until they are ready for it. The method was created by Professor James Asher, who believed that since small children learn much of their language based on commands directed at them by, for instance, their parents, L2 pupils can benefit from this as well (Harmer, 2007:68).

3.2.7 The Silent Way

The Silent Way encourages pupils to take charge of their own learning. It is the teacher who is silent and says as little as possible. The method was created by Caleb Gattegno on the basis of believing that pupils learned the most when they were forced to create language and not just listen and repeat what the teacher says. In the Silent Way, the teacher normally points to different sounds on a phonemic chart and demonstrates the sounds so that the pupils can repeat them. While pupils are trying to pronounce the sound, the teacher is silent, only using gestures to communicate with the pupils. When the pupils have got the sound right, the teacher points to a new sound. In this method, the pupils are in charge of learning the target language and solving problems, while being indirectly controlled by the teacher (Harmer, 2007:68).

3.2.8 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was originally called the *Communicative approach* (Harmer, 2007:69). The main idea of the communicative approach to teaching was to give pupils communicative competence and, by doing so, the learning of the target language would come naturally (Harmer, 2007:52). This meant creating classroom situations that reflected real-life situations and thereby giving pupils an appropriate vocabulary for making conversation in English. What really defines the changes made from the audio-lingual approach to the communicative approach was how it was now more important to make the

pupils produce speech and make themselves understood in English than to be grammatically correct all the time (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:26).

It was in the 1970's and 80's that most English language teaching was dedicated to *communication* and a number of new textbooks were published containing more oral and communicative exercises. In addition, numerous language teaching activities were invented by teachers all over the world, which is why CLT consists of several communicative-based teaching methods, such as interviewing people, role play, discussions and other activities that were mostly conducted in groups or in pairs (Drew and Sørheim 2009:26).

3.3 History of English teaching in Norway

All the methods mentioned so far show reasons for the many possible changes in the way teachers have taught oral English since the early 1970's. Changes have occurred all over the world and have also taken place in Norway in recent decades. Even though English has been taught for centuries, the next section will explain general changes made in Norway since 1959, the year when English became a compulsory subject for all Norwegian pupils.

3.3.1 English as a compulsory subject – start-up period

In addition to making English a compulsory subject in Norway in 1959, this was also the year the compulsory 9-year schooling was introduced (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:28-29). Before the introduction of mandatory English lessons, the previous curriculum had stated that English could be taught in schools if possible. This resulted in English mostly being taught in the bigger cities and not in Norway's many small villages. During the start-up period of compulsory English learning in Norway, oral practice was mostly limited to just reading aloud and in some cases the teachers did not have the necessary English language competence needed for teaching English (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:28-29).

Although the direct method was taught at Norwegian teacher training colleges and universities, many teachers in schools in the 1960's used a modified version of it, or used the grammar translation method. This was mainly due to the fact that the teacher's English had to be fairly fluent in order to teach English using the direct method. However, many Norwegian

teachers were not fluent in English (Drew and Sørheim, 2007: 24). It was also during the period of the 1950's and 1960's that the audio-lingual method was introduced in Scandinavia.

3.3.2 1970 – The start of the communicative period

The period from the 1970's to the present is by many called the *communicative period*. The core concern of this period has been teaching by using real-life communication. In the 1970's the idea of communication was included in almost every aspect of the English language subject: '...syllabus planning, teaching materials, testing and assessment, and so on' (Howatt, 2004:250). However, Norway's English teaching situation in the 1970's did not reflect the international trend of teaching communication. Even though the 1974 Norwegian national curriculum stated that the most important aim in the English subject was to learn how to speak and understand the English language, the grammar-translation method, or a modified version of it, was still predominantly the most used approach in lower secondary schools (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:29).

In the 1970's and early 1980's the way of teaching oral English was based on the audio-lingual approach (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:28-29). This was despite the fact that this method drastically decreased in use internationally after 1964. Its decline was partly due to the fact that Wilga Rivers, an Australian academic and writer, had presented the shortcomings of the method, but also because the method 'fell short of promoting communicative ability as it paid undue attention to memorisation and drilling, while downgrading the role of context and world knowledge in language learning'(Thanasoulas, 2002).

3.3.3 'Doing things with words'

The internationally-praised communicative period did not really influence Norway until the 1987 curriculum (*M87*). The *M87* curriculum stated that the most important aim in the English subject was communication (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:29). Internationally the focus (motto) was on 'doing' things with words. The idea of the 'motto' was that if pupils were active and serious during lessons, they would be able to *do something in English* after the lesson that they could not do before (Howatt, 2014:90). Connecting the language used in the classrooms to that of the 'real world' became more and more important for communicative tasks and activities internationally during the late 1970's (Howatt, 2014:90).

Norway in the late 1980's was influenced by the rest of the world. Communicative activities, such as role plays and games, were introduced into the lessons in order to give the pupils real-life communicative practice. In other words, creativity was encouraged as opposed to earlier, when being creative and creating one's sentences and explaining something in English were not part of the teaching (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:29).

During the three most recent decades, the focus on communication with other people around the world has become even more essential to the teaching of the English language in Norway, as it also has been internationally (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:29). As Howatt (2004: 258) states: 'During the last twenty years or so the achievements of the communicative "revolution" of the 1970's have remained more or less intact'. The communicative approach has been influenced in Norway by international scholars' research and the success of other countries with the method.

Ironically, the way Norway's approach to teaching English has been influenced by other countries, not only in Europe, but all over the world, is an example of why being able to 'do things with words', i.e. communicate, is so important. If Norwegians had not been able to speak English, to communicate across Norwegian boundaries, and thus been made aware of the changes and developments made in teaching methods internationally, one could suggest that none of these changes, some might say improvements, would have occurred and made the English teaching in Norway what it is today. As stated in the current Norwegian National curriculum, *LK06*:

To succeed in a world where English is used for international communication, it is necessary to be able to use the English language and to have knowledge of how it is used in different contexts. Thus, we need to develop a vocabulary and skills in using the systems of the English language, its phonology orthography, grammar and principles for sentence and text construction and to be able to adapt the language to different topics and communication situations. (*LK06*, English subject curriculum)

3.4 Oral language tasks

Hughes (2002:134) states the following about oral language skills:

Activities based around speaking need to be managed and fostered through careful planning and direction by the teacher, and through a choice of sustainable tasks to stimulate speech. The need to both engender and manage the vagaries of speech interaction has brought about a rapid growth in the development of a range of teaching techniques and supporting published materials to help students to speak, in the form of information gap activities, role plays, simulations and games.

The present section shows a number of examples of different oral language tasks that can be used in EFL teaching.

Description tasks

A description task is all about using the target language when describing something. This could be describing the classroom, the bathroom or what you think a character from a text looks like. One can also describe what one can see in pictures (Louma, 2004:139-140).

Narrative tasks

The narrative task is very similar to description tasks. Most often the tasks are based on picture sequences or cartoons. These tasks make the pupils practise recounting a sequence of events and how to conjugate verbs so that they fit in a given time-frame. In the case of a narrative task, this is most often through the present or past tense. An alternative to pictures is to have the pupil describe something that has happened to him or her (Louma, 2004:141-144).

Instruction tasks

Instruction tasks are often pair work tasks, where one of the participants gives the other instructions on, for example, how to get from point A to point B, how to make a meal, or how to put on make-up. When doing this type of task, where pupils give directions and instructions to another pupil, they get to practise giving a message and make sure that they are making themselves understood in the target language. They also get to practise explaining when they do not understand an instruction and explaining what they do not understand. This makes these types of tasks real-life based. They provide good practice for the times when one actually needs to understand or give directions and instructions with an English speaker (Louma, 2004:144-146).

Comparing and contrasting tasks

An example of a comparing and contrasting task can be that pupils receive five pictures that illustrate five people's different protection clothing: a firefighter in head gear, a person riding a bicycle with his helmet, a doctor in operating attire, a nomad in the desert wearing a tunic, and a man in a lab coat. The pupils are told to 'compare and contrast two or three of these photographs, saying what kind of clothing the people are wearing and why you think the protection might be necessary' (Louma, 2004:147).

Comparison and contrasting tasks are not only based on illustrations. Another example of a task that challenges pupils to compare and contrast is comparing concepts, for instance living in a rural community compared to living in an urban community. Comparing and contrasting tasks are more challenging than description tasks, as they also require the pupils to analyse and discuss similarities and differences (Louma, 2004:146-148).

Explaining and predicting tasks

An example of an explaining and predicting task can be asking pupils to study a graph that shows, for instance, the changes in the number of workers in five different occupations from 1990 to 2005. The pupils are then asked to explain the trends they see in the graph and speculate on why the numbers are different and what could be the reason for the changes made (Louma, 2004:148-150).

The prediction part of the task comes when the pupils are asked to speculate on what the changes illustrated in the graph might mean. For instance, what it could mean for the economy in different parts of the world and whether the changes would be the same in other parts of the world (Louma, 2004:148-150).

Interview tasks

Pupils can plan, design interview guides and conduct interviews with native speakers, fellow pupils or other L2 speakers. An interview task should have a significant purpose, such as to collect information for written or oral exercises (Simensen 1998:191).

An example for a suitable interview task can be to interview an adult about, for instance, what they used to do in their spare time as children. Another example, which turns

interview tasks into a role playing task, can be to conduct job interviews. Here the pupils get to talk about themselves and practice for future job interviews (Simensen 1998:191).

Decision tasks

According to Louma (2004:151), 'Decision tasks involve discussing the issue that the decision concerns from a number of perspectives and then making a decision'. The task is therefore often a discussion between two or more pupils about the best way of doing something. For instance, the pupils could be asked to discuss what five items one should bring to a deserted island or where to go for a class excursion. When conducting a task like this, it is important that the pupils know that a thorough discussion is expected before they make a decision (Louma, 2004:150-151).

Oral presentations

Oral presentations provide practice in speaking in front of other people. Most often the pupils are to present on a given topic or a topic of their own choosing, for about three to five minutes. Oral presentations have become an especially common activity in the lower secondary school. Oral presentations are often the task that teachers use to set an oral grade for the individual pupil (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:73).

Role play/simulation tasks

Role playing/simulation tasks help make English lessons more versatile and produce creative speech, as people can take on different roles and play someone other than who they really are. In other words, the pupils do not always have to speak to each other as themselves, but can adopt roles, such as adults, people working in different professions, or people from other countries (Louma 2004:151).

An example of a role play/simulation can be acting out a play or parts of a play, for instance Romeo and Juliet. Others can be pretending to be a person working in a clothing store and a customer looking for a new jacket, or acting out a made-up scene of pupils bullying another pupil. Using simulations like these can especially help pupils to practise travelling and other encounters of speaking with an only-English speaker, and also to learn valuable moral lessons by placing themselves into other people's situations (Louma, 2004:153).

Another example on how to use roleplay/simulation in English lessons is using role cards. One useful way of using role cards is to write the title of a certain situation on an envelope and put cards inside that define two or more roles (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:58)

Reacting in situations tasks

Reacting in situations tasks combine simulation and function-based communication and consist of reacting to different situations one might experience in life. An example of such a situation can be that the pupil is told that he or she is to pick up a friend from the train station, but the train is late. The information table is out of order, so the pupil needs to get information from someone who works at the train station. One pupil takes on the role of the train informant and one takes on the role of the person that needs information. The pupils therefore have to engage in a realistic conversation, where the language needs to be adapted to the said situation in order to ask and answer the questions in a smooth and fluent way (Louma, 2004:157-158).

Games

Games, which are often designed as contests, bring out the competitive side of pupils and are therefore particularly challenging and motivating. When using a game as a classroom activity, the pupils are able to use the language freely to achieve an aim. Most often, pupils are so engaged that they forget that they are using the target language (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:66).

Board games, guessing games and persuasion games are examples of games that are appropriate in an EFL classroom (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:66-68). Persuasion games are based on the concept of pupils persuading each other to do or agree on something. This is an efficient way of helping the pupils practise arguing and expressing their opinions, an important skill to possess when participating in interviews (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:68). For instance, the pupils could discuss whether to take the bus or walk home from school.

Structured speaking tasks

A structured speaking task is structured in that it controls what the pupils are going to say. Examples are reading a text aloud, and sentence repetition. Structured speaking tasks are most often used in schools in order to assess linguistic features, pronunciation and grammar (Louma, 2004:158-159).

Discussion tasks

Discussion tasks are mostly used for older, more mature pupils (lower secondary school and up) as one needs a certain level of proficiency in order to discuss a topic properly (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:73). 'Discussion involves explanation, interpretation, prediction, expressing a point of view, making associations and personalising the issue' (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:73).

Discussions may be organised in plenary, groups or pairs, depending on the classroom environment. If pupils find speaking in plenary challenging, small groups or pairs are often the best way of organising. As the English subject is influenced by many themes and topics typically found in Social Studies, there are numerous different topics to discuss, such as social, political and ethical issues (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:73).

Information gap tasks

Information gap exercises are activities designed on the principle that one pupil has got information about something that another pupil needs (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:60). In other words, the pupils need to communicate in order to find out something they do not already know. Such an exercise might entail, for example, filling in the missing information in a text, explaining where to place certain items in a picture or asking for and giving precise information (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:60-61)

Listening tasks

A listening activity, as the name indicates, always involves listening to something. Listening to music, stories, books, recordings or films are typical listening sources found in a classroom. The main idea of a listening exercise is that the pupils should actively listen to the target language and learn proper pronunciation and vocabulary from this, just as a child does in its first year of life. The child listens to its parents and other native speakers in order to learn its native language (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:47-49).

In an EFL classroom, pupils may listen with a specific purpose or without a specific purpose. Pupils listen without specific tasks when they listen to their teacher speaking English as the classroom language. Other times it could be listening just for enjoyment. For example, it could be if English music is playing in the background while the pupils are doing written tasks, if a text is read to them, or if it is a recording. Typical listening activities with a specific purpose are filling in missing words in a text while listening to the text (fill-in-the-blanks),

putting paragraphs from a text in the right order, and answering questions that are read aloud in plenary in writing (i.e. a true or false exercise) (Drew and Sørheim, 2009:50-53).

3.6 Related EFL research in Norway

The present section presents several studies relevant to the present one. These are studies that either focus on mapping historical trends in EFL teaching, that focus on oral language in lower secondary school, or are other EFL classroom studies.

3.6.1 Research mapping historical trends in English education in Norway

One study that is similar to the present study focuses on the history of how written English has been taught in Norwegian lower secondary schools since *M74*. The study was conducted by Maier (2005). The main aims of the study were to map how, when and why teachers had changed the way they taught written English during their careers. Maier used semi-structured interviews and interviewed ten lower secondary school English teachers, five males and five females, who all had at least 30 years of teaching experience.

The study showed that most teachers had changed their practices when it came to teaching writing, but that one might have expected more changes in light of all the other changes the English subject had undergone since the early 1970's. One might also have expected that the process writing method and computer technology had had more of an impact on how writing was taught, but this was not the case.

The study also found that the textbooks had developed in that they were more challenging and interesting with more authentic texts. The *L97* curriculum had been the reason for many of these changes. Among these were that the teachers had started teaching different written genres, the pupils were to receive two grades in English, written and oral, and there had been 'a general shift toward fluency and communication in writing, as opposed to being strict about mistakes' (Maier, 2006:89).

Another historically-based study on lower secondary school writing was that by Watne (2007). Watne's study was an investigation into the school leaving written exams in English from 1978 to 2005, with special attention to validity. The aims of the study were to find out

which language skills were tested in the exams from 1978 to 2005, how the exams had changed, and to what degree one could rely on the exams to be valid.

Watne interviewed three examiners, of written English exams, about the exam scoring process and quantitatively analysed the exams in the period from 1978 to 2005. The analysis was conducted through the exam tasks, the examiners' guidelines, grade statistics and circulars pertaining to test assessment.

The study proved that there had been a great increase in the focus on language as communication during the period. Watne also revealed that the testing had changed from testing a mixture of language skills, through several different methods in the *M74* and the *M87* exam periods, to only testing two basic language skills, reading and writing. Text production was, in the *L97* exams, the most predominant test method. It was also revealed that the examiner's guidelines had become more theoretically based and extensive in 2005 than they had been in the *M74*.

3.6.2 Research focusing on oral EFL skills in Scandinavia

Some Norwegian studies of English have focused on oral language, as the present study does. This subsection presents some studies that have focused on oral language teaching in Norwegian EFL classrooms.

A study by Otneim (2013) investigated the effect of a 10-15 minute teaching design based on task-based language teaching of oral fluency among 7th grade EFL learners in Norway. The purpose of Otneim's research was to find a method for teaching oral English that gave learners more opportunities to speak in class, in addition to having enough time to work with other parts of the target language. The research was inspired by a previous empirical study suggesting that pupils produce little English in the English lessons and that prepared speech, such as presentations, is what is usually taught and assessed in the EFL classroom when it comes to oral English.

The study was based on an experiment using a teaching design that was inspired by the principles and procedures of task based learning (TBLT). TBLT is a method that provides the pupils with many opportunities to speak, it focuses especially on meaning and communication, and is conducted through tasks. The experiment was conducted in a 7th grade class in every English lesson for five weeks and the parallel class served as a control group. The research questions for this research were:

What is the effect of a 10-15TBLT teaching design on the temporal variables of fluency; mean length of turn and rate of speech? What is the effect of a 10-15 minute TBLT teaching design on the non-temporal variables of fluency; quantity, variety and most frequently used smallwords? (Otneim, 2013:3)

The study showed a positive trend among the pupils that used the method, especially when it came to mean length of turn. However, the individual results showed that the experimental group might have performed better than the control group due to other reasons than the teaching design. The researcher states that further research is needed in order to confirm the positive trends discovered in the research.

Another study that focuses on oral language is that of Østensen (2013). Østensen studied teachers' beliefs and practices concerning the acquisition and teaching of pronunciation. The study focused on teachers and pupils in the upper level in primary school.

Østensen used teacher interviews and questionnaire surveys in order to conduct her study, which showed that teachers' beliefs are to a large extent connected with their reported teaching practices. The teachers were sure that good pronunciation was very important in a communicative perspective. They therefore chose to speak the target language as often as possible during lessons and expected their pupils to do the same. None of the teachers seemed to deliberately train correct pronunciation in the classroom despite their beliefs on its importance.

Østensen discovered that many teachers considered reading aloud a suitable method for practising pronunciation. The results from the questionnaire showed that a vast majority of the teachers gave their pupils feedback and corrected their mispronunciations either when reading or speaking. This, however, was not the result of the teacher interviews where the teachers confessed to rarely correcting pupils' pronunciation due to not wanting to embarrass them in front of the class. Østensen explained that teachers should strive to acquire a relaxed, supportive classroom environment in order to understand what they are reading, and to practise correct pronunciation.

The findings showed that teachers believe they are important language models, and that active use of the target language is of uttermost importance when learning and teaching English. The teachers interviewed stated that the biggest issue in teaching pronunciation is the challenge in getting the pupils to speak. 'They believe this to a great extent has to do with

attitude, and they call for a raise in the awareness of English as a core subject and recognition of its relevance and status' (Østensen, 2013:50).

Another study that focuses on oral language is the study conducted by Chvala (2012) about genre and situational features in oral exam tasks in 10th grade. The study focused on examining oral exam tasks to find out 'how oral skills are understood and defined by teachers in lower secondary schools in Norway' (Chvala, 2012:234).

In order to determine the degree to which teacher-written oral exams provide pupils with the necessary genre and situational information in order to adapt their oral English to clearly defined genres and situations, Chvala analysed three teacher-written oral exam tasks. Chvala's research questions were:

To what degree are genre and situational features defined in the exam tasks?

How does this reflect the general aims of the English curriculum?

What possible conclusions can we draw about the continuous assessment of oral skills in these English classrooms based on an analysis of the final assessment? (Chvala, 2012:234)

The study showed that there was an overall overrepresentation of informative oral presentations in the exam tasks analysed. It also showed an exclusion of clear information in relation to spoken interaction and how the participants and interlocutors should behave in this interaction.

Finally, Chvala revealed that informative presentations could be one of the most widely practised genres in the lower secondary school. Also, this genre appears to be very much tied to the context and the situation of the classroom, which suggests that the discourse used by pupils in the classroom is classroom-bound. Chvala recommended that in order to develop pupils' discourse competence, teachers should teach a diversity of discourses in different situational contexts.

Furthermore, Rye (2014) conducted research concerning Norwegian lower secondary EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about L1 use in the classroom. Rye studied teachers' use of L1/L2 in the English subject in lower secondary school. Rye's study was aimed at getting a better understanding of teachers' L1 use and to reveal the possible role of the L1 in an L2 classroom. Rye investigated three teachers from the 8th, 9th and 10th grade in order to collect her data. Interviews, classroom observations and a pupil questionnaire were the methods used to collect results.

Rye discovered that most teachers assumed that the best way of teaching a language is through monolingual lessons and that the use of L1 should be limited. However, the teachers observed all used their L1 in their teaching. The reasons for codeswitching and using L1 in the classroom were most often to ensure pupil comprehension, for instance when giving messages and explaining something that is especially difficult. The L1 was also used for translating difficult or new L2 words. The pupil questionnaire proved that the pupils preferred their teachers to speak L1 in certain situations.

Finally, Jensen et al. (2011) conducted research on how pupils perceive their teachers' oral English. The study, *Students' attitudes to lecturers' English in English-medium higher education in Denmark*, examined students' reactions to their non-native lecturers at a major business school in Denmark. The research mainly focused on examining 'the relationship between perceptions of English language proficiency and perceptions of general lecturing competence' (Jensen et al. 2011:1).

The 31 lecturers who participated in this study did not have English as their first language. They were all recorded while lecturing and the recordings were listened to by three experienced EFL examiners. The teachers' oral proficiency was assessed through the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* global scale (CEFR, 2001:24) and they were able to use + and - to indicate whether the lecturers' oral English proficiency was, for instance, a B1+ or a C1-. The lecturers received scores from B2+ to C2-.

The most interesting finding of this study was:

The students' perceptions of the lecturers' English language proficiency is a significant predictor of their perception of the lecturers' general lecturing competence and vice versa. (Jensen et al. 2011:1)

It was an interesting finding that the pupils' perception of their teachers' oral skills affects the way they consider their teachers' teaching competence and that the pupils' perception of their teachers' teaching competence affects their perception of their teachers' oral English. It would be interesting to see if this is the case with younger pupils as well.

3.6.3 Other related EFL classroom research

According to several studies conducted on where and how children and young adults learn English, it may be surprising to some that most pupils seem to learn as much or more English

outside of school through English-mediated leisure time activities than in school. For example, a study conducted by Henry (2014) revealed that many of the pupils who were asked, believed that they had learnt nearly all, most, or about 50% of their English outside of school.

Henry's study showed that pupils spent roughly 20 hours per week (boys spending a little more time than girls) in English-mediated environments outside of school and that this was often doing richly meaningful activities. In addition to English TV, music, English-mediated web pages and books, digital gaming was one of the most popular spare time activities, especially for boys. Most young adults nowadays own both their own computer and phone and have easy access to the Internet and digital games. Studies have shown positive correlations between the number of hours spent in English-mediated activities and pupils' test results (Henry, 2014:97). However, some activities have proven to benefit pupils' English proficiency more than others. Digital gaming and visiting English-mediated web sites have proved to make more of an impact on pupils than receptive activities, such as watching films, TV series and listening to music (Henry, 2014:97).

Henry (2014:111) reports that some Swedish studies of English lessons show that the pupils' views on English lessons are that they are an easy, pleasant break from the other, more challenging subjects. The pupils do not seem to find English challenging and the topics and texts used in the English lessons do not interest them. In these observational studies, it was found that most teachers used textbooks that were too easy and not varied, few authentic texts, and the general trend of the activities was reading texts, answering questions and translating the texts into Swedish. There were little room for oral interaction in the lessons and the target language was used surprisingly little. The use of digital tools was rare and the pupils in one study had explained that they felt more comfortable speaking English outside of school than in the English lessons (Henry, 2014:98).

Although the study was conducted on Swedish pupils, Henry (2014) argues that this could be a growing tendency in other European countries, such as Norway, and even several other parts of the world, at least in the future. It can also be argued that Sweden and Norway are two nations with similar traits. Both Norway and Sweden are small linguistic community countries, where nearly all foreign media imported into the countries are from the UK and the US, people generally have a high level of English-language proficiency, and most are advanced in technology and using the Internet. With these arguments in mind, it is possible that Henry's (2014) study conducted in Sweden can also represent growing tendencies in Norway.

Another research is that of Lialikhova (2014), who has researched the use of videos in Norwegian EFL classrooms in the lower secondary school. Her study aimed to find out how videos could help achieve the goals of the *LK06* English curriculum. Her main hypothesis was that teaching with video would develop pupils' communicative skills and therefore be appropriate for the communicative approach to ELT.

The research focused on five research questions: why the teachers used videos in ELT, what kinds of videos were used in English lessons, how and how often videos were used, what was taught and learned through the use of videos and, finally, what the teachers' and pupils' attitudes to lessons with videos were (Lialikhova, 2014:3). The data was collected through interviews with four teachers, observations of EFL lessons and a questionnaire directed at pupils.

The study exposed that EFL lessons with videos were aimed at, first of all, developing oral and written communicative skills. In addition, videos were used as a method of introducing and giving pupils a broader understanding of different topics. Feature films were the most common videos used in lessons and the most effective lessons were when videos were shown in segments up to 35 minutes. According to Lialikhova (2014:3) 'Videos were used in general from three times a year up to every month by the teachers'.

The study showed that videos appear to have an impact on pupils' language skills and vocabulary. Both the teachers and pupils were positive towards the use of videos in ELT lessons. The findings suggested that videos were effective when used to develop communicative language skills, vary lessons, motivate pupils, supplement the textbook and promote communicative language teaching. Lialikhova (2014)

4. Methods

The current chapter describes the methodology applied in this thesis. The aim of the thesis is to map the changes and developments in the teaching of oral English in the Norwegian lower secondary school since the curriculum of 1974 (*M74*) was implemented and throughout the other curriculum periods: *M87*, *L97* and *LK06*. The main research question of this thesis is ‘How has the teaching of oral English in the Norwegian lower secondary school developed since the 1974 curriculum?’ The thesis will also attempt to answer the questions ‘How did the teachers teach oral English in each curriculum period?’ and ‘How did the learners experience the teaching of oral English in each curriculum period?’

The subsequent sections explain the data collection, the nature of qualitative research, semi-structured interviews and methodological concerns of validity and reliability. A description of the process of collecting data through semi-structured interviews, the sampling of the interview subjects, planning the interview guides, and piloting the interviews, is also included.

4.1 Data collection

In applied linguistics research, there are three main types of primary data: quantitative data, qualitative data and language data, which are often subsumed under qualitative research (Dörnyei, 2007:19). Quantitative data often presents numbers from, for example, questionnaires. Qualitative data usually includes recorded interviews, transcriptions of interviews, field notes and other relevant documents. Finally, language data often includes samples of spoken or written language elicited from a sample for the purpose of language analysis (Dörnyei, 2007:19).

4.1.1 Qualitative research

The present research study is qualitative. As formerly established, a qualitative research study usually consists of interviews and observations, which further on in the research process may become several pages of transcripts and field notes, as well as other documents relevant for the study. Qualitative research is thus mostly structured around people, samples, interview

subjects, those being observed and the researcher him/herself. According to Lichtman (2012:17):

In general, the main purpose of qualitative research is to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience. It is about humans. The purpose of qualitative research is to describe, understand and interpret human *phenomena*, human *interaction*, or human *discourse*.

A qualitative research approach was considered the appropriate method for the current study. As the main aim of the study is to record changes and developments made in the Norwegian history of oral English teaching, relevant documents, such as the curricula of 1974, 1987, 1997 and 2006, in addition to examples of the textbooks and workbooks belonging to the four different curricula and time periods, also need to be explored. Another aim of the present study is to describe and explain how teachers have taught oral English and how pupils have experienced its teaching. In order to answer these questions, including the main research question, one needs to understand the human experiences of the teachers and the pupils, and through these direct sources, gather in-depth information about the development of oral English teaching in Norway. An open, or semi-structured interview with appropriate interview subjects, is crucial in order to acquire answers that are detailed and that will be beneficial to the study.

4.2 The subjects

The only criterion for the teacher and pupil sampling was that the interview subject needed to have taught or been a pupil of English in the lower secondary school during one of the four curriculum periods, including and following the *M74* curriculum. Gender, age, place of work/studying and years of experience were not taken into consideration when sampling any of the interviewees.

There are several ways of sampling interview subjects for a qualitative study. However, as Dörnyei (2007:126) explains, ‘The main goal of sampling is to find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn.’ For the current study, the method of convenience sampling has been employed. To use a convenience sample means to use those individuals who are

available for the study. Although this sampling strategy is the least desirable, it is the most common one, at least at the postgraduate research level, as postgraduate research often happens in less-than-ideal circumstances, and during a short period of time and economic restrictions (Dörnyei, 2007:129). However, as Dörnyei (2007:129) points out, ‘One redeeming feature of this sampling strategy is that it usually results in willing participants, which is a prerequisite to having a rich dataset’.

4.3 Credibility, validity and research ethics

When addressing methods of sampling, the question of validity is one that also needs to be addressed. This is because, although the method of sampling by convenience will save time and money, it may be at the expense of credibility. For this research, in order to answer all of the research questions, a semi-structured interview and in-depth answers from reliable sources were crucial. One really cannot ensure that a convenience sample is reliable. However, all of the subjects in this research fit the description of having taught or being a former pupil of oral English in lower secondary school at the prescribed time. No other criteria were set for the subjects and they may therefore be considered just as reliable as any other sample would be. What helps make the sample more reliable is that both the teacher interview and the pupil interview were piloted with appropriate test interview subjects. In addition, the interview was written and planned in cooperation with someone in the English department at the University of Stavanger. Furthermore, Norwegian was spoken with all the former pupils in order to make the interview situation more natural and for the interviewees to feel more comfortable. Two of the teachers also preferred speaking Norwegian in order to explain themselves clearly and to avoid any misunderstandings.

When it comes to the question of validity it is clear that this study is limited by the fact that the sample is small and therefore one cannot generalise or come to any definite conclusions. However, this study on changes and developments in oral EFL teaching in Norway since 1974 is based on four sound perspectives: Teachers, pupils, textbook materials, and the curricula from 1974. Although the sample is small, the validity of the study is strengthened since all these four perspectives on the matter are taken into consideration.

Moreover, because qualitative research often revolves around individual people’s personal views and intimate matters, research ethics should not be underestimated. For this research, the main issues of confidentiality between the samples and the researcher were that

the interview subjects remained anonymous and how the researcher should handle the recorded findings. All of the subjects in this research were ensured anonymity and pseudonyms will be used in the upcoming sections which present the data. The interview subjects were also informed that the interviews would be recorded and, during the interviews, no names were mentioned. They were also informed that all the data would be deleted when the research was finalised.

4.4 The interviews

The following provides an explanation of different interview styles, including the style that was used for this research. Detailed descriptions of the two different interview guides, as well as details around the piloting process, are also explained in the following sections.

4.4.1 Unstructured and structured interviews

The semi-structured interview is a mix of the unstructured interview style and the structured interview style. What characterises an unstructured interview is that no interview guide is planned ahead, only a few starting questions (Dörnyei, 2007:136). In an unstructured interview, in contrast, the idea is to get the interviewee to feel more relaxed than he/she would be in a more formal interview situation, and therefore the information provided by the interviewee is rich and detailed. In order to achieve this, the researcher should be as silent as possible during the interview and only ask questions of clarification and give reassuring feedback to help the interviewee talk freely (Dörnyei, 2007:136).

A structured interview has a prepared, intricate list of questions in the interview guide, which are to be covered thoroughly with the interview subject (Dörnyei, 2007:135). The advantage of conducting a structured interview is that it makes the answers of the different interviewees easy to compare. The disadvantage of a structured interview is that, compared to an unstructured or a semi-structured interview, one receives less elaborated data (Dörnyei, 2007:135).

4.4.2 Semi-structured interview

The research for this thesis is based primarily on semi-structured interviews with four teachers and four former pupils. A semi-structured interview is the interview form usually conducted in applied linguistics qualitative research. The interview form is, as the name explains, somewhat structured as the interviewer should have prepared a structure for the interview with some or many pre-decided questions or topics to ask the interviewee. That the interview type is *semi*-structured means that, even though parts of the interview are planned ahead, the interview is open-ended and the interviewer can ask other questions than those prepared (Dörnyei, 2007:136).

A semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to ask questions of clarification to check his/her own comprehension of the interviewees' answers and to ask questions to make the interviewee elaborate on certain issues. For instance, if the interviewee is talking about something very interesting that the interviewer had not thought of discussing in advance, the interviewer is able to ask follow-up questions about the issue to help make it relevant for his/her research.

A semi-structured interview is appropriate for research where the researcher has a somewhat good overview of a topic, so that he or she is able to form extensive questions about it in advance. This interview form is suitable for those who do not wish to use 'ready-made response categories that would limit the depth and breadth of the respondent's story' (Dörnyei, 2007:136). One needs to prepare an interview guide for a semi-structured interview, which is usually piloted in order to secure the quality of the interview.

4.4.3 Pilot interviews

Two pilot interviews were conducted in order to test the structure, length and question comprehension of each interview guide. Piloting the interview guides was important for the reason that 'a good interview guide requires careful planning followed by some piloting. A few trial runs can ensure that the questions elicit sufficiently rich data and do not dominate the flow of the conversation' (Dörnyei, 2007:137).

The pilot samples were, like the interview samples, chosen out of convenience. The pilot samples were one teacher and a former pupil who were easily available for the researcher through personal contacts. The pilot sample for the teacher interview was a teacher

with three years of teaching experience. The pilot sample for the pupil interview was someone who had attended lower secondary school during the *M74* curriculum. It was important for the researcher that the pupil chosen had attended lower secondary school as long ago as possible. This was in order to check if it was possible to remember enough and answer the questions adequately. The pupil in question had attended lower secondary school from 1977 to 1980.

The pilot interviews proved very helpful for the process of fine-tuning the interview guides. During the piloting of the teacher interview guide, the subject of correcting pupils' oral errors came up and it was decided that adding a question on how the teachers would correct pupils' oral errors was necessary, as this was an aspect of teaching oral English that had been overlooked in the original interview guide. A few of the questions were also rephrased to ensure that the researcher would not have to explain questions after asking them.

When piloting the pupil interview guide, it was important to check if being able to remember details about one's English lessons in lower secondary school was possible. It was therefore necessary to pilot the pupil interview guide with a pupil who had preferably attended lower secondary school during the *M74* period. The pupil who piloted the pupil interview guide started lower secondary school in 1977 and had few or no problems remembering oral English in class and was able to provide sufficient answers to all the questions. The pupil interview guide was not altered after the pilot interview.

4.4.4 Teacher interview guide

The interview guide for the four teachers was constructed in order to find out how the teaching of oral English had changed and developed and how teachers had taught oral English over the four latest Norwegian national curriculum periods: *M74*, *M87*, *L97* and *LK06*. The questions for the teachers were organised into eight categories with the exception of the interview with the *LK06* teacher, where there were seven categories (see Appendix 1).

The first category was created to get an idea of the teachers' *background* as a teacher, but also to start off the interview with personal, easy-to-answer questions because, according to Dörnyei (2007:137), 'If the interviewees feel that they can do themselves justice when answering these initial questions, this will make them feel competent, help them to relax and consequently encourage them to open up'. Some examples of the questions asked in the *background* category are: 'When did you start teaching English at the lower secondary school level?' and 'What kind of education do you have (generally, and in English)?'

The interview guide then turned to asking about the curriculum during each period and the teachers' use of the curriculum. The idea behind this category was to check if the importance of staying true to the current curriculum had changed over the years. An example of a question from the curriculum category is: 'Did the school management stress using the curriculum in a specific way?'

The next category, *classroom language*, was included in the interview guide to gain an understanding of the language pupils were exposed to. A question of what language was predominantly used by the teachers was therefore asked and a follow-up question was why, and in which cases, they decided to speak Norwegian.

It was also interesting to map the development of available teaching materials. This is especially important as technology has advanced since the 1970's to a large extent, especially in western societies. Questions about available materials and technology were added to the interview guide with these technological changes in mind, e.g.: 'What kinds of materials did you use in connection with oral activities?', 'What kinds of audio-visual aids/technology did you have?' and 'How often did you use them?'

The largest category in the interview guide was *teaching methods/activities*. This was the category which contained the largest number of questions because finding out what methods and activities that had been used when teaching oral English is one of the most important aspects of the research question: 'How did the teachers teach oral English in each curriculum period?' The teachers were asked which activities were the most popular among the pupils, if the activities that involved speaking were very controlled, or whether they allowed the pupils to be creative. They were also asked, for example, about what kind of activities worked best for teaching oral skills.

The *classroom organisation* category was focused on determining how pupils were organised during oral training in class, as the matter of teaching in plenary or dividing the pupils into pairs or groups might have changed over the years. Some examples of the questions in this category are, 'When teaching oral skills, how did you usually organise your pupils?' and 'In your opinion, which is the best way of organising pupils when teaching oral skills?'

It was also interesting to ask questions concerning what methods were used in order to assess pupils' oral English in the different periods since these are elements of the teaching of oral English that might have changed a great deal. As pupils have been given both an oral and

a written grade in the English subject at the lower secondary level since 1997¹, it was important to find out what kinds of assessment the oral grade was based on in the teaching periods since then. The *assessment* category was the final category for the teacher representing the *LK06* period, as this teacher had only taught during the *LK06* curriculum and in no previous curriculum periods.

The final category in the teacher interview guide was intended for the teachers who had taught in lower secondary school for more than one curriculum period. The idea was to take as much advantage of their experience as possible. The interview therefore finished by asking the three teachers in question about how they felt their pupils' oral English had developed and changed and how their own teaching of oral English had altered or developed throughout the years they had taught in lower secondary schools. Questions asked included: 'What do you think has changed the most about oral English in the lower secondary school since you started teaching?', 'Do you think the level of pupils' oral English has changed over the years?' and 'Are there any teaching methods, activities or ways of organising that you have disregarded over the years?' (see Appendix 1).

4.4.5 Pupil interview guide

The pupil interview guide was constructed in order to find out how the former pupils had experienced oral English teaching in lower secondary school during each of the four curriculum periods. The interview guide consisted of eight categories. The first seven categories were the same as those in the teacher interview guide. The reason for using the same categories, and as a result asking similar questions to both the teachers and the pupils, was to simplify the process of comparing the findings. In addition, using the same structure for both interviews proved to make sense as the teachers' and pupils' answers to the questions would complement each other.

Similarly to the teacher interview guide, the pupil interview guide began with simple easy-to-answer *background* questions, e.g. 'When did you start lower secondary school?' and 'What do you remember most about oral English in lower secondary school?' This was followed by a question on whether the pupils were made aware by their teachers of the curriculum in force during their time in lower secondary school, and a question on how much time was spent on oral skills compared to other English language skills, such as writing. It

¹ Oral and written language were most often assessed in a combined continuous assessment grade before 1997.

was interesting to find out if the number of oral activities and the amount of oral training had increased since the 1970's, as this was one of the researcher's hypotheses.

The category that followed was that of *classroom language*. The purpose of asking the pupils questions concerning how much English their teacher spoke and whether they found it difficult to speak English themselves during class was to find out if the amount of English spoken in Norwegian English lessons had changed over the years. Whether pupils have found it difficult or easy to speak English during class may depend on the class environment as well as the pupils' capabilities. It was interesting to find out if the pupils have generally felt more comfortable about speaking English in class in recent years, or whether they were more eager to speak English when it might have been considered a more exciting subject for the pupils during the 1970's.

When it came to *teaching materials* and *oral activities/methods*, it was of interest to establish what kinds of different teaching materials the pupils had experienced when they were taught oral skills over the years, as well as the different kinds of activities and methods their teachers had utilised. The former pupils were asked the following examples of questions in these two categories: 'Which materials/aids do you feel were the most effective for the development of your oral English skills?', 'What kind of oral English teaching methods/activities did you most enjoy when being taught oral skills?', 'Were the activities that involved speaking very controlled or did they allow you to be creative?', 'What did you prefer?', and 'Were your skills/abilities taken into consideration when you were given oral activities to do, or was everybody given the same level of difficulty?'

It was also interesting to ask the pupils how they remembered being organised, i.e. whether they were taught oral skills in plenary, in groups, or in pairs during oral activities and practising oral skills. The issue of *classroom organisation* is one that has changed in many subjects over the years and it is therefore interesting to see how it has changed in the English subject, especially when it comes to oral English practice.

When it came to the category of *assessment*, the pupils were asked questions concerning their perception of how their teachers had set their oral grades. Although oral presentations are often nowadays the basis of the oral grade, they were not common in Norwegian lower secondary schools until the late 1990's. It was therefore of interest to find out what the pupils' perceptions were of how these could influence their oral grade.

The final category, *teacher competence*, was inspired by the Danish scholar Christian Jensen, who has conducted research which revealed that pupils might interpret a teacher's dialect or Norwegian accent, mixed with his or her oral English, as lack of competence,

although the teacher might be an excellent teacher (Jensen, 2011). ‘Did you consider your teacher’s oral English to be good?’ and ‘Did your teacher’s oral English have an impact on whether you considered him/her a good teacher?’ were questions asked in order to see if Jensen’s research was relevant not only now, but also since the *M74* curriculum was published (see Appendix 2).

4.5 Analysis of textbooks and corresponding materials

In order to better understand how the teaching of oral English in Norwegian lower secondary schools has developed since 1974, one textbook and its corresponding material from each curriculum period was also analysed. The analysis entails a general impression of the textbook and what methods it uses, as well as the total number of oral exercises provided by the textbook placed into suitable categories. This was done to find out how textbook materials have developed in order to get an impression of how teachers have taught English in Norway since 1974 through these materials, and to understand how pupils would have experienced being taught through these materials.

The books were chosen out of Lund’s (1997) bibliography of English textbooks that had been in use in the Norwegian elementary school since 1820 and out of convenience, depending on how available they were. The textbook materials that were chosen were: *On the go: 2 (M74)*, *English Now 2 (M87)*, *Search 9 (L97)*, and *Crossroads (LK06)*. All the textbooks were from the middle grade in lower secondary school, which was the 8th grade during the *M74* and the *M87* curriculum periods, and the 9th grade from *L97* to the present. The number of oral exercises in each textbook has been counted and will be presented in tables in the results chapter. These tables are organised from the category with the highest number of oral exercises to the lowest. The categories are explained in the next sub-section.

4.5.1 The categories used in the textbook analysis

The categories were created by the author after studying the four textbooks carefully. The categories are listed below:

1. Discuss/talk about given topic

2. Communication in order to produce written work
3. Explain/tell something (to partner/group/class)
4. Discussion
5. Share/present own work (for partner/group/class)
6. Listening exercises
7. Interview
8. Role play
9. Ask and answer questions (pair work)
10. Reading aloud (pair/group)
11. Game
12. Pattern drills
13. Practice pronunciation
14. Project work after each chapter (Search 9 only)

4.5.2 Difficulties in categorising

Making categories and sorting the oral exercises provided by the textbook was quite problematic as it was sometimes difficult to define the essence of an assignment given in a few words. Thus, some exercises might fit into several categories. There needed to be as many as 14 categories to gain a clear overview of what kinds of oral exercises the different textbook materials provided.

The author solved the issue of potentially fuzzy categories by choosing what part of the exercise would take up the most time. For instance, an exercise might be to pair up with a partner, write a text, and then read it to each other. As the writing part of the assignment would take up most of the time in this case, the exercise was put into the ‘Communication in order to produce written work’ category and not in the ‘reading aloud’ category. Several exercises were put into this category, not because they were oral, but because there was an icon, for instance two heads next to each other or a speech bubble that indicated that, even though the exercise was written, the pupils should work with a partner or group.

Another difficulty was the textbooks’ different use of ‘discussion’ as opposed to ‘discuss’. The two newer textbook materials often used the term ‘discuss’, whereas the older teaching materials had often used the terms ‘talk about’, ‘describe’ or ‘explain’. As the ‘discuss’ exercises were not always a typical discussion, where one argues for or against

something, these exercises were put in the ‘discuss/talk about given topic’ category. However, sometimes the pupils were told to discuss a topic and explain why they felt the way they did about the said topic. When the pupils were told to share their own opinions in these exercises, the exercise was put into the ‘discussion’ category together with other exercises, which clearly stated that the pupils were to plan arguments, give examples of arguments, and the pupils were sometimes instructed to take on roles and argue on behalf of those roles.

5. Results

As this thesis aims to map the changes made in the teaching of oral English since 1974, it was important to get first-hand information on how the teaching of oral English had been conducted in the four curriculum periods. This information has been collected by interviewing one teacher and one pupil from each period, in addition to analysing and counting the number of oral exercises in textbook materials from each period.

The first section presents the textbook material analysed from the eldest (*M74*) to the most recent (*LK06*), and ends with a brief summary. After this section, there follow four sections of interviews. In each section, a summary of the teacher interview and the pupil interview from the same curriculum period is presented.

5.1 Analysis of oral exercises in textbooks and corresponding materials

The present section analyses one textbook and corresponding materials used in lower secondary school from each of the curriculum periods from 1974, with a focus on oral exercises in the materials. The section starts with an analysis of the oldest textbook materials and finishes with the most recent to get a clear picture of how the teaching of oral English in Norwegian lower secondary schools, through textbooks and corresponding materials, has developed since 1974. The study of these materials is helpful in revealing how teachers have taught and how pupils have experienced oral English teaching since the *M74* curriculum. All the textbooks used in this chapter are from the middle grade in lower secondary school, which was the 8th grade during the *M74* and the *M87* curriculum periods, and the 9th grade from *L97* to the present. In each textbook and corresponding materials, the number of oral exercises have been counted and sorted into the 14 categories presented in section 4.5.1. These oral exercises are presented in tables that show the different oral categories in a numbered order from the highest number to the lowest, and with corresponding percentages.

5.1.1 *On the go: 2* (*M74*)

The *On the go: 2* reader and workbook were published in 1975 and were used during the *M74* curriculum period. The reader consists of 205 pages, 20 chapters, and four sections at the back

of the book (Songs, irregular verbs, glossary, and index of names). ‘Plans for the future’, ‘The laundrette’, ‘Australia’ and ‘Finding a hotel’ are some examples of the titles of different chapters. Each chapter has three texts divided into A, B and C. The texts build on each other and seem to be on a consistent difficulty level. After each text, there usually follows a list of glossaries, where some are translated, some are explained by a synonym, and some are explained by a definition of the word in English. All the texts are also followed by questions to the text and oral exercises. The reader is illustrated with several black and white photographs and drawings that are related to the texts and topics. It provides 92 oral exercises in total, of which the largest category, 36%, is pattern drills that usually follow a specific grammatical pattern. This indicates that *On the go: 2* is a textbook that is heavily influenced by the audio-lingual method (see section 3.3.3). The corresponding workbook is 141 pages long and consists of only written exercises for each text in the corresponding textbook chapters.

Table 1 shows an overview of the oral exercises in *On the go: 2*.

Table 1: Oral exercises in *On the go: 2* (1975)

Type of oral exercise	Number of exercises
Pattern drills	32 (36%)
Reading aloud (pair/group)	20 (22%)
Explain/tell something to partner/group	17 (18%)
Ask and answer questions (pair work)	15 (16%)
Interview	5 (5%)
Share/present own work (for partner/group/class)	1 (1%)
Game	1 (1%)
Discussion	1 (1%)
Communication in order to produce written work	0 (0%)
Role play	0 (0%)
Discuss/talk about given topic	0 (0%)
Listening exercises	0 (0%)
Pronunciation practice	0 (0%)
Total number of oral exercises	92

The majority of the pattern drills entail working together in pairs while using a specific pattern, for example:

X: How can they do a thing like that?

Y: What gives them the right to do so?

Follow the pattern.

X:

Y:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a) How can he do a thing like that? | |
| b) How can she say a thing like that? | |
| c) How can you say a thing like that? | |
| d) How can they say a thing like that? | |

The exercises that fall into the reading aloud category (22%) are most often dialogues that the pupils are instructed to read in pairs. In this textbook, the exercises that encourage creative speech entail telling stories to a partner, either by looking at some pictures, using certain phrases or key words, or retelling a story that they have read.

The category that includes the exercises where the pupils have to ask each other and answer questions in pairs usually involves one pupil asking given questions about a text and another pupil looking through the text for the answers. A variety of these exercises are getting the pupils to make up questions of their own about a given topic and asking and answering each other.

The interview exercises in *On the go: 2* are interviews where the questions are provided. The pupils are to work in pairs where one of them would ask the given questions and the other would, for instance, pretend to be a person from the text and answer the questions based on what they had learnt about this character through the text. The one exercise that includes sharing something with the class is to make up a story on how two people from one of the texts meet each other. The pupils are given keywords to help them create a story. First they are instructed to work together with a fellow classmate and practise telling the story to each other, and then they have to tell it to the class.

The one game provided by *On the go: 2* was called *coffee-pot* and it was a guessing game. One pupil was to think of a verb and then the other had to guess which verb the other was thinking of by asking questions that could be answered by 'yes' and 'no'. Like all the other exercises in this textbook, the pupils are given several examples of what questions they could ask their partner.

The one discussion exercise involves the pupils discussing whether it would be better if pupils came and went to school as they pleased. Here too the pupils are first given examples of the pros and cons, but in addition they get two large lists of positive and negative arguments to use for the discussion.

In general, the *On the go: 2 reader* contains few unstructured communicative exercises that encourage creative speech. As most of the oral exercises provide several examples of what to say, and the majority of exercises are pattern drills, one can argue that many of the oral exercises are structured.

5.1.2 *English now 2 (M87)*

The *English now 2 Reader* was first published in 1982, but a second edition, suitable for the *M87* curriculum was published in 1986 and this was used during the *M87* curriculum period. The reader consists of 145 pages, 17 chapters, a section on extensive reading called 'Reading for fun', a section of songs, and an alphabetical English-Norwegian wordlist. 'Letter from a bricklayer', 'Finding and getting a job', 'What is pollution' and 'What have they done to the rain?' are examples of the titles of the texts provided. The reader has several black and white photographs of the people the texts are about, as well as many drawings provided, most often as a visual illustration of the text. The texts are varied and differ from long and short texts to cartoon-like stories with several pictures containing short explanations and dialogues. In the margins, there are often small explanations of the people, places and other phenomena mentioned in the texts. Some texts are followed by a summary to help pupils better understand the longer, more difficult texts. Other material, in addition to the workbook, is a tape where all the texts and some of the songs are recorded, and a key where the pupils can check their answers.

The corresponding workbook consists of 109 pages with both written and oral exercises for each chapter. Explanations for the exercises are in Norwegian. *English now 2* contains the lowest number of oral exercises, only 39, of the four textbooks and corresponding materials studied in this section. The few exercises are, however, quite varied. As the *M87* curriculum had stated that the most important aim in the English subject was communication (see section 3.6.3), the book, despite the few oral exercises, seems to be influenced by the communicative method. There are only two pattern drills which were typical of the audio-lingual method, while there are many 'ask and answer' pair work

exercises, which one could argue provide communicative practice, despite the fact that some of the questions are provided.

Table 2 provides an overview of the oral exercises in *English now 2*.

Table 2: Oral exercises in *English now 2* (1985)

Type of oral exercise	Number of oral exercises
Ask and answer questions (pair work)	10 (27%)
Share/present own work (for partner/group/class)	7 (18%)
Communication in order to produce written work	6 (15%)
Discussion	4 (10%)
Reading aloud (pair/group)	4 (10%)
Role play	2 (5%)
Interview	2 (5%)
Pattern drills	2 (5%)
Explain/tell something to partner/group	2 (5%)
Game	0 (0%)
Discuss/talk about given topic	0 (0%)
Listening exercises	0 (0%)
Pronunciation practice	0 (0%)
Total number of oral exercises	39

The largest category of exercises (27%) entails two pupils asking and answering each other's questions. An example of such an exercise is when the pupils are given an overview drawing of a flat and are then asked to ask each other questions about it. For instance, one pupil asks 'Where are the chairs?', while another one answers 'They are in the living room'. The pupils are given two examples of what questions they can ask and how to answer them. In other exercises like this, all the questions are provided and the pupils are to take turns in asking and answering the questions.

The pupils are often encouraged to share their work with the class. Mostly, they are asked to present written work orally, either in pairs or alone. There are six exercises that are written pair work. To do these exercises, the pupils first have to communicate orally in English. Some of these exercises include making posters or writing letters. There are four

discussions in the workbook. In most of them, the pupils are allowed to prepare by answering questions and planning arguments. In some of the discussions the pupils are given different roles and are instructed to argue from the point of view of their character. The pupils are not asked to read aloud more than four times. Most often, this is a dialogue between two people.

In the two role play exercises, the pupils are asked to pretend to be waiters and customers at a restaurant and create short scenes that illustrate people polluting the environment. These exercises, which include role playing real-life situations, show how the book was inspired by the motto of the late 1980's: 'Doing things with words' (see section 3.6.3). For the two interview exercises, some questions were provided. The two pattern drills were exercises where the pupils were to produce sentences by practising prepositions and adjectives.

Two exercises encourage the pupils to tell their partner something. The first encourages telling him or her about an imagined work week that they have created in connection with the texts about work and jobs. The other is to give a reason why they do not want to join an organisation. The pupils could decide whether to tell the class, another pupil, or write a letter.

5.1.3 *Search 9 (L97)*

Search 9 was published in 1998 and was designed on the basis of and used during the *L97* curriculum period. *Search 9* is called a learner's book instead of a reader or a textbook and therefore has no corresponding workbook, as all the exercises follow each text. There are, however, both tapes and CDs connected to all the texts in the book and, in addition, a tape and CD with simpler texts for struggling pupils. As *Search 9* provides many of the texts in two versions, a regular and a simpler one, it caters for at least two ability levels in pupils. Compared to *English now 2*, *Search 9* shows more influence of the communicative period, with its many role plays, discussions and real-life speech exercises.

Search 9 has many coloured photographs and drawings, and is 320 pages long. These include nine chapters, a section of individual reading, a section that provides facts and maps of four English-speaking countries, a section that explains grammar, a section on phonetic spelling, and a wordlist. 'Growing up', 'Kings and queens', 'Sports' and 'Imagining India' are examples of the nine chapters in the book.

At the end of each chapter, there is an entire page devoted to project work, where the pupils are to work in groups with exercises that reflect the texts and topics of the chapters. The pupils are always given options, both for what to do and how to present their work. For instance, in the project work for the chapter called ‘The wild west’, the book suggests that the pupils could work with native Americans, Aboriginals, Samis, Intuits, Kurds, a famous person from the wild west, or several other topics. The book usually encourages the pupils to choose whatever way of presenting their topic they like, but the chapter on the wild west suggests the following: an interview, a debate, a poster, a survey, a slide show, or an exhibition. As the pupils have so many options, the project work is an exercise which is difficult to place in one category. This is why it has been given its own category, only featured in Table 3 below, which provides an overview of the types of oral activities in *Search 9*.

Table 3: Oral exercises in *Search 9* (1998)

Type of oral exercise	Number of oral exercises
Discuss/talk about given topic	23 (23%)
Communication in order to produce written work	17 (17%)
Explain/tell something to partner/group	12 (12%)
Discussion	12 (12%)
Project work after each chapter (<i>Search 9</i> only)	9 (9%)
Share/present own work (for partner/group/class)	8 (8%)
Listening exercises	8 (8%)
Interview	4 (4%)
Role play	4 (4%)
Ask and answer questions (pair work)	2 (2%)
Reading aloud (pair/group)	1 (1%)
Game	0 (0%)
Pattern drills	0 (0%)
Pronunciation practice	0 (0%)
Total number of oral exercises	100

The largest category of exercises is ‘discuss/talk about a given topic’ (23%). *Search 9* uses the term ‘discuss’ very often and is clearly influenced by its time, i.e. the communicative period

in that it often encourages creative speech. In the book, 'discuss' sometimes means just to talk about a given topic and it does not specify that one should argue one's case, but merely talk about it using one's own words. The pupils are also often told to discuss a topic that the textbook has not told them enough about, so it might be a challenge for them to properly discuss it. In these cases, the exercises have been placed in the 'discuss/talk about given topic' category. Sometimes, however, the exercises that use the term 'discuss' encourage the pupils to share their thoughts on a given topic and provide arguments for their opinions, or they are given provocative statements that are easy to provide an opinion on or to discuss, for instance 'girls are better at sports than boys'. If any of the 'discuss exercises' have proven to be real discussions and forming arguments, they have been placed in the 'discussion' category (12%). The second largest category of oral activities in *Search 9* is pupils having to communicate in order to produce written work (17%). These are group exercises, such as making a poster together, but also pair work that asked the pupils to cooperate on writing, for instance by making limericks together. Several of the exercises encourage the pupils to tell or explain something to a partner or a group. Examples of these are explaining what they think a person from a text looks like, saying why they enjoyed reading in a text, and explaining a sport they know well. The exercises that challenge the pupils to share or present something (8%) are usually to be done in front of the class. Often this is written work that they are to read aloud, or explaining why they enjoyed reading a text of their own choosing. However, in one case the pupils are told to make a short presentation about a newspaper for the entire class. This shows that oral pupil presentations had become part of the English lessons in the late 1990's.

Search 9 is the only textbook out of the four studied in this section that has specific listening exercises, such as fill-in-the-blanks exercises while the pupils listen to a text or a monologue, or look for the message in a song. Role playing parts of a story and performing a dialogue are two of the four role play exercises featured in the textbook. An example of the four interview exercises is pupils interviewing an adult and asking them about how their childhood was, for example about what games they played, if they watched TV, what kind of music they listened to, and about crime, pollution and traffic. In comparison to *On the go: 2* and *English now 2*, *Search 9* only has two oral ask-and-answer-questions-in-pairs exercises, whilst the two other textbooks had many. Both of these exercises ask the pupils to make questions about a given topic and text for each other and to ask and answer each other's questions.

There is only one exercise that has to do with only reading aloud. Reading something aloud is mentioned in other exercises, but was often followed by 'discuss' or 'explain'

something. Thus, these exercises have been put into other categories, as the reading part of the exercise is not the most time-consuming part. The *Search 9 learner's book* contains no games or oral pattern drills.

5.1.4 *Crossroads 9 (LK06)*

Crossroads 9 was published in 2014 after the revision of the *LK06* curriculum in 2013 and is being used in English teaching at the time of writing. The content of the book is divided into two categories: 'Enjoy reading' and 'Grammar'. The first section of the 'Enjoy reading' part contains information on how a text is built up and how to read poetry. This is followed by several poems, short stories, an extract from a novel, and cartoons. Most of the grammar section is in Norwegian and has several written exercises, but also some oral ones. The supplementary material includes a CD with all the texts, a webpage, an e-book version, and a version of the book with easier texts for struggling pupils. All the exercises follow the texts, and so there is no corresponding workbook. The textbook contains a few coloured illustrations and no photographs.

Table 4 provides an overview of the different kinds of oral activities in *Crossroads 9*.

Table 4: Oral exercises in *Crossroads 9* (2014)

Type of oral exercise	Number of oral exercises
Discuss/talk about given topic	23 (28%)
Communication in order to produce written work	17 (21%)
Explain/tell something to partner/group	14 (17%)
Discussion	8 (11%)
Share/present own work (for partner/group/class)	8 (11%)
Role play	6 (7%)
Interview	2 (2%)
Pronunciation practice	2 (2%)
Pattern drills	1 (1%)
Reading aloud (pair/group)	0 (%)
Game	0 (%)
Listening exercises	0 (%)

Ask and answer questions (pair work)	0 (%)
Total number of oral exercises	81

The largest category of oral exercises in *Crossroads 9* is ‘discuss/talk about a given topic’ (28%). Also here, distinguishing between ‘discuss’ and ‘discussion’ was problematic, but the author has used the same principles as with *Search 9*.

Almost all of the exercises are communicative and entail discussing a topic, telling a partner/group/class why one enjoyed a text, poem, explaining grammatical rules orally, or communicating with a partner or group in order to produce a text. The discussions are unstructured and the pupils are always encouraged to make up their own arguments. No examples are given. The pupils are told to discuss, for example, the issue of Mexicans crossing the US border to find jobs and the advantages and disadvantages of imprisoning juvenile offenders.

The role play exercises encourage real-life communication. Some examples are making a role play about two parents talking to their two children, who have done something wrong and who are trying to make up good excuses for their actions, and a role play that features Brits and Americans misunderstanding each other because of language differences. An example of one of the two interview exercises in the book is: ‘Interview a classmate about his or her life. Write down questions beforehand. Some keywords: *Family, friends, education, finances, future, dreams.*’

This is the only one of the four books studied that includes the ‘practice pronunciation’ (2%) category of exercises. Though there are only two, these exercises specifically encourage the pupils to practise both pronunciation and intonation. The exercises are located in the grammar section of the book and encourage pupils to read and understand the phonetic alphabet, ask the teacher how to pronounce a word, and then practise the words in pairs.

There is one pattern drill in *Crossroads 9*. The exercise is located in the grammar section of the book and tells the pupils to practise in groups, asking for something with appropriate intonation, and to follow the intonation pattern explained in the grammar section for asking a question.

5.1.5 Summary

This section has thrown light upon the changes in the English teaching textbooks and their corresponding materials through the four curriculum periods. All four textbooks and corresponding materials are clearly influenced by their time and the national curriculum that was in use when they were published.

On the go: 2 was influenced by the audio-lingual period in that it had many oral pattern drills (32 out of 92). This was also the textbook that included the most oral exercises that had to do with simply reading something aloud. In the other books studied in this section, the reading aloud exercises were usually followed by an additional oral exercise that encouraged creative speech.

English now 2 was influenced by the communicative period despite the fact that it provided the least number of oral exercises (39). These exercises were, however, varied and there were many communicative exercises, though somewhat structured. This book contained only two pattern drills, which represents quite a drastic change from the 32 pattern drills in *On the go: 2*.

Search 9 showed even more influence of the communicative period. The oral exercises were varied, with role plays, discussions and real-life speech exercises. The book also had project work exercises at the end of each chapter, which encouraged the pupils to take charge of their own learning, as they could decide for themselves what to do and how to present their work.

Crossroads 9 was different from all the other books in that it contained no photographs (only a few drawn illustrations), and no examples of how to conduct oral exercises. It can therefore be argued that this is the most challenging textbook material for pupils of the four studied.

5.2 The interviews

This section provides a presentation of the findings that were collected through eight semi-structured interviews. One teacher and one pupil from each curriculum period were interviewed and the interviews are presented in chronological order (from the earliest to the

most recent curriculum). This section starts with the teacher and pupil from the *M74* period and ends with the teacher and pupil from the *LK06* period.

5.2.1 *M74* period

Grete (M74 teacher)

At the time of the interview, Grete had been working as a teacher since 1979, had been teaching English since 1982, and had just retired from her teaching post in the summer of 2015, i.e. she had 33 years of English teaching experience. She had studied at the teacher training college in Stavanger in 1975 and continued with a year of studying music and a half-year course in PE and Christianity in Kristiansand. She had studied to become an English teacher at the University in Stavanger whilst working as a teacher. The course was part time and lasted two years. She explained that the education partly prepared her for teaching oral English as she had what she called a ‘methods-teacher specialist’, who taught her how to teach the different aspects of the English curriculum. However, a good deal of the course was reading British and American literature, which she did not feel helped make her a particularly better English teacher, as it was not a big part of the current curriculum. She summed up that she could have wished that the methods lessons focused more on teaching oral English, but that the education prepared her quite well in that respect.

Concerning the use of the *M74* curriculum, Grete explained that, as they had to be aware of the aims of the English subject, they had to use the curriculum when planning their lessons. At the same time, the textbooks they used were based on the curriculum and so the focus was more on following the textbooks when teaching as opposed to following the curriculum. She elucidated that the school management did not stress using the curriculum in a specific way, but that the management trusted the teachers to follow the approved books in class.

When asked about how much time was spent in class on oral skills compared to reading, writing and grammar training, Grete replied: ‘In those days, oral skills were not as important as they are today’. She continued by explaining what kinds of activities they usually did in class. These included reading a text, translating the text and asking the pupils questions about the text to make sure that they understood it. The pupils could also listen to the recorded text to train intonation.

In most of Grete's lessons during the *M74* curriculum, she spoke Norwegian in class. However, she spoke English when preparing her pupils for a text, the readings were in English, and when she talked about the text with her class after reading it, she would speak English. However, often or most of the time she would translate what she said in English into Norwegian. This was because the pupils had not been taught English for that many years and, in addition, they did not have a sufficient vocabulary required to understand only English speech. Her pupils also spoke mostly Norwegian in class except for when they were expected to speak English, which was when reading a text aloud and answering questions about it. It was not particularly challenging to get the pupils to speak English in class. Although Grete considers today's pupils to be better English speakers than her pupils in the early 1980's, she had not experienced it to be more challenging to get the pupils to speak English in class before compared to now. Through all of her years of teaching English, Grete has seen that there are always some students who are more difficult to get to speak, either because they do not have the interest, are afraid to make mistakes, or consider themselves to be bad speakers. At the same time, there are always pupils who enjoy speaking English. In order to make speaking in class less scary for the pupils, Grete did her best not to correct her pupils harshly in plenary, but instead tried to do it in a subtle and comfortable way.

When it came to available teaching material at the time, Grete had access to a textbook, activity/workbook, audio recordings, music, films, pictures, overhead projector, slides projector for showing pictures, and what she called a 'spritduplicator' (Spirit/fluid duplicator), because she did not know the word in English. The duplicator was used to copy original, hand written sheets of paper for an entire class. In her lessons she most often used the textbook, the workbook, and audio recordings. She would sometimes play a pop song aloud in class as a listening exercise, give the pupils the lyrics of the song, and have them translate them into Norwegian. She explained that they got their recorded material from NRK (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) radio. She would very seldom use films and pictures in her classes. If she used films, they were mostly musicals or teaching materials made by NRK. If a film in English was used in class, she used Norwegian subtitles. One of the schools Grete was working at in the early 1980's had a language lab, which was often used when it was new. However, Grete explained, it was only used for a few years as something often went wrong with the technology and it was too difficult for the school to keep it running, and so they eventually stopped using it.

Listening activities were among the most important oral teaching activities Grete used during the early 1980's. Recordings and music were a big part of the listening activities. The

only form of speaking activity used in those days was 'listen and repeat' or choral exercises where the pupils were to repeat what the teachers said. These activities were constructed to train oral intonation and correct pronunciation. Speaking activities, such as discussions and communication exercises, were not applied by Grete in her English lessons at that time. When Grete was asked why speaking activities that included real-life communication and creative speech were not part of the lessons, she answered that this was not only because the pupils were not able to practise them, but that the focus was not on real-life, creative oral activities. The focus was on being able to read a text and understand it. When asked if she believed that these English lessons would improve the pupils' communication skills in English, she answered 'no'.

When Grete was asked about which oral activities were the most popular among the pupils, she did not have a specific activity in mind, as that really depended on the pupils. However, the least popular, or the most dreaded, she did remember, was having to stand up and speak in front of the class, or write something on the blackboard.

The oral presentation was something Grete started doing with her pupils in the 1980's, but she could not remember exactly when. The 'presentations' were a sort of mini-talk where they had to prepare about half a minute of speaking, and some pupils dreaded it. She would never push her pupils particularly hard, which was something she stressed. She did not want to make the exercise scarier than it had to be. They could decide for themselves whether they wanted to stand next to their desk or in front of the class.

When asked about which activities work best for teaching oral skills, Grete replied:

In many ways I think that any teaching method would work if you have established a good, confident and relaxed relationship between yourself and the pupils. If you are able to make them understand that you care, that you are not just looking for the mistakes they are making, if they understand that you want them to achieve the best, in many ways I think it does not matter. Because there are different teaching methods, and pupils are so different, that you can't only use one, you have to use several, trying to meet the different types of pupils because some learn by using their eyes, some use their ears, some use their hands and some like to move their bodies. So you can never only use one activity, because one activity will not work for everyone.

'Activities where pupils are made passive. I do not believe in that' was the answer given by Grete when asked about oral activities that were not effective for oral English

training. Grete explained that the pupils had to do something, not just sit and listen; oral activities should activate the pupils in some way, for instance either by taking notes, answering questions, or fill-in-the-blanks exercises. She further talked about how the oral activities during the *M74* curriculum were constructed. She explained that the activities used in those days were very much structured and did not challenge pupils to speak creatively and use their own words. The activities in class did not cater for different ability levels among the pupils; all the pupils in Grete's class were expected to accomplish the same activities. However, the pupils who struggled most with the English subject and language were taken out of the class and were taught English in a more simple way than the rest of the class.

Grete mainly taught oral activities in plenary. Nevertheless, she would sometimes organise the pupils in pairs. This was, for instance, to get the pupils to read to each other and translate a text if the activity book suggested it. Grete then explained that the best way to organise pupils when conducting oral activities was in small groups with just two or three pupils, and have them sit together and speak English. Norwegian was not allowed. When asked if she found it important to organise groups so that everyone was comfortable, Grete replied that she would always consider, for instance, if the class had a problem with bullying, when dividing her pupils into groups. In addition, she said: 'I always try to make them understand that your best friend is not necessarily your best partner in class'. A neat trick that Grete had was not to interfere with the pupils, but walk around and listen to the groups that were the furthest away from her. This way the groups did not know when she was paying attention to them and she could gain a more realistic view of her pupils' language abilities, as they did not know that she was listening to their English skills.

Pronunciation, reading aloud and being orally active in class were the factors that decided Grete's pupils' grades during the *M74* curriculum. When she started doing the mini-talks with her pupils in the 1980's, they were assessed and given a grade for these. Grete's view of the mini-presentations was that they were quite important as it was a creative type of assessment, something that the pupils created on their own. However, she explained that most pupils had probably got help from someone at home while making their presentation. As it was not common at that time to ask pupils questions about their presentation, as they usually had just memorised what they were going to say, it did not really reflect their oral English competence.

Grete did not remember her pupils having oral exams during the *M74* curriculum. When asked about what her views on today's lower secondary school final oral exam were, she started answering by telling a story about one of her former pupils, who had talked to her

once about how English today was just social studies in another language. Grete continued by explaining that today the pupils are expected not only to speak English correctly, but also to present a topic and discuss it in a very mature way. Today's final oral exam is not just an exam in the English language. It is so much more and it is very demanding. When asked if she found the exam too demanding, she answered that at least for the higher grades it was expected that the pupils were very mature, and she added: 'Sometimes I am afraid that we forget that they are only fifteen, sixteen years-old. Children. Not adults'. Grete explained that:

For a final grade, the pupils should not be penalised for a mistake considering facts, but (the examiner) should focus on the way they (the pupils) speak English. It is an *English* oral exam, not a social studies oral exam! I really think that it is the language part of the exam that should be stressed.

When Grete talked about changes since she had started teaching, she explained that she felt as if English was the subject that had changed the most in her years of teaching compared to all the other subjects. During the *M74* curriculum period, Grete had taught English almost in the same way as she had been taught English herself. She felt that the English subject during the 1970's was very old fashioned. However, since the mid 1980's, it had developed and was now one of the most modern school subjects, as it had followed time and had developed along with the rest of the world. The English subject really reflects how we use the English language today and therefore English is the most important subject in school. She continued by explaining that when we are abroad, we use English. When we search for something on the Internet, we use English. In general it does not matter how good you are in mathematics or science if you are not able to make yourself understood in English, oral and written. Many Norwegians nowadays use English as their first language when they are at work. Grete said that the English subject has changed so much by following time. It has developed together with the rest of the world and today's textbooks and workbooks reflect the society we live in. Because of this, Grete felt that her pupils' attitudes towards English had changed for the better over the years. Today they know that they are going to need to know the English language as well as possible.

Grete also said that she could not remember the last time she had asked a pupil to read a paragraph and translate it. Now she would ask her pupils to read a text at home and then come to school and discuss the text, using creative language and being active. Also, she had stopped focusing on certain aspects of the subject. For example, previously all pupils had to

speak RP (Received Pronunciation) English, but it was acceptable to speak with an American accent as long as they had a private American influence in their life. In her last years of teaching, Grete never focused on what type of English her pupils spoke, as long as they spoke in an understandable way.

Grete finished off by telling a story about her son who, when he was only three years old, got 'The Lion King' on VHS in English, with no subtitles, and how he started learning English from that point on and in many ways became bilingual. She continued by explaining that today this was almost the norm for all people as there is so much English language influence through music, television, Internet, and even gaming. This was one of the biggest changes pointed out by Grete. She also added that in her final years of teaching, she spoke English in her classes consistently and demanded that her pupils did the same. Finally, she added that what has revolutionised the English subject is modern technology, both in how it influences the pupils from an early age, and also because it is much easier to use for a teacher compared to, for instance, the language lab, where the technology was so difficult. Today it is not difficult putting on a video clip, a movie, a song on the projector and computer, which have become common in all Norwegian classrooms.

Ola (M74 pupil)

Ola started lower secondary school in 1977. At that time the compulsory elementary school was nine years, which means that lower secondary school was from 7th to 9th grade. Ola and his classmates were never made aware that there existed a curriculum, and *M74* would not have meant anything to 13-year-old Ola.

A good deal of time was spent on oral English in Ola's English lessons in the late 1970's. The aspect of oral English that Ola remembered the most about from his time in lower secondary school was reading aloud in front of the entire class: 'Sitting in a row, reading aloud, with everybody listening. It was the only thing that we did, in connection with oral English'. The oral activities were not exactly varied. The oral training consisted very much of reading aloud from the textbook. Ola estimates that about 40% of the lessons were devoted to reading aloud and to a small extent answering some questions about the texts they read.

The teacher that Ola had most of the time in lower secondary school spoke just as much Norwegian as she spoke English in English lessons. This was because of the very different competence levels in his class. Many of the pupils would not have understood what was going on during the lessons if the teacher had spoken only English, and so she would

often translate from English to Norwegian. When talking about something that did not have to do with the English subject, for instance if the teacher was giving messages about other aspects of school, it was always done in Norwegian. The teacher definitely did not make it a priority to always speak English. Ola did not prefer his teacher speaking either language, Norwegian or English. He did not care. He was an average pupil with an acceptable vocabulary and had little issues with understanding the teachers' English, but he could not remember that he had any opinions on what language the teacher spoke. He added: 'I do not think I understood the importance of knowing the English language whilst in school. I did not like the subject because of the reading sessions'.

It is therefore not a surprise that Ola would most often speak Norwegian in the English lessons if he was not told to speak English. They were told that they had to speak RP English. Ola thought this made speaking English even more difficult as they did not have much influence of RP English and it was unnatural for them to speak it. Ola further explained that they were not really encouraged to speak that much English in class, but rather speak when they were told to, which entailed reading aloud and answering a question or two about the text. However, the pupils that had a better English competence were the most active, but that was mostly because the teacher would ask them more often than she would ask the less proficient pupils.

From Ola's personal perspective, over half of his classmates, including himself, did not enjoy speaking in class. But he admits that reading aloud and speaking in class were not really as bad for him as for the pupils who really struggled: 'Some pupils did not even know how to read and write in Norwegian, but they still had to read aloud in English. It was painful to listen to and I can only imagine how painful it must have been for them'. Ola talked about how he felt that making these pupils read aloud was the equivalent to the teacher bullying them, and he seemed bitter. He was convinced that the school system had made a big mistake by treating pupils who clearly had reading disabilities in this way. Ola never seemed to blame his teacher, but merely thought that she had conducted the English lessons in the way she was expected to by the school management: 'It was definitely bullying. These struggling pupils should have gotten tasks that suited their abilities and they should have been spared the humiliation of speaking English unprepared in class'. No one was given any different tasks or activities adjusted to fit their level of competency.

When it came to teaching materials, they had a textbook and a book with exercises. This was used in all of the lessons and was, according to Ola, not the most efficient way of developing oral skills as, other than the reading, the focus was on written English. The teacher

would also often use the blackboard or overhead projector. Ola could not remember the teacher using TV, music or recordings in the English classes, but he could remember them all being used at some point during lower secondary school, so they were definitely available for the teacher to use. The oral activities, other than reading aloud, were dictation, where the teacher read words that they had to write down in English and they had to answer quite easy, leading questions about the texts they read. Ola concluded by saying:

Very boring classes, but school was very boring, in general. At least compared to the impression I have of how my children's school experiences have been. Today's school focuses more on variation and the individual pupil. I would definitely have preferred today's modern English lessons.

When the interviewer asked Ola if there were any activities or teaching methods he enjoyed, the interviewer was surprised to hear that Ola admitted that reading aloud was not always so bad for him. If he ever managed to read flawlessly, he would feel a sensation of mastering the English language and this, of course, made the experience of reading better. However, he added that prior to having to read aloud each time, he definitely dreaded it and he did not read flawlessly very often.

Because of the excessive reading activities, most of the oral English tasks were structured. Even answering questions about the texts was in some ways also structured, as the teacher would often ask questions where the pupils knew the answer she wanted. In addition, a one-word answer was often sufficient, which was not very creative. Ola explained that they would teach correct pronunciation sometimes, but this was individually in class when they made a mistake whilst reading. When the interviewer asked if the teacher ever used choral practice as a method, Ola had never heard of it, but commented that it would be a good method, as everyone could then have practised together without anyone being singled out. As the teacher corrected the pupils every time they made a mistake, it was definitely humiliating for those who were stopped and corrected on every other word that they read. 'So much time was wasted in the lessons', he added.

All of the oral activities were conducted in plenary and Ola was highly convinced that English would have been a much less scary subject if this had not been the case: 'I would definitely have preferred practising my oral English in small groups or in pairs'. The focus on oral English was definitely more on reading texts and speaking with the right pronunciation and accent than actually being able to communicate.

Ola and his classmates' oral English was assessed and graded on the basis of the reading sessions and other oral activity in class. Other than this, there were only written assessments. Oral English was not even a part of the final exam.

Ola never experienced giving presentations in English. His personal view on the activity was that if presentations had been part of the lessons, these would have been more varied and the pupils' level of general vocabulary knowledge would have improved. He added that it would probably have been scary, but that it might, for some, have helped making speaking English aloud more natural and less scary. Ola added that today he speaks quite good English and is able to understand and make himself understood, but it is still hard speaking English in front of many people. He would not be comfortable presenting anything in English in front of many people at work and so today he would have liked presentations to be a part of the English lessons, as it would perhaps have made him used to giving presentations.

Ola definitely considered his English teachers' English to be good, even though they were different English speakers. One of them had a very posh sort of British English which Ola described as 'Oxford English', whilst the other one spoke more traditional RP English. Ola added that he probably thought they were amazing English speakers, maybe because he had little to compare them with. He was sure that his teachers' oral English had an impact on whether he thought they were good teachers: 'I thought the teachers were good teachers. I did not question how they treated us back then. This was just the way teachers were back then.' He continued to explain that teachers had much more authority back then than they do today and that they as pupils did not even think about being critical towards a teacher.

The factor that has contributed most to the development of Ola's oral skills is mainly his education. However, Ola is certain that he would have had much more knowledge about the English language had some changes been made to the teaching methods before he started lower secondary school: 'Pair and group work combined with different methods and activities would have benefitted my English more and I would probably have had a more relaxed relationship to the language'.

5.2.2 M87 period

Ole (M87 teacher)

Ole started teaching in 1988 at an upper secondary school in Hordaland. He had a BA in English and additional courses. Ole could not remember that his education had especially prepared him to teach oral English. When he attended a pedagogy course, he had his first practical teaching experience. Ole explained that in this first practice period, he had taught a class with many immigrants who had other languages than Norwegian and English as their first language. The class resulted in him getting a false impression of what oral English teaching was than what he had experienced when he started teaching at upper secondary school. However, Ole explained that in his English education, they had subjects like phonology and phonetics and he felt that it somewhat prepared him, at least when it came to teaching pronunciation. He could not remember being taught that much about didactics in English either, at least not that he could remember taking it into consideration when he started teaching. As this was a long time ago, he could not be completely sure because it was hard to remember.

Ole admitted to generally being the kind of teacher who did not pay much attention to the curriculum of any period. Because his teaching was often based on the teaching material provided e.g. textbook and activity book which was constructed to fit the *M87* curriculum, he did follow the guidelines of the curriculum in this way. He felt that he had discovered over his years of teaching which methods worked and which did not and had changed and developed his teaching on the basis of this. However, he acknowledged that he used today's curriculum to a larger extent than previous curricula, as the competence aims were definitely an important part of today's teaching. He could not remember the school management stressing how to use the curriculum, but was certain that his methods were not contrary to the schools' guidelines. He also added that he had been censored in each curriculum, but that he did not find that this had had much influence on his teaching methods. During the late 1980's and early 1990's, Ole claimed that there was more focus on writing than oral training as opposed to how it is today. He added that oral speech today is much more in focus than before and it serves more as a basis for written English training. Ole added: 'If you can express something orally, you can express it in writing'.

Ole's use of the target language when teaching had gradually increased during his years of teaching English. He considers himself to be a language model and speaks almost

only English in class and expects his pupils to do the same. He would use Norwegian especially in situation where he was teaching grammar as, he explained, an 8th grader would most often have difficulties understanding English grammatical expressions.

When it came to whether it was challenging getting his pupils to use English in class, Ole explained that he would say that his pupils were more of a challenge when it came to speaking English in the late 1980's compared to now. However, this was because they were not that experienced English speakers and were more insecure of themselves. To get a large group of children to speak only English is challenging in the beginning, even today. The key, Ole explained, is to make English speaking natural in one's classroom and never go out of character as a teacher and speak Norwegian. As long as the pupils were encouraged to always speak English in class, they would eventually get used to it and there would be no challenge.

Ole would almost never correct his pupils' speech in front of the class, but if he did, he tried as hard as he could to be subtle. If a pupil struggled with the pronunciation of a certain sound or word, he would have the entire class practise pronouncing it chorally. This way, no one was singled out. As far as Ole could remember, there were no set rules on how pupils should speak English. He remembered, however, that it was of importance that they were all consistent in using their chosen English accent. 'Not many pupils used American English back then, more of them do today'.

When discussing teaching materials of the *M87* curriculum period, as a new teacher Ole found himself bound to the textbook and the activity book provided by the school. This therefore characterised his teaching in the late 1980's. However, as he developed as a teacher, he started using more supplementary materials of his own choosing. He would also use music, mostly as a listening exercise, or just to bring some variation to the normal teaching.

An audio-visual aid which was often used in Ole's classes was the overhead projector. He would also use films, but more often than not he used the tape recorder. As the textbook came with a tape, where all the texts from the reading books were recorded, it was an efficient way of combining reading and listening. Through the recordings, the pupils would also hear different ways of speaking English. However, there was not much focus on dialects and accents during the late 1980's and early 1990's as most recordings were RP English or American English. When Ole did not use the recordings as an audio aid in his lessons, he would have the pupils read the texts aloud to each other in pairs, never in plenary. It was important for him to have the pupils read aloud in pairs because the most important part of English lessons is using the English language. By having one pupil read out loud for 29 pupils

to listen to, there was only one pupil using the English language. Ole had also had access to a language lab for a short period of time.

Ole spent some time in his classes during the late 1980's teaching correct pronunciation. He introduced his pupils to the phonetic alphabet and stated that 'I used it in the 1980's and I still use the parrot method, choral practice. The advantage here is that all pupils participate and everyone gets to practise pronunciation, but no one is singled out'. Other typical oral exercises that practised pronunciation would often be pair work with focus on pronunciation. This was, for instance, dialogues that were specially constructed in order to teach the many new and difficult sounds the English language presents to Norwegian pupils, for instance /θ/. Other exercises which were often executed in pairs or small groups were role play and information gap tasks and would most often divide the pupils in pairs. This, as well as most of Ole's oral exercises, was effective as it encouraged the pupils to make up their own sentences and be creative. He would also have discussions in small groups.

Listening exercises were also often used by, for instance, playing a Beatles song once or twice and having the pupils discuss the different words that they heard and the meaning of the song. When asked if translating lyrics and other texts was a method he would use during the *M87* curriculum, Ole stated that translation was not a method that he had used in his classes, at least not to a great extent. If it ever did occur, it would be translation exercises given in the activity book.

'Read the text and answer the questions exercises' from an activity book is an activity that Ole pointed out as less popular than others as he believed that the pupils found it to be very boring. A challenge with these types of exercises is that many pupils will not read the entire text, but merely look at the questions and try to seek out only the answers in the text, and therefore not really understand the text. Ole has experienced that the most enjoyable activities for pupils are the ones that include *using* oral language and that most pupils will find written activities to be duller. This is also the reason why most of the activities Ole uses in his English teaching today are oral activities.

The oral activity that Ole pointed out as unpopular and inefficient is listening to each pupil reading aloud. As previously stated, Ole would never have his pupils read aloud in class. However, in the very beginning of his teaching career, he was, as he himself stated, 'No better than any other teacher'. He had tried getting his pupils to read a text aloud in class. The activity, Ole quickly discovered, had no advantages. As the pupils were nervous and scared, they were not able to focus on the text at all. During the entire activity, they would only focus on when it would be their turn to read and not focus on the text. As they were not able to

focus on the text, they did not have a clue what it was about. Since it was clear to Ole that no one learnt anything from this type of exercise, he quickly disregarded it from his teaching.

Conversation groups is the activity that Ole today finds the most efficient when teaching oral skills. He explained that in this activity the pupils were told in advance what they were going to talk about in the activity groups and that they researched a theme, which was often something that they had already discussed in class. Ole would take four or five pupils out of class and talk about their topic. The pupils quickly acquired a wide vocabulary in connection with these topics and got to speak freely in a comfortable environment.

Ole catered for the different ability levels in class to a certain degree. This resulted in usually giving the more advanced pupils more challenging tasks and also letting them work with different exercises outside of class. Even though Ole could remember doing this, he did not do it often and admits that he probably should have done it more.

For classroom organisation, as previously stated, Ole mostly used pairs or groups as opposed to plenary exercises and activities. When asked about the best way of organising pupils for oral activities, he felt that pairs and groups was not necessarily the best way, as he would regroup his pupils several times during a class: 'Often you introduce something orally with the entire class and then you go from full class to pair work and from pair work back to full class to check different aspects of the teaching'. He added that his pupils would always be organised in pairs as he preferred the desks to be placed two and two together. This way he could easily switch from plenary teaching to short or long pair exercises.

"This is tricky. It was tricky back then and it still is" was the first comment Ole gave when answering how he would assess his pupils' oral skills. This was because pupils were often restricted to speaking English in class and even in small groups. Ole explained that he had to organise the pupils in pairs for them to feel safe enough to make a real effort to speak in English. He added, however, that if a teacher uses more role play and conversation groups, this encourages more spontaneous speech and will give you a wider impression of the pupils' oral abilities. He said: 'Back then, I think I can say that I often set an oral grade on a quite thin basis for some pupils'. Before the student presentations became usual, which according to Ole was not until after the *M87* period when computers and PowerPoint became common in Norwegian schools, he would mostly use role play, listening to pair work, and what the pupils managed to say in class as a basis to set an oral grade. He added that pupils' production of language in class should not really influence the grade, as pupils should not be punished for not daring to speak. Therefore, he would compensate by paying extra attention to the pupils

who did not speak in plenary when they were in small groups or pairs to get a broader basis to set their oral grade.

Today's traditional oral student presentations are something that Ole is very sceptical about and critical towards, both in an ordinary classroom grading situation and in the oral exam. He was pleased with a recent decision that had reduced the length of the student presentations in the oral exam from 15 minutes to 10 minutes, as many pupils would focus too much on the presentation part of the exam and forget to practise for the part that follows, i.e. the examination. In the examination part of the oral exam, pupils can be asked about anything from the entire English course and are expected to engage in a genuine and realistic conversation with the examiner. In the oral presentation many pupils will learn what to say by heart, but some might read everything from a script. Whichever way the pupils present a topic, Ole has often experienced that the language used by the pupils is not their own and therefore reveals that they have just copied something off the Internet. This has often revealed that the pupils do not know the subject that they are presenting, in addition to speaking with many words they do not understand. Ole also explained that he had witnessed many good presentations; these often had good visual aids, where the pupil seems to have everything under control. The pupil knew what he or she was talking about, talked freely without a script, and answered all the questions about the presentation correctly. However, when the examiner asked about the English subject's other topics, the pupils had not practised these at all. 'These are the biggest problems about oral exams'.

Despite of all this, Ole insists that the oral presentation still needs to be a part of the oral school exam because, when done properly, the pupils are able to learn how to make good presentations, how to structure their work, how to choose what is the most important within a wide topic, and how to reflect on their findings. If the pupils manage to do what is intended in the presentation, they will learn a good deal that is useful for their future. Ole added: 'but I am glad that the length has been reduced to ten minutes'.

Ole would always ask similar questions to those asked in an examination after a regular student presentation. This would be to check if they knew what some of the words that they had used in the presentations meant and if they understood the content of what they were presenting. He summed up that oral presentations have mostly taught the pupils to be good at allegedly giving good presentations and to look like as if they know what they are doing. However, it is most often when questions are asked, where the pupils need to use their own language in a more free way, that as a teacher you can truly identify their competence.

When summing up and talking about the biggest changes made in English teaching since 1988, when Ole had started teaching, he said that the focus of his teaching was now to a much greater extent on oral English than before. At that time, he would focus more on grammar and written English. However, even in a situation where he was teaching written English, for instance teaching sentence variation, he would always have oral English in the back of his head as he is certain that good written English will also result in better oral speech. He added that computers and other technology have made English an easier language to teach. ‘The difference between reading Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’ and seeing Martin Luther King himself perform the speech on a large screen in classroom is enormous’. In addition, the pupils use computers with spelling programs for their written English and so teaching spelling is another part of the teaching, together with reading texts aloud in plenary, that Ole has disregarded over his years of teaching.

Ole also added that in general the pupils’ oral and written English have become better and better during his years of teaching. His thoughts on why they are better today than before are that today’s youths are exposed to the English language all the time. Many young people read books in English that are printed and sold before the Norwegian translations, many play video games where they get to practise both oral and written English and, of course, social media are a big part of young Norwegians’ everyday lives. They learn the language in a natural way and that was not possible in the same way in the 1980’s.

Petra (M87 pupil)

Petra started lower secondary school in 1989. What she remembered most about the English subject was that she was not particularly good at it. She explained that thinking back to lower secondary school, she realises that she was not as bad as she then considered herself to be, but that her teacher had many demands and would often correct them, especially when it came to pronunciation: ‘We had to speak British English or posh English as I like to say. Even though it felt that I tried my hardest to get the pronunciation right, I always felt that it was never good enough’.

Petra was never, during her time in lower secondary school, made aware of the curriculum at the time, i.e. *M87*. At that time, the focus of the English lessons was definitely mostly on written English, but Petra could not remember how much time was spent on written English compared to oral. She could, however, remember that they often read aloud, both at

home and in class. Most often, the readings were homework and then they were checked in plenary in class if they had read the text.

The English teacher that Petra had during lower secondary school spoke only English during the lessons, as far as she could remember. She could not remember having any issues with understanding what he said which, according to her, confirmed the fact that she was probably better in English than what she thought of herself in lower secondary school. Petra was sure that this had to do with the fact that, because she was corrected for her Norwegian accent very often, she never felt that she mastered oral English. This was also the reason why Petra rarely spoke in English lessons, despite her teacher encouraging all the pupils to speak as much as possible. Petra also added that it was usually the pupils that were good at speaking who were asked to speak in class. Those who never spoke on their own initiative would often be asked to read aloud in class.

Petra's answer to what kinds of teaching materials she had experienced her teacher using in the English lessons was: 'The teacher was not a very creative person. I can only remember that we used the textbook and the workbook during lessons'. The books were not, according to Petra, efficient for teaching oral skills. The audio-visual aids the teacher had access to during this time were overhead projector, TV, and tape recorder. However, these had never been used in the English lessons.

The oral activities used by Petra's English teacher were very childish. They would practise counting, sing children's songs, and learn English rhymes and limericks. They would also have some choral practice, as the teacher was very fixed on correct pronunciation, intonation and accent. Petra explained that she could still remember her teacher spending a good deal of time teaching the pupils how to count and how to pronounce the number three. 'How important could it be to pronounce it perfectly?' she asked.

Other than this, they would role play if it was a task in the workbook. Social studies were not a part of the English lessons, such as Petra's children experience today. The focus was more on the English language itself. She was generally not a fan of any of the activities as she did not feel as if they taught her anything. However, she added: 'I disliked reading aloud the most because the length of the texts was too long for my abilities, which was not motivating, but rather the opposite'. Most activities were structured and the pupils were rarely encouraged to speak creatively and make up their own sentences, using their own words.

The oral activities, and almost all of the teaching in general, were conducted in plenary. Petra was not sure if any other way of organising would have been better, as they did not have any experience with group and pair work from primary school.

During her time in lower secondary school, Petra's oral skills were assessed on the basis of her efforts in class and the quality of her reading. When it came to presentations as an oral activity and the basis for assessment, Petra was very positive towards them. She could not remember them having presentations in lower secondary school, but explained that her son is currently attending lower secondary school and presentations are an important part of his education: 'When my son started having presentations, he would always dread it, but the more presentations he has had, the more comfortable he is with presenting and speaking English. She added that her son has learned a good deal from the presentations.

Petra considered her teacher's oral English to be very good and was never critical toward his abilities as a teacher, but today she is certain that he was not pedagogically a good teacher. His oral English was, in Petra's words, very 'posh' and he wanted his pupils to speak exactly like him, which, Petra explained, 'was difficult because trying to imitate him felt forced and was awkward'. Finally, when answering what had contributed most to her development in oral English, Petra said that what she learnt in school had definitely formed the foundation of her English, but that she has had a natural development through travelling.

5.2.3 L97 period

Marit (L97 teacher)

Marit started teaching in lower secondary school in 1999 and had taught English at the same school ever since. She had a Bachelor's degree in English and additional courses. Other than English, Marit taught German, Religion and Social Studies. When asked about how her education had prepared her to teach oral English, she explained that they had had didactics courses at university. In these courses, they were taught both practically and theoretically how to teach both oral and written English.

As the subject of the relevant curriculum (L97) was discussed, Marit disclosed that she had always used the curriculum in relation to her teaching since she started teaching and until the present. She deliberated, however, that the curriculum during L97 was mostly used when making a half-year-plan and in relation to the final exam for 10th graders, who were finishing lower secondary school. It was also when the exams were discussed that the school management would stress upon the teachers the use of the curriculum and following it down to the very last detail. This was, of course, in order to make the pupils well enough prepared

for the exam, both the oral and the written exam. Marit continued to say that she therefore definitely focused more on using the curriculum when she taught a 10th grade.

During the early years of L97, there was definitely less focus on oral teaching than there is today. Marit estimated, however, that the difference was not striking and guessed that during her early teaching years she spent about 40% of time on oral teaching activities and now it was about half of the teaching. She summed up by saying that today oral and written English are given equal teaching time, but added that oral language might even have more teaching time than written.

When asked about what language she predominantly used in her classroom during L97, Marit answered: 'Now I always speak English! But that is because the pupils nowadays actually understand what I am saying'. She explained that back in, for instance, the year 2000, pupils came from primary school and were definitely not used to having their English teachers speaking only English, 'but by 10th grade, they were'. She added that back then, at least in the 8th and parts of the 9th grade, she would translate, explaining something first in English then in Norwegian. When teaching grammar, she would speak almost only Norwegian as the grammar was often difficult for the pupils to understand and to add the English language on top of that would have been too difficult. Marit still mostly teaches grammar in Norwegian, but not for her 10th graders.

Marit has always encouraged her pupils to speak mostly English in class. Marit added that today's pupils are much better English speakers than they were 15 years ago and so the amount of English spoken by her pupils, as well as their English proficiency in her classes, has increased every year since she started teaching. Today her pupils speak some Norwegian in the 8th grade, but in the 9th and 10th grade they speak little to no Norwegian in the English classes. However, Marit feels that getting the pupils to speak in class is just as problematic today as it was 17 years ago: 'Getting pupils to contribute orally in class has everything to do with class environment', she explained. Marit would often solve this problem by dividing her classes into suitable groups where it would not be as scary for the pupils to speak and practise their oral English. She added that a 'think, pair, share' exercise is a good method of getting the pupils to engage orally in class. When using this method, the pupils first sit by themselves and *think* about, for instance, a topic given by the teacher. Then they pair up and discuss the topic with a partner. Finally, they all share in plenary something of what they have discussed with their partner. When everyone has to do it, it is not so challenging. In addition, they have to prepare what to say in advance and they do not have to say more than a sentence if they do not want to.

Whether the pupil speaks English with an American or a British accent has never been important during Marit's teaching career: 'The most important part of oral English is fluency'. Marit would often use recordings of the texts from the textbook in her class and through these the pupils got to experience American, British and Australian accents. However, Marit stated that most of her pupils spoke American English, and they still do. She added that this is probably because young people mostly get their English language influence through American TV, music, and video games.

When it came to pupils' errors, Marit would never correct them in front of the entire class. She would always give them feedback individually if possible, or casually correct them by including the word they, for instance, mispronounced in the answer she gave the pupil.

In addition to very often using the recordings that followed the textbook, Marit would use the textbook and activity book, music, films or just small movie clips when teaching oral skills. She had access to a good deal of audio-visual aids as well: CD player, overhead projector, TV and a projector. When she had started teaching, there was no computer connected to the projector in the classroom, so for the first two years of Marit's teaching she used the overhead projector often, especially for grammar teaching. When computers came into the classroom, she also started using presentation programs, such as PowerPoint in her teaching. This was especially for introducing new topics. Marit would show a film twice a year. This was in connection with the mini-talk that the pupils had in each semester. To make it less frightening for the pupils, Marit had often chosen to divide the class so that the pupils only had to present to half the class. The other half would watch a movie that had something to do with the topic they were focusing on at that time.

For teaching oral skills, Marit often used role play or role cards (an activity where the pupils get a 'mission' from a card, but have to improvise what to say or make up lines on their own). Using role play as an activity could become a challenge in some classes as some pupils might not be willing to act. Marit would solve this by letting the pupils read the lines from the play in pairs or in groups and not have them perform in front of the entire class. After listening to a text in the textbook, Marit would often discuss the text in plenary and ask the pupils questions about the text to make sure they had understood it. These questions were easy to answer and often had to do with small details of the text, and they revealed which pupils were paying attention to the recording and which were not. Today, Marit explained, there is much more focus on asking questions that encourage pupils to use their own words and speak creatively.

Marit pointed out that most pupils were fond of role play, movies and discussions during the *L97* period. They were actually very good at discussions and she would often use them as an oral activity. To make a discussion activity easier for the pupils, she would give them role cards, explaining whether they should, for instance, be for or against a topic. This way the discussions were not personal and pupils were able to let themselves loose and produce a good deal of creative speech. Marit realised that she did not use this activity very often today. When explaining why this was so, she concluded that it was a result of so many new teaching methods and oral activities that had taken its place.

Most oral activities used by Marit during *L97* encouraged creative speech and were not structured, except for the role plays. However, here the pupils got a chance to be creative in a different way than through free speech, and they enjoyed this. Reading aloud in class was the oral activity Marit picked out to be the least popular among pupils: 'That, in addition to it not being efficient, is why I use the recordings that follow the textbook near to always'. She also added that the mini-talks that they have each semester are not a popular activity. However, the pupils were somewhat positive towards the activity as they understood that it was important in relation to the oral exam.

Marit taught correct pronunciation. Sometimes she would teach it using choral practice if there was a sound or a word many of the pupils struggled with, but mostly she helped them practise through individual feedback. Marit was certain that being fluent and having correct pronunciation were two of the most important aspects of the English subject.

During the *L97* period, Marit admitted not to have catered particularly to the different ability levels in her class. Something that she did do, however, was to give struggling pupils easier texts to read and she would also take them out of class to hear them read so that they would not have to dread reading in front of the entire class.

Marit was sure that some sort of role play activity is the best oral activity for teaching oral skills as it is an activity that can be very similar to real life, depending on the topic and situation of the activity. She was also certain that reading aloud was not a good activity for teaching oral skills, especially not in plenary.

When it came to classroom organisation, Marit would teach oral skills both in plenary and in small groups. Often she would have the class discuss and talk about a text in plenary, but sometimes she would use the 'think, pair, share' method, which varied the classroom organisation through the entire activity. When it was time to organise pupils for a mini-talk, she would usually have them do the presentations individually, but sometimes also in pairs.

Marit believes the best way of organising pupils for oral activities is in small groups as then everyone will get to speak and it will be less overwhelming than in a large group.

‘Presentation, reading alone with a teacher, and effort in class’ was the basis on which Marit set an oral grade during the *L97* period. Today she does not evaluate a pupil’s efforts in class as the pupils’ personality and how much oral speech they produce in plenary should not affect the oral grade in any way. ‘They are allowed to be shy!’, she stated. Marit was sure that pupils learn a good deal through oral presentations. What they learn is critical thinking, structuring, reading, speaking, speaking in a good volume and generally presenting something, which is something that they will need later on in life in both private and work situations. However, the most important reason why the oral presentation practice is so important in lower secondary school is because the pupils need to practise for the final exam in the 10th grade. Marit’s view of the oral exam that 10th graders have to take is that it demands a good deal of knowledge and maturity from them. She is certain that the exams are necessary, as knowledge about the different topics raised in oral exams is important for Norwegian pupils as, in her words, ‘Norway is a knowledge society’. A problem, however, is that there has been too much focus on the presentation part of the exam and less focus on the actual examination.

Although Marit has not taught English in lower secondary school for more than 16 years, the English subject has gone through many changes. The biggest changes, according to Marit, are that the schools are much more focused on adapting the subject to each individual pupil and giving individual feedback. Feedback has become much more important as the pupils are now much more aware of what basis they are graded on, as well as the fact that the schools today stress that pupils need to know the assessment criteria with reference to all situations of assessment. Another aspect of teaching that Marit focuses much more on today in comparison to before is to link topics discussed in English with other subjects, such as Religion, Social Studies and Norwegian. All subjects in lower secondary school are much more interdisciplinary today than they were 16 years ago. The news has also become more central in schools and Marit has often used recent news and highly-discussed news cases when introducing new subjects.

Reading aloud in plenary is a method that Marit has disregarded over the years. She would rather her pupils read in pairs or alone just for her. She also explained that she had, in recent years, focused much less on the traditional listening exercises, but was not sure why this was so. It was probably because so many other effective oral exercises had been invented since she started teaching and so the good old ones were slowly, but surely, forgotten. ‘The

subject's methods and different activities used in class are always under development', she added.

Marit was sure that the level of pupils' oral English had changed during her years of teaching. 'They understand the language much better and their oral English has improved greatly'. She also added that pupils have a somewhat better attitude towards the language as they acknowledge its use, especially in the gaming community, where chatting, and speaking in English is a part of their everyday life. The amount of English spoken in class by herself and the pupils has increased. Today, there is almost no Norwegian spoken in Marit's classes. The biggest influence on Norwegian pupils' oral English proficiency is, in addition to videogames, the Internet. Marit added and smiled:

Social media, chatting with people from all over the world and generally being influenced from a lot of media on a daily basis has made young Norwegians better English speakers. Unfortunately slang and SMS language have made its way into the written English, which is a problem. But that is not the issue we are discussing today!

Anders (L97 pupil)

Anders started lower secondary school in 1999. By that year the compulsory school in Norway had increased from 9 to 10 years. Lower secondary school was, therefore, from the 8th to 10th grade from the time that the L97 curriculum started being used, and it still is. The interview started off by Anders explaining what he remembered the most about oral English in lower secondary school. His reply was: 'Reading aloud is what I remember the most from oral English. This made oral English easy. It was easy to get a good grade when all you had to do was read'.

Anders and his fellow pupils were made aware of the curriculum and what was expected of them in the beginning of each school year. He explained that his teacher was a new teacher and that this was probably the reason why he focused that much on the curriculum and wanted his pupils to be aware of it. Anders estimated that about 40% of the lessons were spent on oral activities. The focus was generally on written English, especially grammar.

Anders' teacher spoke a good deal of Norwegian during the classes, which also resulted in Anders speaking mostly Norwegian. 'It would definitely have been better if he had spoken more English', Anders reflected. Despite the teacher speaking a good deal of

Norwegian during their lessons, Anders and his classmates were encouraged to speak as much as possible during class. Anders did not mind speaking English in class, but he was sure that both he and most of his classmates were happy when they did not have to.

The materials Anders mostly experienced in connection with oral activities were the workbook and the textbook, music, the overhead projector, and the blackboard. He enjoyed working with the music videos the most. The audio-visual aids that were available during Anders' time at lower secondary school were a CD player, tape recorder, TV, and the overhead projector. The audio-visual aids were used quite often, especially the TV. This was in relation to the music videos that Anders' teacher would often use in lessons. They would watch music videos that were popular at the time and this was therefore most of the pupils' favourite activity.

The activity consisted of watching the video and analysing it. They would, amongst other aspects, discuss the meaning of the lyrics and translate difficult words. The activity was conducted in plenary and many pupils would be active speakers during the activity. The activity encouraged a good deal of creative speech. The reason that so much time was used on the music video activity was that there was a definite teacher shortage during Anders' time in lower secondary school. This resulted in their English teacher becoming their music teacher as well. However, there did not seem to be enough time for both subjects. Anders' teacher would therefore combine the two subjects by including music in their English lessons, most often in the form of videos. Anders concluded that none of the activities were that efficient for teaching oral English, but that he definitely enjoyed analysing the music videos.

Besides the music video activities, the teacher would often have the pupils read aloud in plenary. The texts from the textbook were divided so that everyone had to read about the same amount of text. 'This activity was fine for me, but others struggled badly. One of my friends was bullied a lot by his classmates for being a bad reader', Anders explained. Different abilities were catered for, but only in written English. The aforementioned friend of Anders struggled with both reading and writing and so he would get easier written tasks, at least for homework. In addition, he got to do written activities on the computer and got a programme called 'clue' installed to help him with his writing. Another way the different levels of the pupils were taken into consideration was in relation to the homework assignments. These were divided into 'shall', 'should', and 'could' categories. Everyone, of course, had to do the 'shall' exercises, but the teacher did not expect the weaker pupils to do more than this. The 'could' tasks were added mostly to give better pupils some challenges.

Choral practice was also part of the oral activities Anders' teacher used. This was to teach pronunciation. The oral activity that Anders disliked was reading. Despite it being an easy activity, he did not learn anything from it as his only focus during the activity was on preparing for what he was going to read. This resulted in him, and others, not learning what the text tried to communicate.

Oral activities were always conducted in plenary. Anders would have preferred smaller groups some of the time. He imagined this to be safer for those who struggled and that they would probably have gotten more individual time with the teacher. However, he remembered that when they did have oral activities in smaller groups, he and his group members would speak Norwegian, despite being told to speak English. He was not sure why this was, but said the main reason was probably because they found speaking English unnatural and awkward to people to whom they always spoke Norwegian.

The oral grade in English was set on the basis of Anders' and his classmates' reading skills and oral efforts in class. Anders experienced having oral presentations in Norwegian, but never in English. In addition to having the new teacher, they also had English teachers who were not educated as English teachers. Anders believed that this was probably the reason why they never had oral presentations in English. 'As English is an oral subject, presentations would have been a good method of assessing. It is also a method that might help you prepare for your working future', Anders added. Luckily, Anders was not picked for an oral English exam: 'I would not have been even slightly prepared for an oral exam'.

Anders considered his teacher and his teacher's oral English to be good and was sure that these were interrelated. That he did not learn everything that he should have was something that he had not been that critical about. His time in the lower secondary school definitely made English seem as a subject of little importance in school. What Anders felt had contributed most to his oral English development was definitely not school. He is certain that English movies and TV-shows have been the biggest influence. Through these media you gain a good and varied vocabulary and correct pronunciation.

5.2.4 LK06 period

Anny (LK06 teacher)

Anny had just finished her education and had started teaching in lower secondary school in 2014. She had one and a half years of teaching experience and had therefore only taught

during the *LK06* curriculum. She had an education that consisted of a Bachelor's degree in English, a one-year programme in Nordic languages, and a one-year programme of didactics. The didactics course prepared Anny for teaching oral English to a certain extent, but many of the classes were cancelled that year and so the general impression of the didactics course was not that favourable from Anny's point of view. The books that they had to acquire for the subject, however, were good and Anny would still use them in her teaching.

The curriculum was an important part of Anny's teaching. She would base all lessons on the competence aims in the curriculum. The school management also stressed using the curriculum actively in relation to the teaching as the pupils had to go through everything listed in the curriculum in order to be prepared for the English exams.

Anny spoke mostly English in her classes. If she ever used Norwegian, it would most often be in relation to giving the pupils messages that were not related to the English subject or, especially for weaker pupils, for checking if they understood a task given in the English language. She would always expect her pupils to speak English as well. From Anny's experience, the issue of getting pupils to be orally active during class depended on the class and the classroom environment. She had experience with one class that was naturally very orally-active, where there was a good classroom environment. In this class, the pupils agreed that it was acceptable to try and fail and they always treated each other with respect. This went for all subjects, not just English. Although some pupils in the class were shyer than others, and therefore did not like talking in class, no matter the language, this class was definitely more active than the other class she had experience with. Despite the fact that this other class had many good English speakers, and many high level competency pupils, they were not orally active at all. The classroom environment did not allow them to be.

Anny had solved the problem of the passive class by giving them many oral tasks that were to some extent structured, as these were the types of oral activities they would prefer if they had to speak in class. She would also take all the pupils, individually, out of lessons to have them speak English just for her. What was interesting was that she had learnt through her individual conversation with her pupils that many would like to be more active in class, but that because nobody else was active, it was difficult. No matter how much effort she had spent convincing the pupils that they were not alone in wanting to speak more and explaining to them that if they just started being more active, others would follow, it never changed: 'A bad classroom environment is difficult to turn.'

Whether her pupils spoke American English or British English did not matter to Anny. However, she expected them to be consistent, both in reading and writing. Speaking English

with a Norwegian accent was, according to Anny, not an issue either. Fluency and vocabulary were the most important aspects of the pupils' oral English. However, she has had experiences with pupils who really wanted to speak perfect American or British English and, of course, she would help them achieve this.

Anny would use the textbook in relation to oral teaching, but she explained that the book provided by her school was very old and so, when the topic was, for instance 'pop stars', she would find her own sources. This was because the texts in the textbook were so outdated that the pupils did not even know who the famous pop singers were. She would also use the activity book and recordings, especially for difficult texts, such as 'Romeo and Juliet'. Anny had access to a Smartboard, computers, and a CD player.

Every semester the pupils would have a presentation, a mini-talk. The pupils did this every year and the lengths and topics for the presentations became longer and more complicated every semester. For instance, in the 8th grade the mini-talks did not have to last longer than three minutes and the pupils could decide for themselves what to talk about. In the 10th grade they would have to speak for a longer period of time and the topic might be, for example, *mysteries*. With this topic, the pupils decided themselves if they wanted to talk about the loch ness monster, Stonehenge, the Bermuda triangle, or any other mystery.

When not using the CD that followed the textbook, Anny would often read the text for her pupils, or the pupils would read it. How exactly the texts were worked with differed from class to class, as Anny would let her pupils decide how to go through them. Sometimes they would want her to read the texts. At other times they would want to read in pairs, groups or by themselves. What was interesting was that they would very often decide to read aloud in plenary one by one using the *popcorn reading method*, a method where you randomly call on pupils to read and they can decide for themselves how much they want to read or if they want to read at all. The popcorn method was her pupils' favourite oral assignment, for both active and passive classes. Anny would also use role play, movies and also had her pupils make their own movies: 'This was definitely a popular activity'.

Anny was sure that the pupils, especially in classes with a good classroom environment, do not like listening exercises where she reads a text or recordings, as they would rather read it themselves. Although some pupils dread the mini-talks and presentations, Anny had a general impression that the majority quite enjoyed them. For those that struggled with presenting the mini-talk, Anny would have them present for just her or a small group. Role play was the activity pointed out by Anny as generally not so popular for quiet classes

with a poor classroom environment, as they would not be able to let themselves loose and enjoy being creative.

Anny had difficulties when deciding what oral activity worked best and what activity did not work when teaching oral skills. From her experience, an activity could be very efficient on Tuesday, but not effective at all on Monday with the same or another class. In quiet classes, where the pupils were reluctant to speak, Anny explained that the activities were often more structured as the pupils would respond better to being told what to say rather than using their own language.

Anny did not actively train correct pronunciation, but would definitely try to help pupils who were struggling with certain sounds, for instance if they had issues pronouncing the /r/ and ended up using a guttural 'r' instead. Her focus, however, was definitely more on vocabulary and fluency. She would correct her pupils during their reading sessions in a simple way by repeating the word that they got wrong in the right way. The pupils then chose for themselves if they wanted to repeat it. She would never correct her pupils while answering a question or using creative speech in other situations, as she wanted to encourage speaking in class and not making it something uncomfortable for the pupils.

Anny catered for the different ability levels in class when giving out tasks to complete, but most often for written exercises. In the written exercises they could choose less demanding tasks. Also, weaker pupils did not have to perform their mini-talks in front of the class. This way she catered for them by making the oral presentations less frightening.

Whether the pupils were organised in plenary, groups, or pairs during oral exercises would vary from task to task. As previously mentioned, Anny would often have her pupils decide for themselves how to be organised, and this worked well. Anny could not decide what way of organising worked the best. Plenary organisation would work on some occasions, especially for practising pronunciation and you were sure that everyone was paying attention and doing what they were supposed to be doing. Pair work would also be a good way of organising, as it might make it safer for the pupils to speak. She added that she would always think about how the pupils were paired up in order to get good matches and avoid bullying. Groups also worked, according to Anny, as the pupils sometimes appreciated being able to create groups for themselves, as long as they included everyone: 'Variety is the key'.

The oral skills were assessed on the basis of the mini-talks. Anny did not include her pupils' efforts in class for the oral grade, as it should not affect a pupil that he or she is shy or uncomfortable being orally active in class. She would, however, encourage her pupils to be as

active as possible as they would then learn more, pay closer attention, and she would get a broader understanding of their competency level.

Anny's impression of the pupils was that they took oral presentations very seriously. She stressed that the most important part of the presentation is that she gets an idea of how her pupils' oral language is, not the content. The content of the presentation is important, but it is the language itself that should be first priority. Anny is sure that the presentation is a good oral activity and assessment situation, as it allows creative pupils to be creative as well as helping pupils that struggle with producing speech because they have the opportunity to prepare for it. Anny was sure that structuring and preparing a presentation helped pupils develop their vocabulary, as they often had to learn some new words in relation to the topic chosen. Mini-talks, however, might be more suitable for the stronger pupils, who might get through them without any challenges, and therefore learn little. Despite this, Anny does not know what she would do in relation to setting an oral grade if she did not have the oral presentations. She is glad that she gets one-on-one time with all her pupils once a year as this gives her an even broader understanding of her pupils' competency levels.

Anny's issue with the oral exam is that it focuses too much on the first part, which is the presentation. Anny explained that once, when she was an examiner, she had experienced proficient English speakers who knew the language very well, but did not know anything from the curriculum. She had also experienced pupils who had a very low language competence, but who knew the entire curriculum. 'What do you do in those situations?' she asked in despair. On the one hand, Anny wanted to focus on the language and give good English speakers a good grade, but at the same time she did not want to punish those who had clearly studied the curriculum down to the very last detail, but would have struggled making themselves understood in a foreign country.

The entire exam lasts for 20-25 minutes and then you get 5 minutes to grade. Perhaps it could be solved by giving two grades. One for language and one for content and knowledge of topic, but I do not know. The oral exams are problematic.

Berit (LK06 pupil)

Berit started lower secondary school in 2005 before the *LK06* curriculum was revised, which was in 2013. Berit's favourite subject in school was English and she especially remembered the teacher they had in 10th grade, who was American: 'Her oral English was so good and it

made everyone pay much more attention in the lessons because listening to her speaking was just like listening to a TV'.

Berit could not remember what their teacher said about it, but she was definitely aware that a new curriculum was published during her time in lower secondary school. The teachers would mention the curriculum at the start of every course. Berit estimated that roughly the same amount of time was spent on oral activities as for written activities, 50/50.

The American teacher only spoke English during Berit's classes, but the Norwegian teacher, whom they had in the 8th and 9th grade, spoke some Norwegian. This was especially when giving messages that did not concern the English subject. 'It was natural this way', Berit explained. She continued by saying that some pupils might have preferred it if the American teacher had spoken Norwegian on some occasions, and it probably made these pupils speak less in class as they had difficulties understanding what was going on. For Berit, who enjoyed speaking English, having a teacher speak only English was exciting. It made it natural for her and other high-level pupils to enter an English mind set and therefore they learned much during these lessons and spoke a good deal of English. One thing that was difficult in Berit's classes was that if you only spoke English, you felt as if you were showing off to the other pupils who did not like speaking English.

The classroom environment was not that good and this might have prohibited Berit and many others from learning. Because of teacher shortage, they would be 56 pupils together with one teacher on several occasions. This did not help improve the classroom environment as speaking in such a large crowd was not comfortable and many pupils got lost in the crowd, willingly. Many of Berit's classmates refused to speak English in class and so, even though she enjoyed being orally active, it was safe to say that for some it was a definite problem: 'I think my school did not have that many resources, but of course we had books and an overhead'.

She further explained that they also used the CD that followed the textbook often and that they got a computer in the classroom connected to a projector and a large white screen sometime during lower secondary school, but late in comparison to other schools. They would also sometimes watch movies and Berit is sure that this was the teaching material that most of her classmates preferred. However, she also liked watching movies and she also enjoyed working with the textbook and activity book. The book had topics that were interesting and varied and it was not that demanding.

Other than the formerly mentioned audio-visual aids, Berit's school also had stationary computers available. However, these were rarely used as they were located in a hallway,

which was definitely not ideal. This resulted in a good deal of noise, with teachers and pupils passing through. The pupils would rather take turns using the computer in the classroom than using the ones in the hallway. Berit also explained that the audio-visual aids were used quite often. The CD player was used often, almost every class, the TV was used on a regular basis, and when the projector and computers came into the classrooms late in lower secondary school, the teacher often used YouTube and PowerPoint.

What was most effective for Berit's oral skills development was making her own presentations. When creating a script, she would learn new words and challenge herself to use them, which built her vocabulary. The grade for their presentations was set mostly on the basis of their language and the pupils thus got to choose fairly easy topics for the presentations, e.g. favourite pop songs and TV shows.

The activities used in relation to oral training were varied. They were games, reading aloud chorally, oral presentations, answering questions, discussions, conversations, and role play. The most enjoyable activity was probably games, 'but I loved the presentations', Berit said. Berit enjoyed being able to be creative and they were encouraged to use props and dress up for their presentations. Berit had once dressed up as Goldilocks when retelling the story of Goldilocks and the three bears and Hermione from the books about Harry Potter. 'I think my teachers were happy to have me in their lessons', she said and laughed. As the class environment was not that good, Berit disliked group work, such as discussions, because most often none of her group members would speak English and often they were not interested in doing the given task. Berit thus learnt little from this type of group work.

She added that reading aloud was also an activity that did not develop oral skills. The oral activities were most often creative ones and Berit could not remember there being any great focus on training pronunciation and intonation.

Different ability levels were taken into consideration, especially when Berit's class had oral presentations. They could decide for themselves how long they wanted their presentation to be, 1-5 minutes, and they were often divided into girls and boys when performing. This was to make presenting more comfortable. However, with Berit being a pupil of high level competence, she was not given more challenging tasks and activities until they got the American teacher in the 10th grade, and so the teachers did not cater for her ability level until late in lower secondary school.

Classroom organisation would vary from task to task. As mentioned, Berit's class could be a large group of 56 or 28 pupils. They were more often organised in pairs than in groups, as in groups they would generally be unfocused and not do what they were told. In

Berit's opinion, the best way of organising the pupils depended on the pupils. 'Pair work is probably the best as some will get lost in a large group', she summed up.

The teacher would correct pupils in class if a pupil said something that was very wrong and which made it difficult to understand the pupil at all. The teacher would just simply repeat the word using correct pronunciation. Berit thought this was a good way of correcting. During Berit's years in lower secondary school, the English subject had little to do with speaking perfectly and reading. 'The focus on conversational English was big and it was often mentioned that English was important in relation to work, travel and studies', Berit insisted. All her fellow classmates would be able to travel abroad and make themselves understood. Berit's oral skills were assessed through presentations, role plays, practice exams and oral effort in class, at least in the beginning of lower secondary school.

Berit considered her American teacher to be a better teacher than the other teacher she had had in the 8th and 9th grade and admitted that her American teacher probably had much to do with her oral English proficiency.

What Berit felt had contributed the most to her oral English development was reading English books, which has given her a wide vocabulary, and travelling, and thus, the opportunity to use the English language in realistic settings.

6. Discussion

The present chapter discusses the four curricula, the analysis of the textbook materials, and the teacher and pupil interviews. The chapter is structured by themes in order to gain a good overview of the findings. The themes have been chosen as they are central in this thesis.

These are, in consecutive order: textbook materials, oral activities, the oral presentation and the oral exam, the language of the classroom, and the English subject. In addition, the following section will discuss the changes of the curricula since *M74*, since these are also central to the thesis topic. The discussion of the curricula is based on the review of the four curricula in Chapter 2.

6.1 Curricula

One of the author's expectations at the starting point of this research was that oral English skills have gradually become more important since the 1974 curriculum. This was based on the assumption that Norway has become much more of a multicultural society since then and because Norway's involvement in international cooperation and business is continually increasing. The curricula were reviewed to see how the focus on oral skills had changed over the years. The most noticeable changes in the curricula seem to have happened from *M74* to *M87*, and from *L97* to *LK06*.

The *M74* curriculum focused to some extent on oral speech and stated that the English language was a means of communication. However, in comparison to the *M87* curriculum, which started off by explaining the value of knowing the English language in a very elaborate manner, the *M74* curriculum focused little on oral communication. While the *M74* curriculum focused a good deal on teaching methods, vocabulary, and grammar, and that the pupils should be given an education that gave them practical language knowledge in order to increase their abilities to communicate both orally and written, the *M87* curriculum focused more on the oral aspect of the subject. The changes made in the focus on oral English from *M74* to *M87* were noticeable.

The *L97* curriculum followed the trend in *M87* of using the first section of the English curriculum to explain why oral English communication was so important for Norwegians. The *L97* curriculum explained to an even larger extent why it was so important for Norwegians to

be able to communicate in English. It focused on Norway's increased need for international collaboration as a reason and a motive for the importance of learning English.

The present *LK06* curriculum, however, does not, like *M87* and *L97*, focus in the same way on why it is important for Norwegians to speak English. Instead, it starts off by focusing on how Norway is influenced by the English language and that Norwegian pupils, instead of needing to be able to *speak* English, need to be able to speak *good* English. That the focus of the curricula has changed from focusing on learning English to perfecting the English the pupils already know, support the author's initial assumption that, because children have gradually become increasingly more exposed to oral English through different media over the years, this may have resulted in them performing better than before when it comes to basic oral skills. Henry's (2014) study also supports this assumption, as the study confirmed that many pupils learn as much and sometimes more English outside of school than in school. They do this through social media, music, TV and reading English books, but especially through digital gaming.

6.2 Textbook materials

The textbooks and corresponding materials studied in this research had noticeably changed over the four curriculum periods and each textbook clearly represented their curriculum period and time. Although the books represented their time of publication and their curriculum period, the number of oral exercises in each book varied and did not increase over the years as one might have expected from the increased focus on oral English in the different curriculum periods. While *On the go: 2 (M74)* had a large number of oral exercises (92), *English now 2 (M87)* only had 39 oral exercises. *Search 9 (L97)* had the most oral exercises (100) and was in addition the largest textbook of the four. *Crossroads 9 (LK06)* had 81 oral exercises.

However, the variation of different categories changed somewhat from the oldest textbook to the newest. *On the go: 2* had 36% pattern drills and only eight different categories of oral exercises. Thus, it focused to a great extent on structured oral exercises, which one can argue are not exercises that prepare a pupil for oral communication in English as they are not realistic and related to real-life experiences. Also, *On the go: 2* was the textbook that had the most oral exercises that had to do with simply reading something aloud. *English now 2*, in

comparison to *On the go: 2*, had only 39 oral exercises. However, they were spread over nine different categories and there were only two pattern drills. The largest category was asking and answering questions and, although these exercises were somewhat structured, one can argue that the textbook showed positive trends in the English subject by moving from the audio-lingual method to focusing more on communication. *Search 9*, with the largest number of oral activities, also had them spread out in eleven different categories and one could clearly see that this textbook was very different from the previous ones as it had no pattern drills and only one exercise that told the pupils to only read something aloud. Its focus was mainly on oral communication, and the term *discuss* was introduced, without having to actually give pros and cons on a topic. The textbook had 23% ‘discuss/talk about given subject’ exercises.

Crossroads 9 followed this trend by spreading the total number of 81 oral exercises into nine different categories. The book has no tasks that consist of only reading a text aloud, but, surprisingly, it has one pattern drill. Unlike *On the go: 2*, however, it did not encourage pupils to form sentences based on a given structure, but encouraged pupils to practise intonation by asking for something by following the intonation pattern explained in the grammar section for asking a question.

Another visible change is the corresponding material that follows *Crossroads 9*. While all the prior textbooks had a corresponding workbook (not *Search 9*), a tape with recordings of the texts, and *Search 9* also had a CD with easier texts for struggling pupils, *Crossroads 9* has much more. In addition to a CD with all texts recorded, it has a web page with digital exercises, film clips, pictures and links to other helpful web pages, an e-book, and an easier version of the textbook for struggling pupils. This change shows that the contemporary oral textbooks and modern technology provide more varied lessons, where different ability levels are taken into consideration. As *Crossroads 9* never provides examples of how to conduct oral exercises, one can argue that the book is more challenging than the other analysed textbooks. In addition, the textbook has more authentic texts than the others (c.f. Maier 2006). If the author’s assumption that pupils today are better English speakers is true, the difficulty level of this book supports that assumption. If pupils are better English speakers today, they need more challenging tasks and more challenging material. *Crossroads 9* provides these to a large extent.

6.3 Oral activities

One might assume that as the focus on oral English and communication has increased in the English curricula over the years, the amount of time spent on oral activities in the EFL classroom also has. The results of the pupil interviews support this assumption to some extent. The *M74* pupil, Ola, estimated that in 1977 his EFL teacher spent about 40% of the time on oral activities. Anders (*L97*) estimated the same about his time in lower secondary school. Petra (*M87*) was certain that her teachers' main focus in the English lessons was on written skills. Berit (*LK06*) estimated that in her recent time in lower secondary school about half the time (50%) was spent on oral activities. Some of the teachers were able to confirm this trend. Grete (*M74*), Ola (*M87*) and Marit (*L97*) all stated that during the curriculum period which they represented, the focus was definitely more on written English than oral. This small sample shows that it seems as if the amount of time spent on oral English in the Norwegian EFL classroom has increased, but relatively not much, and not until recently.

Although the teachers representing the *M74*, *M87* and *L97* curricula claimed that the focus on oral English had increased since they had all started teaching, the increase was not as great as one might expect over the span of 30 years, when one considers that the curricula that followed *M74* had an increasing focus on oral communication as the most important part of the English subject.

One might therefore question, through this study, whether EFL teaching has really reflected the focus in the curricula and if enough changes have been made concerning the English subject since 1974. One could argue that Berit's claim might be an indicator of general trends in today's English teaching and that oral and written English are given the same amount of time. However, this does not reflect the three most recent curricula, which all provide an impression that communication and oral skills are of more importance than in the *M74* curriculum. There seems to be a need for teachers to become more aware of how much time they spend focusing on oral skills in comparison to other language skills included in the English subject in order to ensure that their teaching fully represents the current national curriculum.

One of this study's aims was to explore how the teachers' methods of teaching oral skills had changed over the years and what oral activities they used in the English lessons. The former section on textbook materials discussed how the textbooks have changed over the years following the new curricula and in their focus on oral and communicative English. It is

therefore interesting to see how the changes in textbook materials correspond to what the interviewed teachers reported.

Through the teacher interviews, a finding was that Grete used few oral activities, as one would expect from the teacher representing *M74* and a time when communicative oral English was not emphasised in the curriculum. Grete used reading aloud, answering questions about a text, choral practice, and listening exercises. Ola, the pupil representing the same period, confirmed that there was little focus on communicative English, as the only oral activities he could remember used by his teacher were reading aloud and answering questions to the texts that they read. He had never heard of choral practice and could not remember listening to texts or music.

Ole followed the curricula and the changes. In addition to using the same activities as Grete, Ole used more exercises that gave communicative oral English practice, such as role play, information gap tasks and discussions. This is what one would expect, as the *M87* curriculum represented a change to focusing more on communicative English. At the same time, it can be argued that it is understandable that Ole still used the same activities as Grete, as the changes came during Ole's early years of teaching. This positive trend explained by Ole was, however, not confirmed by Petra (the *M87* pupil), who could only remember reading aloud, answering questions and doing other oral exercises which she described as boring (singing children's songs and counting). This suggests that Petra's teacher was not fully on board with the changes of the *M87* curriculum, and this could also apply to other teachers of this period. It at least shows two pictures of oral English from the two interviewees representing the *M87* period. It suggests there were different teaching styles during the period. Some teachers might still have been stuck in the teaching style of *M74*, while other teachers would have embraced the changes of *M87* and introduced more communicative and unstructured activities to their teaching (as in the textbook materials for the period).

The oral activities Marit used during *L97* show little change, as she too used reading aloud, choral practice, role play, role cards, discussions and listening exercises as a part of her teaching. It is strange that Marit used reading aloud as an oral activity. This was a method that Grete and Ole had disregarded by this time, and this was a method which was clearly not communicative and one would have expected to be disregarded by most teachers at the time. However, the biggest change compared to the previous interviewees was that Marit used presentations, or mini-talks, as an oral activity during the *L97* period. Although the *L97* curriculum did not include the term 'presentations', it did state that pupils should be able to show their classmates their work. This suggests that Marit taught according to her curriculum,

despite still using reading aloud as an oral activity. However, Anders' (the *L97* pupil) description of his experience of oral activities does not support Marit's. Anders had experienced having presentations in other subjects, but never in English. Reading aloud, listening exercises, answering questions to texts and discussions were the oral activities he had been introduced to in lower secondary. The activities that were mostly used by his teacher were reading aloud and listening exercises that entailed analysing music videos. One explanation why Anders' and Marit's answers do not concur is that Anders' English teacher was not an educated English teacher. This is, however, not a valid reason, as this English teacher clearly did not represent the teaching philosophy of the *L97* curriculum, which he had full access to. Again, like for the *M87* period, it shows two different pictures of oral English teaching in the same period.

Anny did not mention using as many different oral activities as one might expect from the teacher representing *LK06*. She would use reading aloud, mini-talks, role plays, and making movies. The latter is an interesting addition to the range of oral activities that combine oral language with technology. Berit (the *LK06* pupil) had experienced having presentations where she could use costumes, games, reading aloud both alone and chorally, role plays, discussions, and conversations.

Although Berit had experienced many varied oral exercises, it seems that some traditional oral activities were still being used, e.g. reading aloud. Many possible activities were not being used by the interviewed teachers and pupils in the lower secondary school English lessons. In section 3.4, a wide arrange of oral exercises was presented. Although some of these were used by the teachers interviewed in this research, others did not seem to have had a place in the English lessons, or at least were not reported by them.

Despite the fact that the three teachers representing the three first curricula had disregarded reading aloud as an oral activity from their teaching, as they found it to be inefficient and it was unpopular among the pupils, it was nevertheless the activity the teachers and pupils seemed to discuss the most. All three teachers had used this activity in their first years of teaching. The pupils, dreading reading in front of the class, focused only on what they knew they had to read and not on the full body of the text. Therefore, they did not learn much. Also, some pupils had experienced reading aloud in front of the entire class to be the equivalent of bullying, either by the teacher or the other pupils. This was because some pupils were clearly not good readers, sometimes because of reading disabilities, but also just because their oral language proficiency was low.

Especially for the two pupils representing the *M74* and *M87* periods, reading aloud was remembered as an uncomfortable activity which they did not care for. It was particularly powerful the way Ola (*M74*) described the activity as a way of bullying pupils with reading disabilities, the way Petra (*M87*) dreaded reading because she was corrected and the lengths of text she was expected to read were too long, and Anders (*L97*) talking about his friend who was laughed at because he had trouble reading aloud the English texts from the textbook.

Despite all the evidence that reading aloud is an inefficient activity that only causes discomfort among the pupils, the newly educated teacher, Anny, nevertheless used the activity often. This may be explained by her cancelled classes in the didactics course she had attended during her teacher training. She may therefore not have learnt a wide range of teaching methods, or she may have experienced this activity herself as a pupil and just accepted it as a normal part of her teaching.

What was especially interesting was that Anny believed that her pupils enjoyed reading aloud due to her using the ‘popcorn’ method (see section 5.6), a method where pupils are randomly called by the teacher to read, not following any pattern. The reason why this method might have made reading aloud more enjoyable for pupils is because they could decide for themselves how much they wanted to read. They could read as much as a full paragraph if they wanted to, but as little as a single word as well. This way, the pupils with reading disabilities, or a lower oral proficiency level, were able to read the amount of text that they felt comfortable with and so, with the use of the popcorn method, the impression of reading aloud being the equivalent of bullying seems not to have applied. It also shows that there are variants of reading aloud, and some may be better than others.

One can wonder why Anny had not heard of the activity’s ineffectiveness. But it could indicate that the activity of reading aloud can be acceptable in the EFL classroom as long as one applies a reading method such as the popcorn method. As Østensen (2013) discovered, many teachers considered reading aloud a suitable method for practising pronunciation, which might be a reason to why the method is still in use. There seems to be a need for further study on the effectiveness of the reading aloud activity.

While the pupils representing the three earlier curriculum periods had a good deal of criticism toward the reading aloud activity, Berit (*LK06*) only mentioned it as an activity that was not especially helpful in improving oral skills. Berit had little trouble with reading aloud, just like Anders who thought reading aloud was an easy way of achieving a good oral grade. However, in general the pupils seemed to be negative towards the activity. It is therefore easy to question Anny, the teacher, who claimed that the pupils enjoyed the activity and that only

the popcorn method had redeemed it. It might simply be that her pupils enjoyed the activity because most of today's pupils are better English speakers than they were in the earlier curriculum periods, and that they consider the activity to be easy. They may therefore enjoy it as they have to make little effort.

The fact that today's pupils might not have a big problem with reading aloud in class because they find it easy, brings up the question of what the activity actually teaches pupils. Although reading in plenary might be an effective way of getting through a text in the textbook, there are other exercises that may work better, and which none of the teachers interviewed for this study had disregarded over the years. For instance, listening exercises (see section 3.5), and different varieties of listening exercises are also a good way of getting through a text, as this keeps the pupils active participant of the lessons (c.f. Drew and Sørheim 2009). Fill-in-the-blanks exercises force pupils to pay attention when listening to the text in order to complete the exercise.

6.4 The oral presentation and the oral exam

When it comes to oral presentations, this is part of the English subject that is relatively new. Although the term 'presentation' is not directly used in the *L97* curriculum, the idea of presenting one's own work is mentioned as a way of working with the subject (see section 2.3), and Marit (*L97*) used the activity during the *L97* curriculum period. However, Anders (the *L97* pupil) did not experience the activity being used in the English lessons during his time in the lower secondary school from 1999 to 2002. Both Anny and Berit, however, the representatives of the current *LK06* curriculum, were very familiar with the activity. Berit very much enjoyed making her presentations as they challenged her to use and learn new words. It also gave her and her classmates a chance to be creative as they could dress up as a character or use audio-visual aids, such as PowerPoint. However, although not referred to until *L97*, the textbooks show evidence of the activity being a part of English teaching before that. *On the go: 2* had one exercise where the pupils were told to present something. Surprisingly, *English now 2* had seven presentation exercises and both *Search 9* and *Crossroads 9* had eight. Also, Grete used the method in the 1980's, while Ola claimed not to have used it until after *M87*. This implies that the activity has probably been a part of the English subject to a certain extent for a long time. However, the way that presentations are

conducted today, and how they are used as a means of assessing pupils' oral English, is relatively new.

Although Berit might have enjoyed the exercise, the author's own experience reveals it to be an activity that many pupils fear. This is for the same reasons as reading aloud; many pupils are afraid to speak English in front of the entire class and many are afraid to make mistakes. The method has been criticised, not only for these reasons, but also because it appears to be very much tied to be the context and the situation of the classroom, which suggested that the discourse used by pupils in the classroom was classroom-bound (Chvala, 2012). In addition, it is a monologue which is prepared in advance and does not help pupils practise communicative speech.

The same question can be asked about the oral presentation as for reading aloud, i.e. what this activity teaches pupils. One can argue that oral presentations might help pupils become better public speakers, but this is not guaranteed, as it could also put them off speaking in front of an audience. Ola stated that he was sceptical toward the activity, but that it needed to be a part of the English subject as pupils learnt how to structure their work, present, understand and reflect on their findings. Marit claimed that she learnt how to use sources and be critical toward information and sources. Anny claimed that pupils learnt new vocabulary from making the presentations, as Berit confirmed. In addition, one could argue that pupils learn from watching and listening to each other's presentations, but one cannot be sure that all pupils are paying attention when they are just listening.

Furthermore, as the presentations are prepared in advance, one could argue that this is not the best way to assess pupils' oral English. Although, one can assess the pupils' pronunciation and intonation, since the pupils prepare their presentations in advance, one cannot assess their vocabulary. They may use words that they would not use if they were speaking freely, and one cannot assess their communicative skills as the oral presentation is a monologue. To learn from the teachers that the oral presentation is the main assessment activity when it comes to setting an oral grade is therefore worrying. As Anny (*LK06*) stated, she was happy that she had individual talking time with her pupils because it would be very difficult to set oral grades only on the basis of their mini-talks. However, not all teachers may have this opportunity. One can therefore argue that there is a need for a more varied oral assessment situation in the lower secondary school other than focusing on oral presentations, as Chvala (2012) also argues, in order to consider the oral grade to be valid.

Grete criticised the method of assessment because the focus was not solely on the language, but also on the content of the presentation. According to Grete, pupils were

expected to be very mature, especially in order to achieve the higher grades. Grete was sure that the pupils were expected to be more mature than one could expect of a 10th grader. Ola was very pleased that the presentation part of the exam had been reduced from 15 to 10 minutes. This was because many pupils would focus too much on the presentation part of the exam and forget to practise for the part that follows, i.e. the examination, which was Ola's main criticism of the oral English exam. Marit's view of the oral exam was that it demands a good deal of knowledge and maturity from the pupils. However, she was certain that the exams were necessary because Norway was a 'knowledge society'. Marit criticised the oral exam, however, by agreeing with Ola that there has been too much focus on the presentation part of the exam and less focus on the actual examination.

That there is too much focus on the presentation part of the exam was also Anny's main criticism towards this assessment method. The teachers all felt that the oral presentation was not the best way of assessing oral speech. This was mainly because communicative speech, as argued previously in this section, and according to the three most recent curricula, should be of most importance. This indicates that there is a need for reconsidering this method of assessing oral language, both for assessing pupils through lower secondary school and as a final oral exam. It seems a positive development that the Norwegian Ministry of Education has made a recent change when it comes to the guidelines for what should be focused on by examiners during the final oral English exam (Drew and Sørheim, 2016, forthcoming). It has been decided that the main focus of the assessment should be on the examination part of the exam, not the presentation. This change was made final after the interviews for this research had been conducted. There is still a need, however, for teachers to improve the oral presentation as a way of assessing oral skills in the lower secondary school and to ensure that these assessments are valid (c.f. Chvala 2012).

6.5 The language of the classroom

All of the teachers were clear on the fact that they spoke mostly English in class today. The exceptions were Marit and Anny, who would often switch to Norwegian to give general messages that had nothing to do with the English subject, or when teaching grammar. The way Marit and Anny used Norwegian, for giving important messages and explaining especially difficult grammar, supports the study of Rye (2014), who found that this was how

most Norwegian EFL teachers used L1 in their lessons. All of the teachers expected their pupils to speak English at all times in lessons.

Grete spoke mostly Norwegian in her lessons during the *M74* curriculum. She spoke English when preparing her pupils for a text, when reading a text, and when she talked about the text with her class after reading it. However, she would translate what she said into English into Norwegian often or most of the time. Ole's use of English in lessons had gradually increased during his years of teaching English. The *L97* curriculum focused on pupils learning English in same way as they had learnt their first language, similar to the direct method (see section 3.2.2). Marit had therefore followed the *L97* curriculum and spoken a good deal of English in her classes during the late 1990's. However, she would often translate what she said from English to Norwegian, especially in the 8th and 9th grade. Anny spoke mostly English in her classes. If she ever used Norwegian, it would often be in relation to giving the pupils messages that were not related to the English subject or, especially for weaker pupils, for checking if they had understood a task given in the English language.

When comparing the teachers' answers on their use of L1 or L2 during the curriculum period that they represented, it is clear that the amount of English used by the teachers in the study has gradually increased over the years. This is also what one would have expected of EFL teachers, especially in relation to the changing curricula and their increased focus on oral and communicative language.

The teacher representing the *LK06* curriculum in this study, Anny, claimed that the focus was much more on fluency, vocabulary and pronunciation today when assessing and correcting pupils' oral English skills. Whether the pupils chose to speak in an American, British, or any other accent, was not of importance. For Anny, what was of some importance was that, if the pupils chose an accent, they needed to stick with it.

However, in the *M74* period, the curriculum stated that the pupils were to speak English Standard Pronunciation, but that a pupil who had been taught an American pronunciation should not be forced to change it to British pronunciation. Grete claimed that during the *M74* curriculum, all of the pupils had to speak RP English, but that it was acceptable to speak with an American accent as long as they had a private American influence in their life. Ole explained that during the *M87* curriculum there were no set rules on how pupils should speak English as long as pupils were consistent. What Ole explained seems also to be the general rule today. The idea of making the pupils speak in a set way seems to have been disregarded by the *M87* curriculum, and thus by the teachers from the late 1980's up to

the present. This further implies that in today's English classrooms, the focus is not on accent, but on being able to communicate and to be understood while using the English language.

When it comes to getting the pupils to speak in class, the author initially expected that the pupils would be more active and easier to get to speak in class during the most recent curriculum period (*LK06*), compared to the three earlier curriculum periods, especially *M74* and *M87*. This expectation was based on the assumption that pupils nowadays would have better basic oral skills. On the basis of the sample, however, this does not appear to be the case. Although Grete considered today's pupils to be better English speakers than her pupils in the early 1980's, she had not experienced it to be more challenging to get the pupils to speak English in class before compared to now. All of the other teachers, except for Ole (*M87*), confirmed that it was in no way any easier to get pupils to speak in class today. It all had to do with the classroom environment and, to some degree, classroom organisation. Marit (*L97*) explained that she often divided her pupils into suitable groups in order to make them more orally active. Ola stated that it was probably more difficult getting the pupils to speak during the *M87* curriculum period than today, and he believed this had to do with the pupils being more insecure and inexperienced at that time. However, he added that it was still difficult to get pupils to speak English in class, but that it was possible as long as the teacher was a good language model.

From the pupils' perspective, one can see the same tendency of the classroom environment being the reason for them wanting or not wanting to speak in class. However, the pupils' perspective shows a much more divided reasoning than the teachers could provide. All of the pupils had some sort of problem with speaking in class. Ola (*M74*) and Petra (*M87*) did not like speaking in class, as they both considered their oral English to be poor and they had issues with the English subject in general. Anders (*L97*) did not mind speaking in class, because his oral English skills were acceptable. Even so, he generally preferred not to speak English. Berit (*LK06*), who considered her oral English skills to be good, did not enjoy speaking due to the fact that she was afraid that the other pupils would think that she was showing off. These views show to some extent that the interviewed pupils had better oral English skills in the two later curriculum periods than the two first ones, and thought speaking English in class was something that they both managed. However, for different reasons, they preferred not to. This could be because they might have found speaking English in a Norwegian classroom uncomfortable (c.f. Henry, 2014). Or it might be because of their attitude towards the subject, which resulted in them not being interested in participating, or, as

Berit explained when her class were set to work in groups, one was afraid of giving an impression of showing off.

When it comes to the pupils' perceptions of their teachers' oral English, and whether it had an impact on whether they found the teachers' way of teaching the English subject to be good, all the pupils, except for Berit, said that they thought their teachers' oral English was good. If they had not thought so, it might have had an impact on how they considered their teaching abilities. Berit considered her American teacher to be a better teacher than the other teacher she had had in the 8th and 9th grade and admitted that her American teacher probably had much to do with her oral English proficiency.

However, this small sample does not really confirm Jensen et al.'s (2011) findings on pupils' perceptions of their teachers' oral skills affecting the way they consider their teachers' teaching competence, nor the pupils' perception of their teachers' teaching competence affecting their perceptions of their teachers' oral English.

What Ola, Petra and Anders all had in common was that they all considered their teachers' oral English was good when they were in lower secondary school and they all agreed that this could have had an impact on how good they considered their teachers' teaching ability to be. However, they also shared the claim that they were not critical towards their English teacher and that this might be the reason why they thought they were good teachers. For example, Berit seemed to be somewhat critical in choosing a native-speaker teacher whom she preferred over another teacher. However, this was one pupil's viewpoint, which was different from those of the other three pupils.

6.6 The English subject

One of the aims of the thesis was to explore how the pupils' development of oral skills has changed from 1974 to the present. When discussing teaching materials with the teachers, it was not surprising to see that the use of audio-visual aids had increased and this has most likely brought a positive change to the English subject. Ola and Petra could not remember being shown any movies, video clips or similar in their English lessons, whilst both Anders (*L97*) and Berit (*LK06*) could.

That the use of audio-visual aids has increased is probably a result of more user friendly audio-visual aids being available today and because most schools have IT employees

to deal with the problems that follow such materials. As Grete said, she had access to a language lab during the *M74* period, but hardly used it after a while, as there were often problems with the technology. Today, teachers are often instructed how to use the audio-visual aids in the best way. As one of the five basic skills for pupils is to use digital tools and acquire digital skills (see section 2.4), it is important that teachers are also able to use digital tools.

The increase of audio-visual aids in lower secondary school is beneficial to the pupils as this might indicate that more videos are being used by teachers. As Lialikhova (2014) discovered, videos seemed to have an impact on pupils' language skills and vocabulary in that videos were effective for developing communicative language skills, varying the lessons, motivating pupils, and supplementing the textbook.

Another change in the way pupils develop oral skills is where they get their main oral English influence from. Henry (2014) conducted a Swedish study concerning pupils' oral proficiency influences outside of school. Henry's study showed that today's generation of pupils seem to learn as much or more English outside of school through English-mediated leisure time activities than in school. Henry's (2014) study did not say anything about where the pupils that attended lower secondary school in the 1970's and 1980's received their oral English influence. The current research, however, using the findings of the pupil interviews, might throw some light on this.

Ola stated that the factor that had contributed most to the development of his oral skills was mainly his education. Petra said that what she learnt in school had definitely formed the foundation of her oral English proficiency. Anders claimed that English movies and TV-shows had had the biggest influence on his oral English. What Berit felt had contributed the most to her oral English development was reading English books and travelling.

Ola and Petra, the representatives of the two earliest curriculum periods, both felt that their English education had contributed a certain extent to their oral English proficiency. Anders and Berit, however, representing the two most recent curricula, did not appear to recognise their English education in the same way when considering what had contributed the most to their oral English proficiency. Instead, Anders credited English TV and movies, which supports the study by Henry (2014). Berit referred to only one of the English-mediated activities reported by Henry, namely books.

The pupils' answers to what had contributed the most to their oral English proficiency show that it is likely that a transition started in the late 1990's from school being the main English language influence to the pupils being more influenced by English-mediated activities

outside of the classroom. This trend seems to undermine the way the English subject has developed and one might argue that the subject could be losing its status in the Norwegian school. In addition to this change, the English subject today also seems to have become almost as much social studies as a language subject. Grete, Petra and Marit all pointed this out, which might be undermining the importance of the subject and the importance of actually being taught how to communicate in English in school. As Østensen (2013) found in her study, it is difficult to get pupils to speak in class, which seems partly to have to do with their attitudes toward the English subject. The teachers who were interviewed in Østensen's (2013) study called for increased awareness of English as a core subject and the recognition of its relevance and status. The current research also shows that the English subject might be undermined and that the status of the subject needs to be enhanced.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the teaching of oral English in Norwegian lower secondary schools since the *M74* curriculum to the present. The research aimed to explore how the focus on oral skills had changed over the years, as well as if the teachers' methods of teaching oral skills and the pupils' development of oral skills had changed.

The study was conducted mainly through semi-structured interviews. The thesis explored how teachers had taught oral English since 1974 through interviewing four teachers. The four teachers represented one curriculum period each (*M74*, *M87*, *L97* and *LK06*). They were asked how they had taught oral English in their period and, for those it applied to, how their teaching of oral English had changed during the course of their careers. The study has also shed light on how pupils had experienced the teaching of oral English by interviewing four former pupils, each representing the curriculum periods.

To gain an even broader understanding of how teachers had taught and how pupils had experienced oral English teaching in the lower secondary school since 1974, textbook materials from each curriculum period were analysed. The analysis focused on the number and types of oral activities provided in the textbooks and their corresponding materials.

The author's expectations were that English oral skills had gradually become more important since the 1974 curriculum because involvement in international cooperation and business is continually increasing and because Norway has become much more of a multicultural society since then. The review of the *M74*, *M87*, *L97* and *LK06* curricula supported this assumption. With the *M87* curriculum, the teaching had changed from using the audio-lingual method (see section 3.2.3) to focusing on oral English communication and 'doing things with words' (see section 3.3.3). This development had continued with the *L97* and *LK06* curricula also focusing heavily on oral communication and oral skills.

The textbook materials studied for this research gave an impression of how teachers have taught since *M74*. The textbooks represented their time and curriculum in gradually focusing more on oral English communication since the *M87* curriculum period. The textbooks also showed a trend in that they had become more challenging for the pupils. *Crossroads 9* contains more authentic texts and forces the pupils to be independent when solving exercises as it does not give examples of how to solve them as all the previous textbooks had. The newer textbooks also catered more for pupils' different ability levels which indicates that teachers do as well.

The interviews conducted with the teachers indicate that a number of different oral activities used by the teachers have increased over the years. One activity, however, despite the criticism about it from three out of the four teachers and from all of the pupils, was still a part of the English subject in the lower secondary classrooms represented in the sample, namely reading aloud. This controversial activity needs further research to understand how efficient or inefficient the method is.

The teachers' explanations of how they set pupils' oral English grades in the four curriculum periods also indicate a large change. It seems that the basis for assessing pupils' oral skills has changed from being very thin to focusing on several oral presentations, or mini-talks. That most teachers might set pupils' oral grades on the basis of a presentation is somewhat worrying as this is not the best method of assessing pupils' communicative skills, which have gradually been emphasised more in the English subject curricula. Also many pupils struggle with having presentations and may not be able to perform their best under the pressure the activity provides. It may also give a false impression of pupils' actual oral English proficiency, as oral presentations are performed in advance and most pupils use a script. These findings on the challenges of setting an oral grade only on the bases of oral presentations indicate that additional assessment methods should be used or that changes should be made to the traditional classroom presentation assessment method.

The findings of this thesis also indicate that teachers' use of the target language in the EFL classroom has increased and two of the teachers confirmed that they only used L1 for giving important messages and for teaching particularly difficult grammar. The indication of teachers using the target language more during the English lessons seems to be a positive development in the teaching of oral English, as the teachers are language models for the pupils.

Finally, this research focused on finding out how pupils have experienced the teaching of oral English in each curriculum period. The findings of the interviews with the former pupils showed that the pupils from the *M74* curriculum period and the *M87* curriculum period had a particularly difficult time when it came to the English subject. The reading aloud activity was considered by Ola to be the equivalent of bullying pupils with reading disabilities and Petra had a hard time participating in lessons because she had been corrected many times for not speaking good enough RP English. As the sample for this thesis is small, it does not of course indicate that all pupils during *M74* and *M87* experienced the teaching in this way, but it might indicate that many pupils might have a better experience of the teaching of English today, as Anders and Berit seemed to experience the teaching in a slightly more positive way.

One of the author's assumptions before conducting this research was that pupils' oral English skills have improved since 1974 due to them being increasingly more exposed to media, such as music, video games, television and social networks over the years, and that this has resulted in them performing better than before when it comes to basic oral skills. The author also assumed that this would mean that pupils today are more positive to learning oral skills now than they were before, and that speaking in class is much easier for pupils today than it was before.

Although this research has shown many indicators of pupils today being better oral English speakers than in the previous curriculum periods, the interviewed pupils do not seem to indicate big changes in the attitudes towards the English subject. It still seems to be as challenging to get pupils to speak and be orally active in the English classroom as they were during the *M74* curriculum period. One can argue that the English subject is in danger of losing its status and that there needs to be a focus on enhancing the subject's reputation and importance. The subject is arguably being undermined by social studies becoming a large part of it, in addition to pupils learning a good deal of their English outside of school through English-mediated activities.

As Norwegians today need a high level of oral English proficiency in relation to work, travel, the Internet and other social settings it is of utmost importance for young Norwegian learners to acquire good English oral skills. It is therefore important to contribute to this field of research. This thesis has added to the limited research available on the field of oral English in Norway and in a (historical) way which, as far as the researcher is aware, has not been conducted before.

Further research on oral English and its importance in school is necessary in order to study what may be inefficient teaching methods and to follow pupils' English proficiency development. The need for research on the traditional activity of reading a text aloud in plenary is important in order to determine the effectiveness of the activity. In addition, it would be of interest to research other oral activities in order to determine their efficiency in the EFL classroom. Research on pupils' use of oral English in the classroom in relation to the classroom environment is also necessary in order to find out how to stop the trend of pupils experiencing speaking English awkward and uncomfortable in English lessons. Finally, it might be of interest to research other ways of assessing oral skills and oral proficiency in addition to the predominant oral presentation.

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Appendix 1 - Teacher interview guide

Background

- When did you start teaching English at the lower secondary school level?
- How long have you taught English at the lower secondary school level?
- What kind of education do you have (generally, and in English)?
- How well do you feel your education prepared you to teach oral English skills?

Curricula

- How important was the curriculum in relation to your teaching of oral English?
- Did the school management stress using the curriculum in a specific way?
- How much time was spent on oral skills compared to reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar training?

Classroom language

- What language did you predominantly use in your classroom - Norwegian or English?
Why?
- If you used Norwegian, how/why did you use it?
- What language was mostly used by your pupils?
- Did you find it challenging to get your pupils to speak English in your classroom?

Teaching materials

- What kinds of materials did you use in connection with oral activities (E.G. textbook, activity books, other texts, pictures, audio-recordings, films, music, other texts, music)?
- What kinds of audio-visual aids/technology did you have?
- How often did you use them?

Teaching methods/activities

- What kinds of methods/activities did you use when teaching oral skills? (*listening activities* – Recordings, music, video clips, movies. *speaking activities* - reading aloud, presentations, discussion, conversation, roleplay)
- Which activities were the most popular among the pupils? Why?
- Which activities were the least popular among the pupils? Why?

- What kind of activities work best for teaching oral skills? Why?
- What kind of activities are not so effective for teaching oral skills? Why?
- Were activities that involved speaking very controlled or did they allow the pupils to be creative?
- Did you train correct pronunciation/intonation? If so, how?
- How did you cater for the different ability levels in the class?

Classroom organisation

- When teaching oral skills, how did you usually organise your pupils? (Plenary teaching, groups or pairs?)
- In your opinion, which is the best way of organising pupils when teaching oral skills?

Assessment

- How did you assess oral skills?
- Did you include the pupils' use of oral English in class when evaluating them/giving grades?
- Were oral presentations a part of the pupils' assessment?
- If so, what are your views on oral presentations?
- Did you experience your pupils having oral exams?
- What is your view on oral exams in English and the way they are conducted/assessed at the lower secondary level?

Changes during your years of teaching (for *M74*, *M87* and *L97* teachers only)

- What do you think has changed the most about oral English in the lower secondary school since you started teaching?
- What kinds of teaching methods do you use now in comparison to before? Why?
- Are there any teaching methods, activities or ways of organising that you have disregarded over the years? Why?
- Do you think the level of pupils' oral English has changed over the years? If so, in what way?
- Has the pupils' attitudes towards oral English and speaking English in class changed? If so, in what way and why?
- Do you think that pupils' oral skills in general have changed since you started teaching? Why/why not do you think this is?

- Has the amount of English used in class by you and your pupils changed over the years? Why/why not?
- What other factors do you think have contributed to teaching/learning oral English since you started teaching?

Is there anything else you would like to add on this topic?

Appendix 2 - Pupil interview guide

Background

- When did you start lower secondary school?
- What do you remember most about oral English in lower secondary school?

Curricula

- Were you made aware of the current curriculum during your time in the lower secondary school? In what way?
- How much time was spent on oral skills compared to the other English language skills?

Classroom language

- What language did your teacher predominantly use in the classroom - Norwegian or English? If Norwegian was used, on what occasions?
- Which did you prefer? Why?
- What language did you predominantly use in the classroom - Norwegian or English? Why?
- Were you encouraged by your teacher to speak as much English as possible in class?
- Did you enjoy speaking in class? Why/why not?
- From your personal perspective, how do you think your classmates enjoyed speaking?

Teaching materials

- What kinds of materials did you experience in connection with oral activities (E.G. textbook, activity books, pictures, films, audio-recordings)
- Which material did you like best? Why?
- Are you aware of what kinds of audio-visual aids/technology that was available during your time at lower secondary school?
- Did your teacher often use audio-visual aids/technology? How were they used?
- Which materials/aids do you feel were the most effective for the development of your oral English skills?

Teaching methods/activities

- What kinds of activities/methods were used by your teacher in connection with training oral English? (listening activities, answering questions, drama, translation, discussions, conversations, games, roleplay)
- What kind of oral English teaching methods/activities did you most enjoy when being taught oral skills?
- Which activities/methods did you dislike? Why?
- Which methods/activities do you feel you learned the most from? Why?
- What kind of activities/methods do you feel you learned the least from? Why?
- Were the activities that involved speaking very controlled or did they allow you to be creative? What did you prefer?
- Were you trained in correct pronunciation/intonation? If so, how?
- Were your skills/abilities taken into consideration when you were given oral activities to do, or was everybody given the same level of difficulty?

Classroom organisation

- When you were taught oral skills, how did your teacher usually organise the pupils? (plenary teaching, groups or pairs?) Which did you prefer?
- In your opinion, what is the best way of organising pupils when teaching oral skills?

Assessment

- Were you and your classmates usually corrected when making errors in speech in class? If so, how were you corrected and how did it make you feel?
- Do you think the focus on oral English was more on reading texts and speaking properly rather than being able to carry out conversations and make yourself understood?
- How were your oral skills assessed? (oral tests, presentations, oral effort in class)
- Did you have to give an oral presentation? If so, what are your views on oral presentations?
- Did you have an oral exam? If so, how did you experience it?

(Pupils' perception of) teacher competence

- Did you consider your teacher's oral English to be good?

- Did your teacher's oral English have an impact of whether you considered him/her a good teacher?
- What do you feel has contributed most to the development of your oral English skills?