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Abstract

This qualitative case study investigates the teaching and learning of writing in English in Norwegian upper secondary level elective English classes, namely International English, Social Studies English and English Literature and Culture, with a focus on expository and persuasive writing. According to a report by Lødding and Aamodt (2015), university students in Norway struggle to write academic texts. The aim was to find out to what extent and how expository and persuasive writing was taught in the elective English subjects in the light of poor writing skills reported amongst first year university students. It was also to find out how the students experienced the teaching of writing and expository and persuasive writing.

The case study comprised five upper secondary schools in Rogaland county. The subjects were five English teachers and a sample of their students. Including both the teachers' and the students' perspectives increased the validity of the study. The study used two different methods, namely semi-structured interviews with the teachers and focus-group interviews with the students. The data included information about how the students were instructed in writing expository and persuasive texts, their strategies when writing, the feedback they received, and how they were assessed.

The teacher interviews revealed that only one of the five teachers explicitly taught expository and persuasive writing. The other teachers taught the essay or the five-paragraph essay, which supports the findings of Horverak (2015). Most of the interviewed teachers taught the essay instead of expository and persuasive writing in order to make writing easier for their students. Other findings were that the teachers seemed to focus on the structure of the text when teaching writing and the majority of the students deployed writing strategies that were related to this. Furthermore, the norm was for the teachers to give written post-product feedback. None of the students had participated in process writing thus far in the course, thus supporting the studies of Bø (2014) and Vik (2013), who found that process writing was seldom practised in English at the upper secondary level. In terms of feedback, there was a discrepancy between the teachers, on the one hand, who claimed that they gave extensive feedback, and many students, on the other hand, who felt that the feedback lacked specificity and depth. All the teachers used example texts when instructing writing, which was deemed beneficial and valuable by the students.

This thesis has added to the research on English writing at the upper secondary level in Norway, with its focus on expository and persuasive writing in the elective English classes. It has provided insight into how writing is instructed at this level of English in the sample

schools, from the perspectives of both the teachers and students, and this contributes to understanding how writing is taught in the elective English classes.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 The present study

This thesis is based on a qualitative study of the teaching and learning of expository and persuasive writing in English in Norwegian upper secondary level elective English classes. These elective English classes are International English, Social Studies English, and English Literature and Culture. Expository writing is writing that seeks to explain, or expose a topic or an issue. The writer presents a topic without including his/her own personal opinions. For example, it can be an essay, a magazine article, or a fictional text in a textbook¹. A persuasive text includes arguments, reasons, and justifications in order to convince readers of a viewpoint². It may include the writer's own personal opinions as well as counterarguments. It is often used for letters to the editor, speeches, commercials and articles. The present study, based on interviews with teachers and students, aims to investigate to what extent and how expository and persuasive writing are taught on these courses.

Most of the writing aims in the current *LK06* English curriculum and most of the questions in the written exams expect students to master writing expository and persuasive texts. At the same time, according to a Norwegian report by Lødding and Aamodt (2015), there seems to be a lack of proficiency in writing such texts amongst first year university students in Norway. The report states that the first year students lack the appropriate writing skills expected and this seemed to be a trend across disciplines (Lødding and Aamodt 2015).

This study focused on upper secondary students' and teachers' experiences and views on the teaching and learning of expository and persuasive writing in the elective subjects in English. The study incorporated five upper secondary schools in Rogaland county. The participants were five teachers teaching one of the elective courses and a group of their students from that course. The teachers were interviewed individually and a group of their students participated in focus group interviews. The aim was to investigate the extent and manner the teachers taught expository and persuasive writing and thus perhaps shed light on why university lecturers have been reporting a lack of proficiency in writing such texts amongst first year university students.

¹ <http://access-socialstudies.cappelendam.no/c319365/artikkel/vis.html?tid=382115>

² <https://letterpile.com/writing/Four-Types-of-Writing>

1.2 Background

The present national curriculum (*LK06*) includes a core curriculum that addresses issues that concern the learners' education as a whole and which is meant to function as an overall goal. The core curriculum states that students are to be prepared for higher education³. A recent report (Lødding and Aamodt 2015) from *Nordisk institutt for studier av innovasjon, forskning og utdanning* is based on research on whether first year students are prepared for higher education and what that entails. The investigation found that lecturers at the universities believed that new students had poorer writing and language skills than students in previous years. The report revealed findings from interviewed students and lecturers across several disciplines, ranging from law studies to sociology. The different disciplines require the students to write in different genres. However, students reported that in Norwegian classes in upper secondary school, they always had options to choose from on the writing tests and, as a result, could focus on one genre. One student concluded that it might be more beneficial to have had experiences writing several different genres (Lødding and Aamodt 2015: 55).

The investigation was not language-specific and therefore one can presume that most of the texts were written in Norwegian, as it concerned first year university students. The report states that there seemed to be a tendency for the students' writing to lack structure and one of the lecturers pondered whether that was due to the use of copying and pasting. Furthermore, the students lacked argumentative skills and overall there seemed to be less focus on accuracy. The report indicates that first year students are less prepared for higher education than in previous years, and this is partly due to inadequate writing skills and a lack of study techniques and learning strategies (Lødding and Aamodt 2015).

The students of the elective English subjects, i.e. the subjects of the present study, are expected to be at an intermediate level. Grabe and Kaplan (1996: 303) describe an intermediate student as someone who has mastered the basic skills of writing and who now uses writing to learn about different subjects and topics. Furthermore, an intermediate learner is expected to acquire knowledge from using several sources, has a more varied and wider vocabulary, more complex sentence structure, is a more mature writer, and has a higher consideration for writing for a specific audience and genre (Grabe and Kaplan 1996: 303). This expectation is based on an evaluation of the aims in the curriculum, the questions and criteria from the national exams, and the level of the relevant course books for the elective English subjects.

³ http://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/lareplan/generell-del/core_curriculum_english.pdf

1.3 The aims of the study

The present study aims at shedding light upon the teachers' and students' experiences of teaching and learning writing at the upper secondary level, with a focus on expository and persuasive writing. The study included upper secondary schools that had achieved different grade averages from their exams and continuous assessment grades in the relevant courses.

From the researcher's personal experience of teaching these courses and assessing one of the courses in the national exams, there seem to be different practices in both the teaching of expository and persuasive writing, as well as in how to assess it. It is assumed that the students are more motivated and have more incentives to develop their writing at this level because they have elected the subject. The aims in the curriculum are also more ambitious in these subjects than in the foundation courses (see section 2.3.2). Furthermore, one may assume that many of the students that study one of the aforementioned courses will continue into higher education and therefore the ability to write expository and persuasive texts is important.

The study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent and how is expository and persuasive writing taught in the elective English classes in upper secondary school?
- (2) How do the students experience the teaching of writing and expository and persuasive writing in these classes?

1.4 Outline of the thesis

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides the background for the present study. It gives an overview of the state school system with a focus on the teaching of English and the elective courses in English offered in upper secondary school in Norway. In addition, it addresses the curriculum and the national exams, before giving a brief explanation of the system of teacher education. Chapter 3 sets the thesis in a theoretical perspective and includes relevant literature. Hyland (2003b) and Silva (1993) are two pivotal scholars who lay much of the foundation for the research. In addition, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) provide many examples of different studies of writing and Weigle (2002) offers insight into the assessment of writing. Furthermore, there are several Norwegian studies that shed light on the status of writing amongst Norwegian students and which place the present study in a relevant context.

Chapter 4 provides information about the different methods used to gather the data for the thesis. The study has used two methods, namely semi-structured interviews and focus-groups interviews, and there will thus be an explanation of these methods. Chapter 5 presents the findings. It analyses the data derived from the teacher interviews and the student focus group interviews. Following the findings, there will be a discussion of the data, including possible implications of the results. Finally, the writer will consider some of the limitations of the study before drawing conclusions from it in the final chapter.

2.0 Background

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by giving an overview of the Norwegian school system in section 2.2. Section 2.3 includes a description of the current national curriculum, named *The Knowledge Promotion (LK06)*, before focusing on the curricula for the elective subjects in English Vg 2 and Vg3, i.e. the second and third years of upper secondary school. Assessment of the subjects and the national exams are addressed in section 2.4. Finally, section 2.5 covers issues related to teacher education and qualifications in English.

2.2 The Norwegian school system

The Norwegian school system is divided into two main stages, namely compulsory school, consisting of primary school and lower secondary school in one stage, and optional upper secondary school in the second stage. The students are enrolled in primary school from the first to seventh grades, continuing on to lower secondary school from grades eight to ten, before attending an upper secondary school of their choice for three years. English is taught from the first grade and is the only compulsory foreign language. The municipality is responsible for primary and lower secondary education (i.e. compulsory education), while the county is responsible for upper secondary education. However, the *Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training* bears the overall responsibility for compulsory and upper secondary education⁴. It is mandatory to attend primary and lower secondary school and children attend the schools in their school catchment area. However, there are exceptions where parents have strong arguments for enrolling their children in another school, and there are also a few independent schools to choose from. Nevertheless, the Norwegian school system is very much a system based on social equality and the vast majority attend the school in their catchment area. In fact, only 2,2 per cent attend an independent school⁵. State education is both free and compulsory.

Upper secondary education consists of different education programmes. Education is no longer mandatory, though the majority of students choose to apply and enrol in an upper secondary school. The students that apply are guaranteed enrolment in one of the upper

⁴ https://www.udir.no/Upload/Brosjyre/5/Education_in_Norway.pdf?epslanguage=no

⁵ https://www.udir.no/Upload/Brosjyre/5/Education_in_Norway.pdf?epslanguage=no

secondary schools. Upper secondary education consists of two different directions, both in terms of content and possibilities for further education. There are two main programmes, namely the programmes for General Studies and the Vocational Education programmes. In the Vocational Education programmes, one attends a school offering one's desired line of study for two years and one then gains a placement in an apprenticeship lasting two years. At the end of the apprenticeship, students obtain a certificate of qualification, granting that they have passed all their subjects in the two-year period. This line of study does not give students the option or qualifications needed to continue on to higher education. If students wish to study further, they have to enrol in a third year of study, where they study the same subjects as the students attending the general programme. Completing this year will result in a general university admission certification. However, students who wish to study at a college or university also have that possibility without attending a third year of study, as there is a '23/5 rule', where one may apply for higher education from the age of 23, granted that one has a five-year experience from a work placement⁶.

The programme for General Studies offers three different lines of studies, namely Specialisation in General Studies, Sport and Physical Education, and Music, Dance and Drama. It is the programme for General Studies and its lines of studies that offer the subjects targeted in the present study. The General Studies programme consists of Vg1, Vg2 and Vg3. In the first year (Vg1), students study several subjects, such as Mathematics, Norwegian, Geography and English. The subjects in Vg1 are foundation courses and are mandatory for all the students. Year 2 and 3 (Vg2 and Vg3) offer subjects that are foundation courses, as well as subjects that are more in depth. In addition, there is a wide selection of specialisation courses that students may elect. It takes three years to complete the General Studies programme and, granted that students have not failed any subjects, they gain a diploma of achieved grades for the different subjects and exams. The diploma functions as a university admission certificate⁷.

English as a subject is no longer mandatory in the two final years (i.e. Vg2 and Vg3). However, there are three different in-depth English courses the students may elect as part of their specialised subjects programme. In Vg2, the students have the option to elect International English. If they wish to continue with English, they have two options in Vg3: they can continue either with Social Studies English or English Literature and Culture. All three courses comprise five hours a week subjects and at the end of each course they receive

⁶ https://www.udir.no/Upload/Brosjyrer/5/Education_in_Norway.pdf?epslanguage=no

⁷ https://www.udir.no/Upload/Brosjyrer/5/Education_in_Norway.pdf?epslanguage=no

one oral grade and one written grade. Students who do not elect International English in Vg2 have the opportunity to study the subject in Vg3⁸. It is important to stress that it is only in the programme for Specialisation in General Studies that students have the opportunity to elect the three specialisation courses, as the other programmes only offer International English⁹.

2.3. The National Curriculum (LK06)

2.3.1 The Knowledge Promotion (LK06)

The current national curriculum is called *The Knowledge Promotion* (LK06) and was a result of the education reform of 2006. The Knowledge Promotion curriculum integrates five basic skills as part of every subject. These skills are oral skills, reading, writing, digital skills, and numeracy. The aforementioned skills are considered important to succeed in the different subjects, as well as in society. The schools and the teachers are expected to integrate the skills into their plans and teaching. The background for implementing the basic skills was a concern that children were not mastering the basic skills needed to succeed in school subjects. This concern derived from the first Pisa assessment of Norwegian students' skills, published in 2001¹⁰. The results were referred to as 'the PISA-shock', as Norwegian educators were shocked by the poor scores amongst Norwegian students in the light of Norway's high standard of living¹¹. This, together with the newly appointed Minister of Education in 2001, Kristin Clemet, became the catalyst for a national education reform¹². The result was a new education reform which introduced numerous competence aims that the students were to achieve at the end of specific years in each subject. The teachers were free to choose which methods and strategies to use in order to meet the aims. An increased focus and awareness in promoting the five basic skills across all subjects, together with an aims-based curriculum, was believed to increase the students' knowledge.

⁸ <https://www.udir.no/kl06/ENG4-01/Hele/Struktur>

⁹ https://www.vilbli.no/?Program=V.ST&Kurs=V.STUSP1---- V.STSSA2---- V.STSSA3----&Side=1.2.1&Fag=V.ENG4Z01&Expand=V.ENG4Z01&Fylke=11#expand_V.ENG4Z01

¹⁰ <https://www.oecd.org/edu/school/programmeforinternationalstudentassessmentpisa/34107978.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.oecd.org/norway/48632032.pdf>

¹² <https://books.google.no/books?id=dJQFCgAAQBAJ&pg=PT75&lpg=PT75&dq=pisa+shock+kristin+clemet&source=bl&ots=Ane7qRhTH7&sig=Z8KZBFan9jdPap2BowJsSmxg5vs&hl=no&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwionqMgRRAhVGVSwKHe0QDIIsQ6AEIMDAC#v=onepage&q=pisa%20shock%20kristin%20clemet&f=false>

2.3.2 The curricula for the elective subjects in English Vg2 and Vg3

The curricula for International English, Social Studies English and English Literature and Culture incorporate the five basic skills. In English the basic skills here refer to competence in ‘being able to express oneself orally and in writing in English’, ‘being able to read in English’, ‘numeracy in English involves supplementing one’s arithmetical skills in one’s native language with the necessary expression in English’, and lastly, ‘being able to use digital tools in English’¹³.

Furthermore, the three courses share three main subject areas, namely Language and Language Learning, Communication, and Culture, Society and Literature. In the Vg3 courses, the curricula state that ‘communication also involves precise and coherent expression in a number of oral and written genres, including composite texts’¹⁴. In addition, the subject areas have more specific aims that the students are to achieve at the end of the course.

Even though the curricula for the relevant courses have numerous aims, these aims are not necessarily targeted one-by-one. The topic-based aims under the Culture, Society and Literature area may be combined with aims from the Language and Language Learning area in addition to the Communication area. Furthermore, in order to reach the topic-based aims, one is required to master several of the aims related to language and communication. Thus, the aims mostly connected to the present study cannot solely focus on the aims connected to writing without considering the topics about which the students are to communicate. Therefore, the aims from all three main subject areas are of interest to the present study.

The students of International English are expected to account for their language learning strategies and language learning outcomes. At the end of the course, they are expected to write coherent, well-structured texts on general, specialised and literary subjects. Content-wise, the students are to elaborate and discuss a number of topics related to international educational options, multicultural societies, the media, and global challenges. Social Studies English and English Literature and Culture build on International English and both curricula expect the students to be able to produce texts in a variety of genres with clear content, appropriate style, good structure, and usage that is precise and accurate. Social Studies English has topics that are related to history, politics, social and economic conditions, and regional and international conflicts. In English Literature and Culture, the students are expected to elaborate on and discuss a selection of factual prose texts from English-language

¹³ https://www.udir.no/kl06/ENG1-03/Hele/Grunnleggende_ferdigheter/?lplang=eng

¹⁴ <https://www.udir.no/kl06/ENG4-01/Hele/Kompetansemaal/social-studies-english-?lplang=eng>

culture and social life, and issues from the news media. Finally, the subject area Culture, Society and Literature requires students to elaborate, analyse, present, discuss, locate, reflect on, and interpret several topics. The verbs used in the competence aims require the students to be at an intermediate level, as one needs good writing skills to be able to elaborate and discuss the topics.

2.4 Assessment and the national exams

When students graduate from upper secondary school, they receive a diploma, which is a transcript of the different subjects they have studied and their accomplished grades. The grades system uses a scale from 1 to 6, where 6 is the highest achievable grade and 1 the lowest, and thus a fail. One needs to achieve a grade 2 in order to pass a subject and to graduate. The students either receive a final grade at the end of each school year for each subject or they receive a final grade when the course or subject is completed, which may be more than one year. The final grades are often summative, based on several assessments and conducted throughout the year. However, there is often an emphasis on assessments that are conducted at the end of the school year, as these are normally full-day tests and measure several of the competence aims, as well as indicating the achieved level at the end of the course. There are also formative assessments that are conducted throughout the school year and the teachers are obliged to conduct teacher-student conferences for each subject in each term. Furthermore, the diploma includes the results from the national exams. The average grade score is obtained by adding up all the grades and then dividing them by the total number of grades. The students apply to colleges and universities based on this average grade score.

At the end of each course, the students may be asked to sit for a written exam and an oral exam. The students are selected centrally for the written exams and locally for the oral exams. Furthermore, the assessment of the written exams is prepared and marked centrally by external examiners, while the oral exams are assessed locally by an internal examiner (usually the teacher of the course) and an external examiner (usually a teacher from another local upper secondary school). The written exams have a duration of five hours, and students are allowed to use notes, textbooks, dictionaries and other non-electronic material. However, there are some schools that are part of a project called 'Internett på eksamen' (Internet access during exams) under the *Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training* and these students are allowed also to use the Internet while taking the written exam. In 2015, there

were 56 schools participating in eight different subjects in this project¹⁵. The examiners are not to be informed which students are part of the project and they are to be assessed according to the same criteria¹⁶. However, the project ended in 2016¹⁷.

The criteria for assessing the elective courses in English in the national exams comprise three main categories, namely language, structure and content¹⁸. In addition, the examiners use an assessment rubric that includes three main categories where the first one incorporates the aims within *Språk og språklæring* (Language and language learning), *Kommunikasjon* (Communication) and *Kultur, samfunn og litteratur* (Culture, society and literature). The second category is called *Tekststruktur* (Text structure) and the last one is called *Språk* (Language)¹⁹. The essay questions (i.e. the long answer) in the written exams most often require the students to argue, reflect and discuss several issues and topics related to the competence aims under the Culture, society and literature subject area for each individual course. Thus, the written exam questions are based on the competence aims from the curriculum. In addition, the written exam questions often require the students to include information and references to attached appendices and text boxes. For example, in International English the students received the following exam question (i.e. Task 2d, Spring 2016): ‘Referring to the newspaper commentary in the box below about the lack of education for girls, discuss why the issue of better education opportunities for all is important in the world today’. In Social Studies English one of the exam questions (i.e. Task 2c, Spring 2016) asked, ‘Discuss what you think the cartoon is saying about immigration issues in American history and about current immigration issues in the USA’. In the exam for English Literature and Culture, Task 2a Spring 2016 was: ‘Referring to task 1a and 1b above, discuss what you believe are the predominant contributions of American and British culture in the world today’²⁰. The essay questions often have expository and persuasive elements.

¹⁵ <https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/finn-forskning/rapporter/erfaringer-og-vurderinger-av-eksamen-2015-og-2016/>

¹⁶ <https://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/tall-og-forskning/rapporter/2014/internett-pa-eksamen.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/finn-forskning/rapporter/erfaringer-og-vurderinger-av-eksamen-2015-og-2016/>

¹⁸ <https://access-socialstudies2014.cappelendamm.no/binfil/download2.php?tid=1844624&h=fb764964a720d52e921f824630d51932&sek=1439369>

¹⁹ <https://access-socialstudies2014.cappelendamm.no/binfil/download2.php?tid=1844624&h=fb764964a720d52e921f824630d51932&sek=1439369>

²⁰ Note: password protected. <https://www.udir.no/eksamen-og-prover/eksamen/finn-eksamensoppgaver/>

In 2016, the national grade average for International English was 3,3 (out of 6), while for Social Studies English it was 3,2. English Literature and Culture came out best with a grade average of 3,6. In Rogaland, the county in which the present study was conducted, the results in English Literature and Culture were the same as the national grade average. In International English, the average was 3,6, i.e. above the national average, while in Social Studies English it was 3,4, i.e. also above the national average. In comparison, the grade average for written English amongst 10th graders was 3,6 (2015-16). When comparing English to other elective subjects in upper secondary school, one may note that the students achieved the following grades on their exams in 2016: Biology 2 had an average of 3,3, Geology 2 had 3,7, and Politics and Human Rights had a grade average of 3,3²¹.

2.5 Teacher education

There are three different routes to qualify as a teacher in Norway. Firstly, one can study several subjects as part of a Bachelor of Education and become a teacher after four years. English is not a compulsory subject in this education, but an elective subject. This qualifies one first and foremost to teach in primary and lower secondary schools. Secondly, as of 2003, one has had the option to take an integrated ‘lektor’²² study programme, which integrates subjects and pedagogy throughout the programme. The ‘lektor’ program consists of one minor and one major subject, lasts five years, and includes a Master’s degree. It primarily qualifies teachers to teach in lower secondary and upper secondary school. Finally, one can study different subjects as part of a Bachelor’s degree or a Master’s degree, and subsequently take a Postgraduate Certificate of Education. All three options include a teacher training period, which is a work placement arrangement where one’s teaching skills are evaluated and assessed by mentor teachers.

The ‘lektor’ programme was part of a political initiative to raise the competence level amongst teachers. In addition, in 2002 the authorities offered further education for teachers who either lacked qualifications in the subjects they were teaching or wanted to study a specific subject in order to teach that subject²³. There were many teachers in primary and lower secondary education who lacked qualifications in the subjects they taught. This has

²¹ <https://statistikkportalen.udir.no/Pages/default.aspx>

²² Lektor is a teacher who has a Master’s degree.

²³ https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/KD/Vedlegg/Grunnskole/Strategiplaner/UDIR_SprakApnerDorer_07nett.pdf

especially been the case for English teachers who, even though they had had years of experience teaching the subject, had not actually studied English since upper secondary. A Bachelor of Education qualifies one to teach all subjects and this led to a situation where learners could have a teacher in English who had not studied the subject as part of their Bachelor's of Education degree. A report by Lagerstrøm (2000) showed that the majority of the teachers who taught English in Year 1 to Year 4 in primary school had no formal qualifications in the subject. In lower secondary school, 20 per cent of the teachers who taught English lacked formal qualifications in the subject²⁴. Between 2000 and 2006, as few as 4,7 per cent of teacher graduates at the University of Stavanger had studied English as part of their Bachelor of Education (Drew and Vigrestad 2008: 4).

However, in 2005 there was an initiative to raise the competency in basic education²⁵. The new education reform (*LK06*) focused on raising the competency level amongst students. At the same time, there was a policy plan to raise the level of teachers' competence. The policy is called *Competence for Development* and is financed by both the central and local government. According to a report from Statistics Norway (Lagerstøm et al. 2014), there has been a rise in competence amongst English teachers in primary school and lower secondary school. For example, in lower secondary school, 15 per cent of teachers in 2014 lacked formal qualifications in English compared to 20 per cent in 2000²⁶. Thus, there has been a rise in the teachers' formal qualifications in English in compulsory education. According to a recent report called *Utdanningsspeilet* (2016), 48 per cent of the teachers who taught English lacked the aforementioned requirements in compulsory education. In addition, teachers in compulsory education who have completed their education after 1 January 2014 need to have a minimum of 60 study points in English in lower secondary school and a minimum of 30 study points in primary school²⁷.

The level of teacher qualifications in English in primary and lower secondary school is likely to have had a negative influence on the quality of teaching and learning for a number of students before they reach the upper secondary level. It is unfortunate in terms of the students' learning that so many teachers in compulsory education are unqualified to teach English²⁸.

²⁴https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/KD/Vedlegg/Grunnskole/Strategiplaner/UDIR_SprakApnerDorer_07nett.pdf

²⁵https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kd/vedlegg/kunnskapsloftet/competence_for_development.pdf

²⁶ http://www.ssb.no/utdanning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/_attachment/197751?_ts=148a1618d30

²⁷ http://utdanningsspeilet.udir.no/2016/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Utdanningsspeilet_2016.pdf

²⁸ http://utdanningsspeilet.udir.no/2016/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Utdanningsspeilet_2016.pdf

In terms of upper secondary education, according to a report from *Norsk institutt for studier av forskning og utdanning* (Turmo and Aamodt 2007), 33 per cent of teachers who taught English in Vg1 during the school year 2006-2007 had a Master's degree, while the majority had a 1-2 years degree in English²⁹. In contrast to compulsory education, all the teachers who taught English in upper secondary school had formal qualifications in the subject. The *Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training* states that upper secondary school teachers who are in permanent employment and have graduated after 1 January 2014 are required by law to have a minimum of 60 study points (i.e. one full year of study) in the subjects they are teaching in upper secondary school³⁰. There are no statistics to date over how many of the teachers teaching the elective English subjects have a Master's degree in English³¹. However, there are indications about teacher qualifications from studies of the elective subjects, where teachers who taught these subjects were interviewed. For example, Sparboe (2008) and Shirazi (2010) interviewed upper secondary teachers who taught the elective English subject in Year 3 and their teacher interviews³² showed that approximately half of the teachers had a Master's degree³³ in English. This correlated with the findings of the present study where three of the interviewed teachers had a Master's degree in English, and one of the interviewed teachers was studying for a Master's degree in English at the time of the interview.

2.6 Summary

English is mandatory from Year 1 in compulsory education, and up until Year 2 (i.e. Vg2) at the upper secondary level. From then onwards, English becomes an elective subject and the students are offered three different English subjects, namely International English, Social Studies English, and/ or English Literature and Culture. In the aforementioned subjects, the students receive one oral grade and one written grade. In addition, they may be selected to sit a written and/ or oral exam. There have been initiatives by the central and local governments to raise the level of competency amongst teachers who teach English. This has been necessary as many teachers teach English in Norway, especially in primary education, without formal qualifications in English.

²⁹ https://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/tall-og-forskning/rapporter/utdanningsspeilet_2006/5/turmo-aamodt_2007.pdf

³⁰ <https://www.udir.no/regelverk-og-tilsyn/finn-regelverk/etter-tema/Ovrige-tema/krav-om-relevant-kompetanse-for-a-undervise-i-fag-udir-3-2015/?depth=0&print=1#4.1-hvilke-krav-stilles>

³¹ <http://www.norskulektorlag.no/nyhetsarkiv-2016/endelig-skal-larerkompetanse-kartlegges-article1570-289.html>

³² based on less than 10 subjects in each study.

³³ or 'hovedfag', the previous equivalent before the reform.

3.0 Theory and literature review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of theory and research connected to first language (L1) and second language (L2) writing. The chapter begins by giving an overview of the nature of writing and includes different approaches to writing, such as the process approach and the product approach in section 3.2. In section 3.3, features of L1 and L2 writing are addressed. Section 3.4 deals with genres, with a subsection on expository and persuasive writing. Section 3.5 describes characteristics of academic writing, while learning styles and strategy deployment are covered in section 3.6. Assessment and the role of feedback are addressed in section 3.7. Finally, section 3.8 addresses some research on L2 writing conducted in Norway.

3.2. The nature of writing

Writing has its own conventions and it is not simply speech written down (Brown and Priyanvada 2010: 259). However, as stated by Weigle (2002: 19), ‘Speech and written discourse draw on many of the same communicative goals’. Weigle stresses that one important characteristic of writing is that it involves more sociocultural norms and cognitive processes than spoken language and thus one cannot directly transfer spoken language to writing.

Furthermore, writing is viewed as an act where one communicates meaning (Weigle 2002: 19). The meaning may vary according to the context and in accordance with the different settings and cultures in which one writes. Thus, the act of writing is shaped not only by the individual, but also by culture and society. Consequently, writing as opposed to speaking must be taught by instructing students on how to write (Weigle 2002: 4). Moreover, Weigle (2002: 4) points out that writing is a standardised system that is taught and to be able to master the skills of writing is regarded as essential in one’s educational and societal opportunities. Since the system of writing is more standardised than speaking, the consequences for not conforming to standardised writing will have negative effects (Weigle 2002: 4).

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), Grabe and Kaplan (1996) and Weigle (2002) make a distinction between ‘knowledge telling’ and ‘knowledge transformation’, where the latter is the most challenging of the two as it requires more practice and skills.

In knowledge transformation, the process of writing involves not only putting one's thoughts to paper as they occur, but actually using writing to create new knowledge: in this kind of writing the process of writing itself frequently leads to new knowledge and may change the writer's view of what he or she is trying to communicate.

(Weigle 2002: 32-33)

When one retells (i.e. knowledge retelling), one communicates information or a story that one already knows, which requires the writer to recall this previously acquired knowledge and repeat or retell it. However, 'transforming' indicates that one is expressing new ideas, as well as making deductions based on acquired knowledge and insight. In other words, one is transforming information. To write the types of texts where one is 'transforming' often requires much work of the writer. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987: 10) explain that knowledge transformation occurs when thoughts appear and are developed through the composing process. Thus, knowledge is developed through the interaction between 'text processing' and 'knowledge processing' (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987: 11).

Davies (2004: 245) informs that expository and persuasive texts include writing that is transforming. This kind of writing is also distinct from writing that requires composing, such as personal letters and business letters, in that it is not telling or retelling knowledge that is already known to the writer (Grabe and Kaplan 1996:4). Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987: 11) claim that writers who use knowledge-transforming strategies are found amongst talented young students, undergraduates and graduate students. Furthermore, they are accustomed to working actively with their thoughts and making sure the text communicates what they intend. According to Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987: 11), 'In the process, they are likely to consider not only changes to the text but also changes in what they want to say. Thus it is that writing can play a role in the development of their knowledge'. However, Grabe and Kaplan (1996: 5) argue that most students do not have the ability to transform knowledge even though most academic settings take it for granted that they have acquired this skill before they enter higher education. Furthermore, they argue that students have not been taught to retell knowledge in a consistent manner, both in their L1 and L2. This poses several challenges, not only for the students who lack these skills when entering academia, but also for the lecturers who find that their students do not have the writing skills expected when entering higher education.

3.2.1 Process writing versus product writing

In the 1970s, much interest and research was conducted on L2 learners' cognitive thinking when writing (Hedge 2000: 303). There was an increased interest in finding out the process of writing L2 learners underwent in order to improve their writing performance. The writing process focuses on writing as a process as opposed to a finished product (Bayat 2014). According to Hedge (2000: 302), 'The process view of writing sees it as a thinking, a discovery'. Writers use several strategies in the writing process in order to develop and compose a text. In addition, process writing has been regarded as consisting of a set of stages where the process is divided into three main stages, namely *pre-writing*, where one plans the text, *writing*, where one writes the actual text, and lastly *re-writing*, where one revises, rewrites and completes the text (Flowers and Hayes 1981: 367). Krashen (2014: 21), points out that 'good writers' understand that revision is important and part of the writing process. On the other hand, 'poor writers' regard revising as a weakness and the practice of not revising as a strength.

In contrast to process writing, product writing is conducted in one single stage. However, elements from the process approach may occur simultaneously while the learner performs the writing. Hedge (2000: 302) explains the different stages as including activities such as setting goals, developing ideas, organising information, choosing appropriate language, writing drafts, reviewing, revising, and editing. This process is complex and challenging for L2 writers. The teacher often functions as a guide in this process (Bayat 2014). In addition, Bayat's (2014) study shows that process writing decreases writing anxiety. There are thus several arguments in favour of the process approach to writing.

There are different opinions on how to interpret the process approach. According to Flowers and Hayes (1981: 366), 'The process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing'. Furthermore, these thinking processes are organized hierarchically according to perceived importance. The cognitive levels are not static, but may change their place in the hierarchy throughout this process. In addition, the writing develops gradually and constitutes goals and sub-goals that are discovered while writing. The act of writing stimulates the writers' writing cognition and may thus lead to new goals (Flowers and Hayes 1981: 366). However, Kotler and Hickey (1987: 15) claim that one cannot necessarily suppose that one knows what learners are thinking based on their behaviour when writing. One cannot thus claim to understand what type of behaviour leads to good writing. Kotler and Hickey (1987:

15) claim: ‘For example, complex sentences don’t have anything to do with complexity of mind. Lots of complex thinkers use simple sentences’.

Sommers (1982: 154) argues in favour of process writing because it forces the students ‘...back into the chaos, back to the point where they are shaping and restructuring their meaning’. In addition, the assessor will comment in a different way to a product versus a writing process. The students will be offered more complex and advanced tasks in their revisions than they would receive as part of feedback to a finished product.

Another aspect of process writing is modelling. The process approach allows for teacher and peer modelling. As stated by Barkaoui (2007: 37):

Process-oriented research suggests that we can help students become more competent L2 writers by describing and modelling for them the processes and strategies that underlie effective writing (e.g., generating ideas, planning, drafting, and revising) and providing them with feedback on their performance until they are able to apply these processes and strategies independently and flexibly in relation to their goals and task requirements.

The goal of process modelling is that the learners will automatize strategies and be able to transfer skills to other suitable contexts. Furthermore, process writing is, as argued by Barkaoui (2007: 39), most efficient when it is combined with text modelling. In text modelling, the teachers might firstly model how to understand and analyse a text, before the learners work together in analysing, constructing and discussing the text. Finally, the learners may be able to focus on the text individually and independently (Barkaoui 2007: 38-39). The aforementioned combination will prepare the students to write argumentative texts and in addition will enable them to function in the target communities. Furthermore, as Min (2016 :45) points out, modelling, practice and feedback is a successful combination in developing writing, revision, and strategy skills amongst language learners. Thus, learners are able to acquire new cognitive skills through modelling.

Furthermore, scaffolding may be related to the writing process approach. As stated by Hyland (2013: 211), ‘Instructional scaffolding means providing students with sufficient supports to promote learning, particularly when new concepts and skills are first being introduced.’ In other words, scaffolding is a process where the learners receive help or guidance to perform a task that they would not be able to perform without help from another. In process writing, the other is often the teacher or a peer. The idea is that the learner will

reach a higher level of competence by being assisted by an expert or more experienced other (Ellis 2008: 234).

Nevertheless, there has also been criticism against the process approach to writing. According to Grabe and Kaplan (1996: 89), the process approach to writing disregards the learners' 'intellectual resources' and the learners' different abilities. It is assumed that the students have the necessary skills and knowledge to start the writing process. There is also another concern voiced by a faculty teacher of engineering, who argues in favour of product writing, as cited in Hyland (2013: 248):

Actually I don't ask for a draft. Their report is an assignment and they are graded on this. If we give them a chance to write a draft, if we correct a draft, we are just giving a grade to our own work. We don't write their exams for them so why write their reports?

On the other hand, Kotler and Hickey (1987: 13) argue that: 'The issue isn't whether writing should be thought of as a process or product. That's clear. It's both.' The process approach to writing may be understood as giving the students a set of skills that they can use to intervene in their own writing process. It is to encourage the learners to be more aware of the act of writing and its cognitive processes. The learners are taught strategies that they can deploy in their writing. Furthermore, Kotler and Hickey (1987: 13) argue against the usual practice among teachers, where they assign their students a writing task and two weeks later give them the results in the form of grades. They claim it simply does not work and furthermore pose the question: 'But whoever thought it did?'

3.3 L1 and L2 writing

Writing has its own sets of skills and characteristics. Most children in developed countries learn at least the basics of writing in their mother tongue. However, not everybody learns to master writing at an advanced, or even at an intermediate level. To be able to write in a clear and logical manner, with a good overall structure that serves a purpose, is challenging for many first language writers. Yet, according to Brown and Priyanvada (2010: 259), 'We expect second language learners to write coherent essays with artfully chosen rhetorical and discourse devices!' Consequently, there is much research on teaching L2 writing (Brown and Priyanvada 2010: 259).

Much research has focused on the processes and development of L2 writing. Barkaoui (2007: 35-37) presents the main views on L2 writing development, namely the text-oriented approach that assesses L2 writing performances, i.e. the learners' written texts, and the process-oriented approach that emphasises writing as acquiring a set of strategies that the learners deploy in their writing. The sociocultural approach and its focus on genre awareness, discourse and writing in a context is also emphasised. Barkaoui (2007: 36) points out that proficient L2 writers are able to function in new cultural environments and learn the values, expertise, expectations and genres of their new community. Even though the aforementioned aspects to teaching L2 writing are often researched and presented separately, they are often intertwined in the teaching and learning of L2 writing. Barkaoui (2007: 37) argues that in order to teach L2 learners to attain full writing proficiency, one needs to address these approaches in an integrated manner.

Silva (1993) and Hyland (2003b) have presented much research on L2 writing and how it differs from L1 writing. Hyland (2003b: 34) points out that there are numerous studies that show that texts produced by L2 writers are generally shorter, less cohesive, less fluent, and contain more errors. Hyland lists four different areas where one may find differences, namely grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. In addition, there are many individual differences to consider that also affect the development of L2 writing. These studies also show that there are differences when it comes to the actual writing process, i.e. how the writers plan and review their texts, as well as the quality of the texts.

Silva (1993) conducted empirical research where he examined and compared 72 reports of L1 and L2 writers among undergraduate students in the United States. The L1 learners came from at least 27 different countries and they had advanced English proficiency, though their writing skills varied greatly. Most students used similar composing strategies to their L1 when writing in their L2. However, they spent less time planning the text and more time on gathering material and finding sources than in L1. This was due to the fact that they struggled more to find adequate sources and material and thus invested more time on that particular stage of the writing process. Much time was geared towards exploring and understanding the actual topic of the written assignments at the cost of producing useful material and ideas. Moreover, Silva (1993) noted that L2 writing was more limited because of language constraints. Therefore, the writing was more demanding and less effective. Often the ideas and material were not represented adequately in the final written product. Thus, L2 students struggled to make effective use of the material in their texts. In other words, the students spent their time inefficiently (Silva 1993: 661).

According to Silva's (1993) study, writing in L2 generally required more effort from the writer. L2 writers spent more time on figuring out the prompts and what they were to write about than L1 writers (Silva 1993: 661). In addition, L2 learners had a more limited vocabulary and, as a consequence, they invested more time on using a dictionary. More time was spent finding the right words and expressing themselves. Thus, the overall text production was slower and less effective. The L2 students did not have the convenience of being able to simply read the text aloud and check if it sounded correct, as this would require a higher level of competence in the L2. As far as language features were concerned, the reports clearly showed that the written texts contained more errors overall, for example in the structure of the sentences, on vocabulary, verb tenses, prepositions, articles and nouns. Silva's (1993) findings are supported by those of Hyland (2003b).

The students themselves reported that their greatest challenges were related to vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, the students expressed frustration over not being able to express their ideas appropriately and accurately, which affected the overall evaluation of the texts (Silva 1996: 34). This became evident in Silva's extensive study where the teachers rated the overall quality of the L2 texts as being poorer than that of L1 writers (Silva 1993: 662-663).

In addition, as pointed out by Weigle, (2002: 36), one may lack the social context when one is writing in a L2. Sometimes the learners are not familiar with societal aspects as they appear in written texts and it thus becomes a challenge to transform that knowledge or messages into their own writing. As the social context is an important ingredient in writing, this element must also be considered when teaching L2 writing. A lack of sufficient language proficiency may lead to difficulties in interpreting sources and texts and thus not being able to understand a text fully will affect the writing performance. In other words, as stated by Weigle (2002: 36), 'Poor reading comprehension skills may limit one's ability to evaluate one's own writing'. Students who want to succeed need to be motivated and willing to invest time to gain cultural knowledge about the target language and at the same time believe that they will profit from this investment.

Weigle (2002: 35) argues that L2 writers use many of the same 'writing processes' as they apply in their L1 writing. This may be problematic since L1 and L2 writing are not the same. Furthermore, Silva (1993) argues that L2 teaching has historically taught L2 writing by simply transferring L1 writing practices to L2. According to Silva (1993), while L1 and L2 are similar on a superficial level, when one focuses on the different features of writing, one notices several differences. For example, composing a text has differences when it comes to

planning, transcribing and reviewing. In addition, writing features differ from L1 to L2 when it comes to fluency, accuracy, quality, and structure. This shows differences on a wide range of areas, and it furthermore underlines that L2 writing is distinctly different from L1 writing. Thus, it becomes important for L2 teachers to have competency in the distinct nature of L2 writing (Silva 1993: 657).

When writing in the L2, previously attained understanding of language and writing from the L1 may be transferable to the L2 (Hyland 1996: 34). However, it is not a given that a proficient L1 writer becomes a proficient L2 writer. There are many proficient learners who are not able to express their thoughts adequately in their L2. As stated by Hyland (2003b: 35), 'Linguistic and rhetorical conventions do not always transfer successfully across languages, and may actually interfere with writing in the L2'. There are many considerations to take into account when comparing a student's L1 competency to his/ her L2 performance. Some of these considerations are on an individual level and others are on a cultural level.

Consequently, it is important to take account of individual learning styles and how one may adapt the teaching to students' preferences. However, students are also a part of a community that share certain characteristics. As pointed out by Hyland (2003b: 33-34), 'They are also members of social groups whose schemata, practices, and attitudes towards writing and learning may be very different from our own and also from those of L1 writers'. There are several personal factors, such as the writer's motivation for learning the language, which may affect their willingness to invest time and effort in learning the language. In addition, there are numerous other personal factors, such as the learner's general intelligence, the gender, and previous language learning experiences. Some of these factors are already set and it varies how much one can affect these factors in a classroom setting. However, the students' learning preferences, as well as motivation and attitude to the language, are factors that can be influenced (Hyland 2003b: 33).

3.3.1 Writing across cultures

According to Weigle (2002: 19), 'Speech and written discourse draw on many of the same communicative goals'. Furthermore, writing is viewed as an act where one is to communicate meaning. The act of writing is shaped not only by the individual but also by culture and society. Hayes (1996: 5), cited in Weigle (2002: 19), argues that:

[Writing] is also social because it is a social artifact and is carried out in a social setting. What we write, how we write it, and who we write to is shaped by social

conventions and by our history of social interaction... The genres in which we write were invented by other writers and the phrases we write often reflect phrases earlier writers have written.

Thus, learning to write includes not only learning the grammar, vocabulary and mechanics, but also the social aspects that shape the texts (Weigle 2002: 19-20).

Learning to write in English is different from writing in other languages, both language-wise and because of cultural differences. The readers' expectations vary across cultures and this becomes important to consider when teaching English writing. For instance, how one organises the evidence in a persuasive text varies across cultures (Grabe and Kaplan 1996: 181). In formal English writing, style and organisation are considered more important than in German writing, where content plays a larger role. Furthermore, academic German writing includes a non-linear writing style (Grabe and Kaplan 1996: 187). This is in stark contrast to English writing, where the reader expects the content to be nicely organised, using transitional words and phrases to connect ideas and points. In addition, there is a strong emphasis on originality, in other words to use original content (Weigle 2002: 21).

According to Hyland (2003b: 38-39), there seems to be a general difference between Western cultures and non-Western cultures; in Western education values of 'good writing' are critical thinking and originality, while in non-Western education, one is to show that one has learned what has been taught by retelling what one has learned. Thus, memorization becomes important. Furthermore, to reproduce ideas is seen as being respectful and honourable in many Asian cultures. However, this would be considered immature in English writing and writing of poor quality. Furthermore, texts with much reproduction may be regarded as plagiarism as one is simply repeating other writers' work. This is an important issue to be aware of when teaching L2 writing, where one may have students from different cultures and thus different understandings of what 'good writing' entails.

3.4 Genres

Writing aims at communicating with a targeted audience. The term 'genre' is used for categorising different types of texts and relates to how writers use language when they respond to re-emerging writing situations (Hyland 2005: 87). In other words, as stated by Hyland (2003a: 18), 'We follow certain social conventions for organizing messages because we want our readers to recognize our purpose. These abstract, socially recognized ways of using language for particular purposes are called *genres*'. In classroom settings, written texts

often have an intended audience that is created for the purpose of teaching students to write in a specific genre. As such, there is an element of artificiality in this process. Whitney et al. (2011: 525) argue that much writing which is conducted in the classroom is 'false' in the sense that students are copying the writing styles of text types, such as journal articles, which they have never read. Furthermore, the students are either writing for an unspecified audience or they are writing for an audience which is construed especially for the writing task. In addition, much of this writing may be their first attempt at writing a genre. They then move on to another genre or they write the same genres over and over again with little instruction (Whitney et al. 2011: 525). According to Cordaro (2007: 364), college students who had often received positive feedback on their writing in one or two genres felt confident in that they mastered writing. Therefore, they were often surprised when they received a poor result in writing assignments when they wrote in genres they were not accustomed to. This illustrates, as argued by Cordaro (2007: 364), '...a disconnect between college students' self-efficacy beliefs and their actual abilities....' Thus, Cordero (2007: 364) suggests that students might benefit from direct instruction, as well as peer modelling when writing in new genres.

This disconnection might be understood on the basis of the college students' previous writing experiences. In upper secondary school, many students are asked to follow a recipe or formula of how to write, such as the five-paragraph essay, and some only write first drafts regardless of the writing task. Whitney et al. (2011: 526) claim that: '...in practise, teaching genre often becomes "teaching genres," that is, offering genres to students as performed, discreet, and rigid vessels into which students' ideas might be poured'. Rather Whitney et al. (2011: 526) believe that writing ought to be taught and understood in terms of how writing and genres function in society.

Furthermore, genres change and adapt according to society, and are not fixed. Genres evolve in order to adapt to current needs. Ramanathan and Kaplan (2000: 181) argue that genres might change due to technological progress. For example, Ramanathan and Kaplan (2000: 181) state that the introduction of electronic mail: '...has created a whole new sub-genre for the letters'. Furthermore, Whitney et al. (2011: 526) argue that genres should not be solely taught for the purpose of writing assignments, but they ought to be put in a real-world context outside the classroom context. Students ought to be engaged in the thinking processes about the texts and produce their own understanding of the literary features. Whitney et al. believe that this strategy is more beneficial for learning genres than teachers teaching genre features in the classroom.

There is also a distinction to be made between *genre acquisition* and *genre awareness*. In *genre acquisition*, students are instructed in how to write and to read different text types that are examples of different genres, while in *genre awareness*, the focus is more on analysing the relationship between different types of texts, their rhetoric, and the contexts in which they appear (Johns 2011: 57).

3.4.1 Expository and persuasive writing

Meyer (1999) names five types of expository texts, namely description, sequence, causation, problem/ solution and compare-contrast (Hammann and Stevens 2003: 732). According to Hammann and Stevens (2003: 732), learning to write expository texts is important in order to succeed in higher education. In addition, as pointed out by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987: 183), ‘Expository writing (...) is a normal school task that has about it many of the properties of everyday-life uses of stored knowledge.’ Furthermore, even though there has been focus on how to instruct students to write and read expository texts, they have been taught separately. Writing an expository text grants that one has knowledge about the topic one is to present and how to present it (Hammann and Stevens 2003: 732). According to Hammann and Stevens (2003: 733), writing research has emphasized the importance of content knowledge in effective writing performance. To acquire knowledge, students need to understand the texts they are reading and to retrieve relevant information from them that they can deploy in their writing. The retrieved information then has to be organised and presented according to the genre requirements (Hammann and Stevens 2003: 734).

In higher education, most students, across-disciplines, will receive writing assignments where they are asked to write either expository or persuasive texts. Silva’s (1993) overview of research of L2 writing amongst undergraduate students who represented 27 different L1 languages showed that they were often required to write in the aforementioned genres. Silva (1993: 659) points out that: ‘With regard to genre, most studies called for expository essays; argumentative and narrative tasks ran a far second and third’. This illustrates that students are required to master these genres worldwide when in higher education.

Hyland (2013) interviewed members from different faculties at a university in Hong Kong that teaches in English. Most of the students were L2 learners of English. One faculty teacher in Economics stated that he regarded knowing how to write a persuasive argument, where one provides evidence in support of the arguments, as being the most important for his students when writing (Hyland 2013: 244). According to Hyland (2013: 244), ‘Interestingly, this concern with the rhetorical, genre level features of argument and disciplinary persuasive

logic, rather than grammatical accuracy, reflects current approaches to academic writing instruction'. Thus, there was a trend amongst the faculty members to be more concerned with how the content was presented than with language aspects. Most teachers did not attribute poor writing to poor language skills, but rather blamed it on a lack of knowledge and experience in writing in the required genres. One English teacher also noted that the American students also struggled to write because they were being asked to write in a manner that they were not accustomed to. Thus, the lack of writing skills was evident amongst both L1 and L2 learners (Hyland 2013: 244).

3.5 Academic writing

According to Weigle (2002), to write well is closely linked to a person's academic and professional success. For many, the motivation behind wanting to write well is the assumption that this will give them access to many aspects of society outside school. For some, the goal is also to be able to pursue higher education, where one needs to master the skills of extensive writing. The higher up one goes in the education system, the more important it becomes to master this skill (Weigle 2002: 4). Weigle (2002: 5) claims that: 'One of the main functions of writing at higher levels of education is to expand one's own knowledge through reflection rather than simply to communicate information'. Thus, a lack of sufficient academic writing skills is seen as a lack of the appropriate cognitive skills required for this level of writing. Writing conventions linked to language, such as mechanics, style and accuracy, are important, but the emphasis is on the writer's ability to develop ideas and make sound reasoning, as well as on critical thinking.

Sommers (2008: 152) claims that students who begin higher education in the United States are fortunate if their writing instruction in high school taught them how to structure a text in the form of a five-paragraph essay, and even more fortunate if they learned how to write research papers in the different disciplines. As pointed out by Johns (2011: 58), there appears to be a lack of focus on naming the written assignments. Classrooms in North America, as well as other parts of the world, often use the term 'essay' in writing assignments (Johns 2011: 57). Graves et al. (2010) investigated written assignments for undergraduates in a Canadian college and discovered that most writing assignments were also called 'essay', 'term paper' or simply 'paper'. According to Sommers (2008: 152):

In college, students are asked to write *more* than a plot summary, *more* than a cut-and-paste presentation of secondary sources. Rather they are instructed in the language of analysis, argument, and counter-argument and are urged, in our responses to their drafts, to ‘analyze more’ and to ‘go deeper into their sources’. As academic writers, they are asked to engage with the ideas of others, while most likely encountering and trying to comprehend these ideas, and their authors, for the first time.

Clark and Ivanic (1992: 172) argue against teaching or offering academic writing classes across disciplines as much of the course will only be ‘indirectly relevant to the particular demands of different departments.’ While this is with reference to academic writing at university, one can assume the same to be relevant for academic writing in upper secondary schools. Therefore, to teach writing independently of the subject becomes problematic. In addition, it may be counter-productive, as there are specific discourses and genre requirements that do not transfer across subjects (Hyland 2003a: 23).

3.6 Learning styles and strategies

Macaro (2006: 320) relates that researchers have shown an increased interest since the late 1970s in finding out which strategies learners deploy in learning and practising languages. The research indicates that there is a correlation between the use of strategies and the success rate in learning second languages. Furthermore, research shows that L2 learners can be taught to use strategies more effectively (Macaro 2006: 320).

3.6.1 Learning styles

Firstly, there is a distinction to be made between learning styles and learning strategies. Even though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, there are clear differences. Style is used in accordance with the individual’s learning preferences. In other words, learners might have predispositions or preferences when it comes to learning and these are often referred to as ‘learning styles’. Learning styles do not vary according to different subjects but seem to be stable (Wong and Nunan 2011: 145). However, the use of learning strategies does vary in accordance with the subjects. As stated by Wong and Nunan (2011: 145):

Learning strategies are the specific mental and communicative procedures that learners employ in order to learn and use language. Every task and exercise will be underpinned by at least one strategy, although in most classrooms learners are

unaware of these strategies. One of the hypotheses being tested by learning strategy researchers is that awareness and deployment of strategies will lead to more effective language acquisition.

In terms of learner preferences, there are both differences on the individual level as well as on the group level. Macaro (2006: 321) points out that females appear to use more strategies or different strategies than males. Experienced L2 learners may use different strategies than less experienced L2 learners. Furthermore, individuals may stick to certain types of strategies that are not necessarily the most effective, or they might be unable to use strategies effectively. In addition, there might be cultural preferences amongst the L2 learners (Macaro 2006: 321).

According to Wong and Nunan (2011: 145), learning styles have been categorised in several ways. For example, one can distinguish between analytical versus global styles (i.e. information is learned sequentially versus holistically). There are sensory and physical preferences, such as visual versus auditory (i.e. watching versus listening), and tactile versus kinaesthetic (i.e. sense of touch versus use of whole body). In addition, there are personality styles, such as patient, verbal, dramatic and supportive. When learning languages, Willing (1994), cited in Wong and Nunan (2011: 145), argues that there are four major styles, namely communicative, analytical, authority-oriented and concrete. Communicative learners prefer learning by watching, listening and speaking, while analytical learners prefer to study grammar and read books. Furthermore, communicative learners enjoy learning English outside the classroom, while analytical learners prefer to study on their own and to focus on tasks given by the teacher. Authority-oriented learners prefer their teacher to explain the material. Concrete learners like games, pictures, films, and learning English outside the classroom. However, most learners use several styles and strategies when they learn a language, and might change their preferences.

Wong and Nunan (2011) investigated which learning styles and strategies were deployed by effective and ineffective language learners. The subjects were undergraduate students in Hong Kong. They were categorised according to achieved grades in English acquired from the public exams at the end of their secondary education. Wong and Nunan's (2011: 155) investigation found that the more effective students favoured the communicative style versus the less effective students, who favoured the authority-oriented style.

In addition, the more effective students spent more time practising English when not in school and in addition enjoyed learning English considerably more than the less effective learners. The last point can be related to motivation and thus suggests that more motivated

learners will invest more of their time voluntarily in learning the language. In addition, the L2 learners' previous experiences with writing might determine which strategies they will use in later writing tasks (Macaro 2006: 331). For example, if a L2 student used a specific strategy for writing a text and received positive feedback or a high grade, then the strategies used for that task may be deemed successful and therefore employed in the future. On the other hand, if the result was negative and deemed a failure, the attributed strategies might also be deemed unsuccessful and as a consequence not used in the future.

3.6.2 Strategy deployment

However, it is important to stress that there is contradicting research when it comes to the deployment of learning strategies. There are disagreements in terms of which strategies are most effective and the recommended number of strategies together with possible combinations of strategies that are most beneficial when learning a L2 (Macaro 2006). According to Macaro (2006: 321), teaching learning strategies seems to be effective when they are taught extensively and when they focus on metacognition. In fact, as reported by Macaro (2006: 321), there have been several studies where learners have been taught to write more efficiently. Nevertheless, the concern over the deployment of strategies versus effective use of strategies remains. As stated by Macaro (2006: 231):

However, we are still not clear whether the good language learner only deploys effective strategies, or whether the good language learner deploys strategies effectively. In other words, does the good language learner select only those strategies that he or she has come to realize are effective, or does the good language learner orchestrate combinations of strategies effectively, regardless of their status as effective or otherwise?

Thus, the research is unclear whether learning strategies develop language learning (Macaro 2006: 325). Furthermore, Macaro (2006) argues that until these issues are resolved, teachers will be reluctant to spend time on teaching learning strategies to their students, as it is not yet established that they will benefit from them. In terms of writing, much research (e.g. Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987; Flower and Hayes 1981), as referred to in Macaro (2006), recognises some common strategic traits used by L2 writers. L2 writers develop ideas and these are transcended through different stages. Macaro (2006: 330) explains different strategies that occur in the process of written text formulation amongst L2 learners, such as retrieving

language chunks, evaluating these chunks, restructuring the chunks, translation of words, and conscious choices made to avoid certain phrases. Repetition of the aforementioned process will, as argued by Macaro (2006: 330), lead to changes in memory related to morphology and syntax, i.e. the understanding of the grammar of the language. Ultimately, as stated by Macaro (2006: 330), ‘These changes, together with repeated activation and automation of processes, lead to skill development.’

Good or skilful writers seem to employ different strategies when writing than less skilled writers. Ransdell and Barbier (2002: 134) report that there seems to be a trend amongst good versus poor writers in that they use a non-linear or linear pattern respectively. According to Ransdell and Barbier (2002: 134):

Non-linear processing is characterized by continuous planning, text generation, and revision and is associated with good writing. Poor writing involves a linear process. The linearity can be quite extreme with a limited amount of planning preceding a relatively large amount of text generation. Revision, if done at all, is an afterthought.

The linear process is illustrated by a 12-year-old referred to in Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987: 9):

I have a whole bunch of ideas and write down until my supply of ideas is exhausted. Then I might try to think of more ideas up to the point when you can't get any more ideas that are worth putting down on paper and then I would end it.

When the writer cannot come up with more relevant ideas, or has limited knowledge on a matter, the writing process ends. As stated by Hedge (2000: 304), there is a trend that poor writers tend to have poor composing skills and thus poor composing skills can be a greater factor than poor language skills when it comes to writing.

According to Ransdell and Barbier (2002: 136), writing tasks that ask learners to plan and to create goals before writing will lead to better writing. Ransdell and Barbier (2002) conducted an investigation into the deployment of the *all-at-once strategy* versus the *step-by-step strategy* amongst college students in the United States. The students wrote in English. For some students English was their L1, while others were bilinguals or L2 writers (Ransdell and Barbier 2002: 137, 142). In the step-by-step strategy the writers were required to firstly plan, then write the text before revising. They were also instructed to spend 10 per cent of the time on the first stage, 70 per cent on the middle stage, and lastly 20 per cent on the last stage.

In the all-at-once strategy, the students were informed to plan, write and revise continuously (Ransdell and Barbier 2002: 136).

The results indicated that the all-at-once strategy led to more fluent writing amongst both L1 and L2 writers. Furthermore, the investigation showed that the students who had more college experience, wrote better regardless of previous English experience (Ransdell and Barbier 2002: 142). This shows that learners who have more experience in writing English, together with college experience (where they have received composition experience), produced English writing that was more fluent and of a higher quality.

According to Hedge (2000: 19), the belief that good learners use strategies that one can recognise and use in the classroom has received much attention amongst teachers and textbook writers. Much research has investigated ways to teach learning strategies (e.g. Macaro 2006; Ransdell and Barbier 2002; Wong and Nunan 2011). However, there are different opinions about how to best teach writing and whether or not students benefit at all from learning about strategies. This is partly because learners might misinterpret the teaching of strategies and might thus not learn what was intended by the teacher. This is exemplified by Summers (1982: 153), who claims that: ‘Instead of offering strategies, the teachers offer what is interpreted by students as rules for composing; the comments suggest to the students that writing is just a matter of following the rules’. Thus, the teaching of learning strategies can become counter-productive.

First of all, according to Krashen (1982: 10), there is an important distinction between *learning* and *acquisition*, where learning is a conscious process in contrast to acquisition which is not. Furthermore, Krashen’s belief is that learning cannot develop into acquisition. According to Krashen (1982: 10, 16), explicit knowledge has limited value and functions primarily as a *monitor* when the learner is focused on the task. Krashen (1982) therefore argues against formal instruction, as it does not develop implicit knowledge that is needed for communication

However, White et al. (1991) argue that formal instruction is beneficial when teaching grammar and accuracy. Furthermore, according to the interface hypothesis, where the learner practises specific structures in order for them to become internalised or automatized, explicit knowledge may transfer into implicit knowledge (Ellis 1994: 654). Thus, students need to be in close proximity of the level in which they are being instructed. Vygotsky’s (1978: 86) *zone of proximal development* is ‘the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with a more

capable peer'. Taking this into consideration, it becomes essential that students are being instructed in their *zone of proximal* development in order to benefit from instruction. The aim is that learners will be able to progress from performing at a level with guidance to performing at the same level independently (Vygotsky 1978: 87). However, Vygotsky (1978: 88) stresses that the activity must be within the learners' developmental level in order for learning and development to take place. Furthermore, Krashen (1982: 21) argues that learners can acquire language if the input is comprehensible, meaning that learners receive information in a language slightly above their understanding and in a manner that they are able to understand its meaning.

In addition, Krashen (2011) argues that free voluntary reading leads to language proficiency. It is recommended that students select their readings from a large variety of books and that they get to read what they are interested in (Krashen 2011: 381). According to Krashen (2011), this is also the case with regard to academic proficiency. To read academic texts leads to an understanding of what academic writing embodies. Through reading, learners will be exposed to language, style and vocabulary and this will be transferable to their own writing. Language input is essential in language learning. When one is to write within a specific discipline or genre, it is beneficial to be exposed to that beforehand and to receive relevant input.

3.7 Assessment

Assessment refers to acts or documentation of a learner's ability or achievement. Assessment of writing varies from written exams, reports, multiple choice tests, portfolios, class tests, or written assignments. Hyland (2003b: 212) stresses the importance of writing assessments when teaching writing: 'Without the information gained from assessments, it would be difficult to identify the gap between students' current and target performances and to help them progress'. Furthermore, one distinguishes between formative assessment and summative assessment. In formative assessment, one evaluates the learner's abilities and the assessor identifies strengths and weaknesses that one then targets. According to OECD³⁴, a national programme called Assessment for Learning initiated in 2010 by Norway in order to improve formative assessment is already showing positive results and the programme has thus been extended further from 2014 until 2017. Summative assessment, on the other hand, evaluates

³⁴ http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/education-policy-outlook-2015_9789264225442-en#page278

how much the learner has learned at the end of a course (Hyland 2003b: 213). However, assessment is not only beneficial for the students, but also for the teachers, as it offers much information about the teaching.

Assessment informs the teacher about the student's abilities and level of progress, which again may be an indication of the effectiveness of the teaching. The student's performance is not only a reflection of their abilities and competence, but also an indication of the teacher's ability and pedagogical skills in teaching the students. When writing assessment is used in order to evaluate the quality of the teaching and, as a consequence, changes the teaching or the teaching environment, this is called 'washback' (Hyland 2003b: 214). For example, the results from the national tests in Norway may determine how a course is taught in the future. If the students score particularly poorly on a specific segment, such as reading comprehension, there may be an increased focus on that aspect during the next school year in order for the students to perform better.

Another important factor in L2 writing assessment is time constraints (Weigle 2002: 37). Teachers need to determine how much time to allot for various tests. This is perhaps especially important for L2 writers, as they often write less efficiently and less fluently than in their L1 (Weigle 2002: 37) and, as a consequence, they need more time to produce a text. The more the students need to focus on the quality of the language, the longer it will take to produce text. However, students are also dependent on having enough material and ideas to write about. When students receive a writing task, they will search for relevant knowledge on the topic and use a schema to identify the genre required for the writing task. The writer is thus searching for relevant ideas, as well as identifying the intended audience (Weigle 2002: 32).

Interestingly, most subjects portrayed in Silva's overview of studies (1993: 659-660) were given 30-60 minutes to complete their writing tasks. However, in some cases the students' time varied from 20 minutes to being given as much time as they needed in order to finish the writing task. Furthermore, the majority of the students conducted their writing in class and half of them under 'test conditions'. This illustrates differences in writing contexts as there are inconsistencies in terms of both time usage and the conditions. The question thus becomes whether these differences affect the outcome, i.e. the writing performance. Weigle (2002: 101-102) states that time allotment for writing needs to be decided according to the type of test given. Writing tasks where the students need to reflect and plan, and possibly revise their texts, such as in academic writing, will require more time. There are also different cultural practises, e.g. time allotment varies. This became evident in an international study of

school writing conducted by Purves (1992), as referred to in Weigle (2002: 102). Finland and Italy were accustomed to writing tests that lasted 180 minutes, while in the United States they were used to being allotted 45 minutes to complete the task. In the Purves (1992) study, students were given 60 minutes and thus the students from the United States finished early as they did not know what to do with the extra time, since they were only used to writing one draft.

3.7.1 Different methods of assessing

Different methods are used when assessing writing. According to Weigle (2002: 109) there are three main methods of scoring a writer's performance that are often referred to in relation to L2 writing, namely holistic scales, analytic scales, and trait scales. The holistic approach assesses the written product as one entity and evaluates what the learner has been able to achieve (Hyland 2003b: 227). There may be a scoring rubric describing the different levels of achievement. The assessor reads the written product and the guide that includes characteristics of the different levels and may set a score in addition to the overall impression of the text. Hyland (2002: 227) argues that this method of scoring may be more beneficial to more experienced raters as opposed to novice raters, as it is difficult to respond to a text as a whole without more guidance when teachers lack rating experience. Analytical scoring, on the other hand, includes criteria and the assessors give scores to different categories, such as content, language and structure. In comparison to holistic scoring, analytical scoring provides more specific information about which features to look for in the written texts. Finally, trait scales differ from the two aforementioned scoring methods in that they are designed specifically for a particular writing task. Trait scoring may be further divided into primary-trait scoring, where the assessor only rates one feature of the writing task, whereas multiple-trait scoring includes scores for different features specific for each writing task (Hyland 2003b: 230). Thus, in holistic and analytical scoring the teachers may use the same level descriptions and rubrics for all writing tasks, while in trait scoring these need to be constructed for each writing task.

3.7.2 Feedback to writing

Teacher feedback plays an important role in shaping students' learning (Hattie and Timperely (2007). Hattie and Timperely (2007:81) state that:

Feedback is conceptualized as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding. A teacher or parent can provide corrective information, a peer can provide alternative strategy, a book can provide information to clarify ideas, a parent can provide encouragement, and a learner can look up the answer to evaluate the correctness of a response. Feedback thus is a "consequence" of performance.

There are different ways to respond to a student's written work (Hyland 2003b). Teachers may give feedback to a written text during the writing process or to a final product. The feedback may be electronic, sometimes using an assessment programme, or on paper. The assessor might choose to comment on all errors and in addition comment on both positive and negative aspects. As pointed out by Barkaoui (2007: 40-41), there are several ways to give feedback and some teachers tend to focus on form, while others focus on content. In addition, there are disagreements amongst practitioners whether or not to correct students' errors. Ultimately, how feedback is practised depends on teachers' preferences, as well as on educational regulations and requirements³⁵. Norwegian students are required by law to receive feedback on their proficiency level in each subject and receive feedback on what they can do to improve and progress in the subjects.

According to the *Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training*, some researchers claim that as much as a third of the feedback given is counter-productive³⁶. It is counter-productive in the sense that it does not contribute to learning as intended, and might actually distort learning as some of the feedback may be based on misunderstandings and misinterpretations, either on the teacher's side or the students' side. This view is supported by Hyland (2003b: 178), who also states that a great deal of research questions the effectiveness of writing feedback. This research is conducted on L1 writing, but one can assume the same to be the case for L2 writing. The feedback is criticised for being ineffective because it is often of poor quality and the students often misunderstand it. Furthermore, the comments are criticised for often being vague and inconsistent. The teachers also sometimes misunderstand the students' texts and make comments based on these misunderstandings, which explains how the response to writing becomes counter-productive.

Formative assessments are important in developing students' writing performance. In accordance with Vygotsky's (1978) 'zone of proximal development' (see section 3.6.2),

³⁵ <http://www.udir.no/laring-og-trivsel/vurdering/underveisvurdering/tilbakemeldinger/>

³⁶ <http://www.udir.no/laring-og-trivsel/vurdering/underveisvurdering/tilbakemeldinger/>

feedback may function as a guide, helping students to reach their next level, which they would perhaps not be able to reach without the feedback. Thus, the feedback becomes important in that it leads to students achieving a higher level of proficiency. Therefore, feedback can guide students in the short term in revising and improving the written text, or in the long term by learning from the feedback and using the acquired knowledge in later writing tasks.

However, there are several concerns regarding teacher feedback and, as mentioned earlier, the response may become counter-productive. As stated by Sommers (1982: 149): ‘Teachers’ comments can take students’ attention away from their own purpose in writing a particular text and focus that attention on the teachers’ purpose in commenting’. Furthermore, Sommers (1982: 152) found that most of the teachers’ comments were not text-specific and might be reused for other texts. In other words, the comments were vague and not specific for the written product. On the other hand, Grabe and Kaplan (1996: 394) also warn teachers against giving too detailed feedback as this might overwhelm the students.

3.8 Norwegian studies on writing

There are Norwegian studies on writing relevant to the present study that have investigated how teachers and students relate to the teaching and learning of writing. The relevant studies are from lower secondary education, upper secondary education and, lastly, studies linked to preparation for higher education. The contribution of the present study can be seen in the context of the following studies.

Lower secondary education

Maier (2006) investigated changing practices in the teaching of written English in lower secondary schools. It was a qualitative study based on ten teacher interviews. The teachers had a minimum of 20 years teaching experience. Maier reported that the teachers had changed their teaching practices to some extent during their careers. They focused less on formal correctness and more on fluency when they taught writing than previously. The teachers reported an increased focus on the teaching of genres. However, there was little use of process writing and ICT.

Studies on upper secondary education

Bø (2014) studied feedback to English writing in upper secondary schools. Bø studied how teachers and students experienced giving and receiving feedback. Furthermore, she studied

some students' written texts to find out how the feedback developed the students' writing skills. The researcher used mixed methods, namely semi-structured interviews with the teachers, student questionnaires, and a study of four student texts. According to Bø, the teachers seldom required their students to write drafts or engage in 'process writing', where one writes drafts and receives feedback before the final product is submitted (see section 3.2.1). Paradoxically, the teachers believed that the students would benefit from engaging in process writing and by receiving feedback before they had to submit their texts, yet this was not practised. The teachers referred to lack of time as the reason, and there was also a fear that the text would not be the student's own if the teacher gave feedback. Furthermore, few teachers required their students to revise their texts after the final feedback. However, those students who did, made greater progress in developing their grammatical competence, as this was the focus of the students' revision (Bø 2014).

In another study of writing skills at the upper secondary level, Vik (2013) researched how 'Assessment for learning' contributed to improving students' writing skills in two upper secondary schools in Year 1. The study focused on assessment and its role in teaching the students to develop their skills and not to focus solely on their achieved grades. Vik conducted focus-group interviews with teachers and students and, in addition, she conducted two interviews (one open and one semi-structured) with the County Director of Education in Rogaland. Vik compared an experimental school, which ran a project focusing on assessment for learning, with a control school. The experimental school emphasised the students' learning when they assessed their work. The project had a positive effect on how the teachers experienced and practised assessment. In addition, it contributed to a more unified approach to assessment. However, the students who had participated in the project that focused on 'Assessment for learning' did not show much difference in how they related to assessment. According to Vik (2013), '... the pupils at this school did not "feel" the change to the same extent, and mostly still thought in terms of grades.' Both these above-mentioned studies are relevant to the present study as feedback and assessment play an important role in understanding and learning how to develop the students' writing skills.

In another study, Nygaard (2010) used mixed methods in order to investigate accuracy in students' written English in three different groups at the second level of upper secondary vocational education. Nygaard analysed students' creative texts during the autumn and spring semester during one school year. The students wrote in a word processing document and the effects of using a computer to achieve greater accuracy were also investigated. Both the frequency of mistakes and the type of mistakes were analysed. In

addition, three teachers were interviewed about their attitudes to mistakes and their correction practises. All the students made fewer errors and thus made progress in terms of accuracy. However, the students that demonstrated the greatest progress used a method for correction that included both underlining and direct corrections.

In another study, Helstad and Lund (2012) investigated how teachers in a Norwegian upper secondary school experienced students' writing across different subjects. The study found that teachers emphasized different aspects when they taught and assessed writing. There was a discussion on how to use digital technology in relation to plagiarism and how the different subjects had their own subject-specific writing conventions. The study found that the different subjects had their own traditions and conventions. The students found the variations across the subjects confusing.

Finally, in a study closely related to the present one, Horverak (2015) studied how teachers in upper secondary schools in Norway taught writing instructions where there was a focus on teaching the students to write in different genres. All the teachers focused on cohesion and the importance of structure. They disagreed on how explicit the instructions ought to be, as some were concerned that too much instruction might hinder the students' creativity. There were also different opinions concerning formal aspects. One teacher told her students that they could write the personal pronoun 'I' in their essays, while others informed their students that this was not appropriate. The implication was that the teachers, although presenting good examples of writing practices, lacked appropriate knowledge in the systematic teaching of writing. The study concluded that the teachers developed writing practices at the different schools, as opposed to having learnt them in their teacher education. Thus, more focus on writing instruction was encouraged in teacher education.

Studies linked to preparation for higher education

According to OECD (2016)³⁷, Norway has amongst the highest entry rates to higher education. This is predominately due to a public and tuition-free education system. Furthermore, English is used extensively in Norwegian higher education. For example, the Humanity subjects have 57 per cent Norwegian literature, whereas the Science subjects have 36 per cent of their reading material in Norwegian (Hatlevik and Norgård 2001: 10). Brock-Utne (2001: 5) notes that at the University of Oslo, all the compulsory readings at the Institute of Psychology, even at the bachelor level, are in English.

³⁷ <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/5jm0xf28vw8s-en.pdf?expires=1481004948&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=576E9B49FEB690452916677435FF85FF>

Sparboe (2008) investigated English academic writing in Norwegian upper secondary school before the implementation of *LK06* in secondary education. Sparboe posed the question whether English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction effectively helped students develop academic writing skills. According to Sparboe, there was little reference to academic writing in the syllabus and in the textbooks for the elective English subjects, which he refers to as ‘advanced English’. Thus, he concluded that students were not being well-enough prepared for higher education.

Finally, in another investigation closely related to the present one, Shirazi (2010) investigated to what extent upper secondary school ESL instruction, based on the *LK06* curriculum, helped students develop academic writing skills. Shirazi used mixed methods. She conducted interviews with two teachers from Oslo who taught advanced English. In addition, a survey about academic writing was sent to all the teachers who taught English in Year 3 in upper secondary school. However, only seven teachers responded to the questionnaire. Nine first year students at the University of Oslo were also interviewed, but due to time-constraints, only two questions regarding academic writing were posed. Shirazi (2010) concluded that, based on the *LK06* guidelines, the upper secondary Advanced English courses (i.e. the elective English subjects) in theory prepared students for higher education. She argued that the *LK06* contained instructions that prepared students to write an ‘intermediate academic’ paper, which was in contrast to what Sparboe (2008) reported. Sparboe claimed that the previous curriculum (*R94*) did not prepare students for academic writing and thus higher education. Thus, there seemed to have been a positive development from the previous curriculum (*R94*) to the current one (*LK06*).

Contribution of the present study

The present study differs from the aforementioned Norwegian studies in its focus on expository and persuasive writing. In addition, the research focuses solely on a study of the elective English subjects. The intention is to contribute to shedding light on the teaching and learning of expository and persuasive writing by including the perspectives of both the teachers and the students, which may lead to a greater understanding of the challenges concerned with writing at the elective upper secondary level.

There have been other studies, e.g. Horverak (2015), that focus on writing instructions. However, Horverak's subjects were mostly from the Vg1 English foundation course. Although there was an emphasis on genre-pedagogy in her study, there was no focus on expository and persuasive writing. The present study is close to the studies of Sparboe (2008)

and Shirazi (2010), which focused on academic writing in the elective English studies and amongst first year university students. Sparboe and Shirazi wanted to find out if the students were prepared for academic writing in higher education. As the learning of expository and persuasive writing may function as an introduction to academic writing, the present study aims to investigate to what extent the teachers in the elective English subjects teach the aforementioned genres and, thus, aims to gather data to find out if there may be a link between the lack of writing skills amongst first year university students in Norway³⁸ and by how writing is being conducted and taught.

Furthermore, the study may shed light on the effects of teaching expository and persuasive writing, and offer some suggestions about how to improve the teaching of writing in the elective English subjects. In other words, the thesis aims at contributing to research already conducted on L2 writing in upper secondary schools in Norway, but to provide added insight into the teaching and learning of expository and persuasive writing in English in the elective subjects.

3.9 Summary

There are different approaches to writing and they are often presented as two different camps, namely the process approach to writing versus the product approach. However, language learners often deploy elements from both approaches when they write. To write proficiently in a L2 requires many skills from the learner, for example composing skills, reading skills, and comprehension skills. In addition, it might be beneficial to acquire strategies in order to write efficiently. Teachers may help L2 learners achieve proficiency by instructing their students on how to write by modelling and by giving useful feedback. Both locally and internationally, teachers and researchers are expressing the view that students in higher education lack sufficient writing skills in order to succeed in higher education. The main issue is whether students have enough experience with knowledge transforming and academic writing when starting college or university. The present study differs from others studies of writing in Norway at the upper secondary level, with its focus on expository and persuasive writing.

³⁸ As reported by Lødding and Aamodt (2015).

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used to obtain the data for the following research questions:

To what extent and how is expository and persuasive writing taught in the elective English classes in upper secondary school?

How do the students experience the teaching of writing and expository and persuasive writing in these classes?

This is a qualitative case study and the chapter begins by giving a description of qualitative research in section 4.2. Section 4.3 addresses the notion of case study and relates it to the present study. The researcher investigated five elective English courses from five different upper secondary schools in Rogaland county. The samples, i.e. the choice of schools and subjects, and the methods used to obtain the data, are presented in section 4.4. The teachers of the courses were interviewed using a semi-structured interview approach. In addition, a group of students from the interviewed teachers' courses were selected to be part of a focus group interview in each course. Thus, the investigation uses two different methods, namely semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews. The process of collecting the data and considerations concerning validity and reliability are addressed in section 4.5. Finally, there is a section on ethical considerations in section 4.6.

4.2 Qualitative research

Dornyei (2007: 126) explains that qualitative research 'focuses on describing, understanding, and clarifying a human experience'. Its focus is not to study a group of individuals that are to function as representatives of a phenomenon or the population, but rather to collect and acquire insight from individuals into an issue that is being researched in order to gain greater knowledge and insight. Borg and Gall (1989: 408) give an example of qualitative research. They argue that an in-depth study of one individual offers greater understanding than a shallow survey of a group 100 participants. Furthermore, qualitative research often requires the researcher to be more active during the data collection process. This may offer greater insight into the field in which one is conducting research. However, qualitative research is not without challenges, as the subjects are often fewer and thus one becomes dependent on both participants who are willing to contribute and on acquiring detailed and relevant data from the

participants one has selected. As Dornyei (2007: 125) states: ‘Qualitative data expands quickly, and novice researchers often find that the real challenge is not to generate *enough* data but rather to generate *useful* data’.

The researcher plays a pivotal role in qualitative research and thus the validity of such research depends much on the researcher. There are several factors to consider in qualitative research and there are threats one must aim at minimizing. It is not uncommon to have preconceived notions before conducting research and thus there is a threat that these presumptions might influence the process and therefore the findings of the research (Cohen et al. 2000: 287, 292).

Qualitative methods, such as individual interviews and focus group interviews, are valuable as they may provide in-depth knowledge into an area and, in addition, open up new possible interests for further studies. In quantitative research one aims at identifying tendencies that are representative of a particular group or the population as a whole, while in the present study, the researcher is mainly interested in gaining deeper knowledge of a particular area by interviewing participants of that area and gaining insight into their experiences. Nevertheless, the samples might show a tendency or rather show characteristics that are representative of the population as a whole, although it is important to stress that one can never be certain of how representative the selected cases are. However, by including five cases, one increases a greater probability of representation (Borg and Gall 1989: 402).

4.3 Case study

The present thesis is a case study. According to Borg and Gall (1989: 402), ‘The case study, in its simplest form, involves an investigator who makes a detailed examination of a single subject or group or phenomena’ It is an investigation of the teaching of expository and persuasive writing in the elective English courses from five different upper secondary schools. The teachers who teach the elective subjects in English, together with a group of their students, comprise the subjects. The study is thus a case study in the sense of studying participants related to five different classes, i.e. five cases and, more importantly, it is a study of the three elective courses (i.e. International English, Social Studies English and English Literature and Culture) seen as one overall case. The courses, i.e. the elective subjects, may be regarded as one case, the different classes seen as a second level and, lastly, the focus groups as a third level (Dornyei 2007: 151-152). According to Dornyei (2007: 151), ‘Cases are primarily people, but researchers can also explore in depth a programme, an institution, an

organization, or a community'. This is a study of a programme, namely the elective English subjects, in which the researcher aimed at collecting data about the participants' views, experiences and beliefs about the teaching and learning of expository and persuasive writing.

Case studies are often used in educational research as well as in a variety of other fields. They often employ more than one method, and this is also the case for the present investigation, which includes teacher interviews and focus group interviews of students. The case often leads to rich data that may produce insight into the area of study. However, in order for the case to make a contribution, it needs to include an adequate amount of samples (Borg and Gall 1989: 402). The present study investigates five courses, which include interviews with five teachers and a total of 39 students.

4.4 The data collection

The methodology consists of two methods, namely teacher interviews and student focus group interviews. The investigation aims at achieving greater validity by including the two different perspectives. Furthermore, as the students and teachers are participants of the same courses, it allows for both corroborations, as well as complementation of the data. It is quite common to use interviews when conducting research on L2 writing, as they reveal the students' experiences and attitudes as well as teachers' beliefs and practices (Mackey and Gass 2012: 141). Six teachers, including the pilot interview, were interviewed from five different upper secondary schools. The focus group interviews were conducted with a selection of the teachers' students. The data was collected from the end of October 2016 to the middle of January 2017. The interviews were tape-recorded and parts of the interviews were transcribed. In order to minimize the probability of researcher bias, as well as increasing the comparability of the data, the data was collected within a relatively short time span.

4.4.1 The choice of the sample

There is always a limit to how many cases one can investigate. Dornyei (2007: 127) has found that when conducting interviews, an appropriate sample size of 6-10 has been successful. On that basis, the present study includes five individual interviews and five focus group interviews, and as such, ought to generate sufficient data. All the upper secondary schools are in Rogaland county. It is important to state that there is a limit to how many upper secondary schools that offer the elective courses that are being investigated in this thesis. There are a total of 18 state schools that have the elective English course, *International English*, in

Rogaland County³⁹, and even fewer offer the two other relevant courses. The aim was to include schools that have participants that represent different levels of achievement and to acquire knowledge from their experiences and beliefs. The assumption is that teachers that work at upper secondary schools of different levels of achievement, as well as the students who study there, might have different experiences and beliefs from each other.

The levels of achievement are based on the schools' former exam results, together with the students' final continuous grades in the elective English subjects. The exam results and final continuous grades can be found at 'Statistikkportalen'⁴⁰ (The Statistics Portal) and provide a reasonable indication about the students' levels. The cases have thus been chosen because of different perceived experiences. As stated by Dornyei (2007: 128): 'This process will allow us to explore the variation within the respondents and it will also underscore any commonalities that we find: if a pattern holds across the sampled diversity, we can assume that it is reasonably stable'. Alternatively, the researcher could have chosen the schools on a random basis. However, this would have been challenging as the present sample is a 'convenience sample' in the sense that one was reliant on the schools' willingness to participate. The different schools were selected through the researcher's personal network and by their willingness to participate. According to Dornyei (2007: 129), a 'convenience sample' is the least desirable yet the most used type of sample.

This study includes the schools that achieved both the highest and the lowest final grades in the elective English subjects, in addition to three other schools that are either in the middle, lower or higher end of the continuum. Students in all the relevant courses received two grades, namely a written final grade and an oral grade. However, since this investigation is on writing, the researcher has solely considered the results from the written grades.

The researcher contacted all the upper secondary schools in Stavanger, and the neighbouring municipalities of Sola and Sandnes, which offer one of the elective courses in English. The head of the English department and the administration at each school were sent an email that included information about the research and the researcher. They also received a phone call encouraging them to participate in the study in an attempt to maximise the response. However, this resulted in only one positive response. Therefore, teachers in the researcher's network were contacted, either directly by the researcher or indirectly by a mutual acquaintance. This was conducted by using a combination of emails, texts and 'instant

³⁹ <https://statistikkportalen.udir.no/vgs/Pages/Karakterer-i-videregående-skole.aspx>

⁴⁰ <https://statistikkportalen.udir.no/vgs/Pages/Karakterer-i-videregående-skole.aspx>

messenger'. In addition, one teacher was contacted in person. The researcher aimed at including schools that had different levels of achievement and thus certain upper secondary schools were approached in the hope of receiving a positive response. The students were partly selected on a random basis by their teachers. However, in the cases where the classes had few students, the focus groups included all the students of that class. This was the case in two of the upper secondary schools. In addition, in two cases the teachers believed the students ought to volunteer to participate in the study as opposed to being selected. Thus, in some cases, the students were not selected but rather those who were willing to participate became part of the focus group.

4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Five teachers from five different upper secondary schools were interviewed. The teachers were interviewed individually using a semi-structured approach (Dornyei 2007: 136). The interviews are classified as such based on the level of structure. They are structured in the sense that the researcher has a plan of what one wants to discuss, but one also gives the interviewee 'considerable freedom in getting there' (Hyland 2016: 106). This approach allows the participants to express their views and beliefs. Furthermore, it is believed that one will acquire more in-depth answers from having individual interviews, as one avoids the participants being influenced by other participants.

An interview guide was prepared but there was also room and encouragement to elaborate and discuss further (see Appendix 1). The questions were categorised into the following: Instructions, Strategies, and Assessment/ Competence aims. In addition, there was a final category called 'Further comments' that invited the teacher to ask any additional questions or to explore or refer back to important segments. The teachers were asked questions such as: Do you specifically teach expository and persuasive writing? If so, how? What are some of your most effective strategies in teaching writing? In what way is your teaching geared to the competence aims? Do you give feedback during the writing process? If so, how? Semi-structured interviews make it possible for the interviewer to accommodate the questions and to explore new avenues of interest. The structure of the interview guide helps to make sure the interview is to the point and that one gathers relevant data.

According to Dornyei (2007: 134), qualitative interviews are often conducted in one go and they last from 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews in this investigation lasted between 35 and 60 minutes. The teachers were given an information letter beforehand informing them of the topic and the purpose of the investigation. However, they were not informed about the

type of questions or categories of enquiries, as that might have influenced the answers. The teachers were interviewed once. Dornyei (2007: 135) argues in favour of multiple sessions. However, one must also consider the type of questions and what giving the interviewee more time to think and plan their answers might entail for the outcomes of the research. On the one hand, it might result in more detailed and rich data, but it might also result in the interviewees not providing an accurate picture of the teaching practices. Furthermore, the topics of enquiry and the questions were of such a nature that they ought to have been unproblematic to answer without having the need to prepare answers. All the interviews were conducted in English and they were audio-recorded.

4.4.3 The focus group interviews

The present study included five focus group interviews with students of the elective English subjects. The interviews were held either in a conference room or in vacant classroom at the different upper secondary schools. The focus group subjects were students of the interviewed teachers. Hyland (2016: 80) states that, 'Focus groups are groups of people with some similar characteristics who are brought together to discuss an issue in depth'. The participants are able to discuss their interpretations of the situation and express their point of views. The researcher aims at acquiring knowledge from the conversations (Cohen et al. 2013: 409-410). In group interviews, the interviewer has less control of the situation, but the advantage is that including several participants might result in rich data. In addition, it is an advantage to include a second method of research and thus be able to 'triangulate' the data (Hyland 2016: 106). This allows the researcher to corroborate the data contrived from the students and the teachers.

The focus groups participated in a 'focused interview' where the interviewer, i.e. the researcher, had prepared an interview guide in order to keep the conversations on topic and to gather relevant data (see Appendix 2). The interview is not only focused on the subjects' experiences, but also on the importance of recognising and exploring areas that need elaboration. As stated by Hyland (2016: 106), the method of using interviews recognises that 'human interaction is central to understanding'. The idea is that the participants of the focus group will be more open and the tone more informal if they interact with each other, as opposed to being interviewed one-to-one (Cohen et al. 2000: 288-290).

A focus group interview guide was prepared and the participants were presented with the following categories: Instructions, Assessment, Strategies and Experience (see Appendix 2). The students were asked questions such as: How have you learnt to write expository and

persuasive texts? Do you revise and learn from the teacher's feedback? What are the strategies that have been most successful when writing expository or persuasive texts? Suppose you were in charge of the teaching of writing and could make one change that would make you learn better. What would you do? Think back to a time your teacher taught writing? What went particularly well? Why? What needed improvement? The researcher led the interviews. However, towards the end, the interviewees were asked to comment on issues that they felt were important for the researcher to include in the investigation.

All the interviews were conducted in English. This was most convenient as the subjects were in English. The students in the focus groups had elected English as one of their specialised subjects and were thus accustomed to speaking English at a sufficient level for the present investigation. Furthermore, as the thesis is written in English, it was considered best to conduct the interviews in the same language in order to minimise translation issues that might compromise the data.

4.4.4 The process and analysis of the pilots

The researcher piloted the interviews. The piloted interviews took place at one of the selected upper secondary schools in Rogaland at the end of October and the beginning of November 2016. The researcher interviewed a teacher and a group of students in the elective English subject International English. In the actual research interview at the same upper secondary school, a different teacher and students from the course Social Studies English in Year 3 comprised the researched subjects. The teacher in the pilot interview had taught the subject for several years and had a Master's degree in English. The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The teacher interview and the focus-group interview were tape-recorded and conducted in a peaceful and private conference room. The interviewees had been informed about the topic and knew they were going to be asked questions about strategies for teaching and learning English in the elective classes. However, they were not informed about the categories of the questions and therefore could not prepare for the interview as such.

Piloting the interviews uncovered some issues that needed addressing before the actual interviews were conducted. For example, as the teacher only had two students who volunteered to participate, the researcher needed to be more strategic and persistent in the process of selecting the students for the other interviews. The interview guides were revised in the hope of minimizing the issues that occurred during the piloting. For the focus group interview, some of the background questions were eliminated, as the researcher already knew the answers to the questions and these were thus redundant. For example, the researcher asked

the students which elective course they were studying this school year, when in fact it was redundant to ask the question, as they were students selected or who volunteered from the teacher's class. It was thus obvious which course they are taking. Another issue was the fact that the students had only written one expository or persuasive text during the course and thus did not have that much experience to which to refer. Therefore, they had a tendency to compare what they had learnt this school-year to their first year in upper secondary school. As a result, a new question was included that asked them to compare the writing instructions they had received this year as opposed to in Year 1.

The pilot interview with the teacher was conducted the day after the focus group interview, i.e. on 1 November. This allowed for comparison and corroboration of information with the previous student focus group interview. For example, the students had mentioned an interesting teaching strategy that the teacher failed to include when asked about the same topic and thus the researcher could use a probe to gear the conversation towards that strategy. As a result, the focus group interviews were specifically conducted before the teacher interviews.

As with the students' interview, the teacher also struggled to refer to enough examples of strategies and instructions used in the International English course. This might be linked to the fact that it was rather early in the semester. As the teacher and students often lacked enough examples from expository and persuasive writing, they referred to examples from English in Year 1. Therefore, the researcher decided that it would be beneficial to include mostly Year 3 courses, i.e. Social Studies English and English Literature and Culture, that build on International English. Thus, the students may refer to examples from International English which they have all studied last school year. Furthermore, the researcher needed to play a more active role by using probes in order to elicit more elaborate answers.

The interview guide was adjusted according to the outcome of the piloting. The interview guide was helpful for the interviewer as it helped organise and clarify her thoughts and ideas. In addition, it was a helpful device for the process of the interviews and especially so for novice interviewers and researchers (Dornyei 2007: 136-137). After the pilot, the guide was revised and new elements were added that needed to be explored further.

4.5 Validity and reliability

Semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews are two different methods that are often used in qualitative research. Although there is a risk of researcher bias when conducting

interviews, and it is difficult to completely avoid this, the researcher aimed at minimizing the threat by planning the interview and piloting the interviews. Focus groups pose the threat of one or a few of the participants dominating the conversation. This may be minimized solely by being aware of the aforementioned threats and playing an active role during the process if necessary. Nevertheless, when one uses methods that include human interaction, it is arguably impossible to avoid all bias, as this is part of the human condition.

Dornyei (2007: 61) points out that triangulation means using multiple methods, sources or perspectives in a research project. The present study aimed at increasing its validity and reliability by including the two aforementioned methods and two different perspectives and sources. The present study included both the teachers' and the students' perspectives in the hope that it would invite a comparison, reveal possible differences, and a corroboration of similarities. Both genders were represented in both the teacher interviews and the student focus group interviews. As stated by Dornyei (2007: 49), qualitative research has introduced other terms that refer to validity, such as 'trustworthiness', 'authenticity', and 'credibility'. The researcher aimed at maximising the probability of achieving this by including the students' and the teachers' perspectives.

Furthermore, all the interviews were conducted in English. The quotations from the interviews are therefore authentic and not translated by the researcher. Translating speech may be considered a threat to the validity of the investigation if the subjects are not translated accurately. On the other hand, it might have resulted in richer data had the interviews been conducted in the subjects' mother-tongue, i.e. Norwegian. However, the subjects had extensive experience and practice of speaking English, and as the school subjects, i.e. International English, Social Studies English and English Literature and Culture, are all taught in English, this was deemed most desirable from both a practical and authentic perspective.

The methodology was solely a qualitative investigation and thus did not include any quantitative methods. However, mixed methodology is often considered to be the ultimate when conducting educational research. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods is believed to lead to more valid and reliable results, granting that the researcher is able to utilise the advantages that they offer when investigating and analysing the data (Creswell 2009: 4). In this case, the researcher could have used questionnaires or observations to increase the overall validity. However, the use of questionnaires felt redundant as it is difficult to foresee an outcome that would contribute to more relevant data that would not be achieved from conducting the focus group interviews. The focus groups did not always include all the students of the course and thus it might have been beneficial to give all the students a

questionnaire. This might have allowed the researcher to corroborate the outcome from the selected and volunteering students with the rest of the class, and thus check if there were any inconsistencies or discrepancies. However, in order to decrease this likelihood, there were some focus groups that included all the students of the course. This was made possible as some of the upper secondary schools had very few students studying the elective English subjects.

In addition, observing the students and teachers in the classroom would allow insight into corroborating what had been communicated through the interviews to their actions inside the classroom. Mackay and Gass (2012: 141) explain that observations are often used in addition to teacher and student interviews in order to monitor the students' and teachers' perceptions of what is going on in the classroom. However, in this case observations were not used in addition to the interviews. It is questionable if the researcher would have gained additional data from observing the classroom. In addition, the questions in the interview guides were difficult to correlate and corroborate by conducting observations.

Arguably, to include the method of observation would have required a longitudinal study, as it is difficult to see how much valid data could be achieved by only observing a few times. In addition, as the students did not seem to have many lessons specifically on writing expository and persuasive texts, the researcher and the teachers would have had to have scheduled a specific time for the observations when this was taught. There would thus be a risk that what the researcher would observe would not be a natural representation of what takes place in a classroom, but what was happening would be especially tailored to the needs of the research and the aims of the investigator. Therefore, the best option would perhaps be not to inform what you are observing and collect relevant data as is occurs over a long period of time.

In order to increase the reliability of the investigation, the researcher studied other interview guides and the findings from these interviews. This made it possible to cross-check the data from other research with the present study. In addition, the researcher piloted both the semi-structured teacher interview as well as the focus group student interview. Dornyei (2007: 132) claims that, 'A few trial runs can ensure that the questions elicit sufficiently rich data and do not dominate the flow of the conversation'. The trial runs stressed the importance of using probes if the interviewee struggles to answer or elaborate on the questions as there might be a threat that the interviewee might become defensive if the researcher fails to do so. Furthermore, conducting the pilots resulted in a fruitful experience and helped prepare the

interviewer for the actual research. To avoid variations in the circumstances as much as possible, the research was conducted during a short time span (Dornyei 2007: 50).

4.6 Ethical considerations

Research in education investigates people and as a result will always include ethical considerations. This is especially the case for qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research as qualitative methods often target people's opinions and views (Dornyei 2007:63). The participants may communicate sensitive information and it may pose a dilemma if the researcher includes such information in the thesis or not. The various categories and questions in the interview guides did not, however, pose any questions that might be considered sensitive as such. Nevertheless, as one of the methods was semi-structured interviews and the other was a focus group interview, it allowed for the participants to answer somewhat freely and therefore all elimination of this threat was unavoidable. The researcher did in fact experience in the piloting of the students' focus group a student who referred rather negatively to a Year 1 teacher. The dilemma thus becomes whether or not to include that segment in the thesis. The information could be interpreted as relevant to the investigation and furthermore, it would be difficult to identify the teacher. However, one could argue both in favour of and against including it, and inevitably it becomes the responsibility of the researcher.

The participants were informed in writing about the research and they signed a document giving their consent to the requirements of the thesis (see Appendices 3 and 4). The document stated that if the participants, at any time, wanted to withdraw from the investigation, then that was their prerogative. The school administrations were also informed about the research and were asked permission to include their school in the case study. Furthermore, the subjects were informed that their anonymity would be preserved. The interviews were tape-recorded and the files will be deleted after the thesis is submitted.

4.7 Summary

The investigation used two qualitative methods, namely semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The data was 'triangulated' by both including the two aforementioned methods as well as including two different perspectives: the students and the teachers. The subjects were primarily selected based on the elective English subjects' previous achieved

grades the year before and, secondly, out of convenience. The researcher aimed at increasing the validity and reliability of the study by preparing interview guides, piloting the interviews and studying similar research studies. The school administrations were informed about the case study and the participants signed an information letter and a letter of consent.

5.0 Findings

5.1 Introduction

The present chapter presents the findings of the research. The chapter consists of five sections and each section presents the data collected from each of the secondary schools. The findings from each school are subdivided into sections that present the teacher interviews and the student focus group interviews. Each section begins by introducing the school and the subjects who participated in the investigation. There are summaries of the different topics raised in the teacher interviews and focus group discussions, in addition to direct quotations where appropriate. Both genders were represented in both the teacher interviews and in all of the focus groups.

The schools are referred to as School One, School Two, School Three, School Four and School Five. The teachers are referred to as T1, T2, T3, T4 and T5. Finally, the students are referred to in each school as S1, S2, S3 and so on.

5.2 School One

School One is situated in a city and the students from the elective English subjects were at the high end on the achieved grade continuum (see section 2.4). The teacher (female) taught the International English course, which is the first elective English subject the students have the opportunity to choose following Year 1. All the students had studied the compulsory English foundation course the year before. There were 14 students on the course and all but one of them (10 females and 3 males) participated in the focus group interview. Both interviews were conducted during the first semester of the International English course, in November 2016.

5.2.1 School One teacher interview

The teacher (T1) in School One had taught English for four years and had a Bachelor's degree in English and History with a major in English. At the time of the interview she was studying for a Master's degree in English. T1 did not have any experience of assessing the national written exams. She did not feel that her degree in English had prepared her to teach International English content-wise as the competency aims were very specific and were often geared towards current affairs. T1's education in English had focused on literature and did not include much on culture and society.

Genres

When asked if the students were expected to master writing in different genres when they started International English, T1 responded by saying ‘yes and no’. At T1’s school, all the teachers had come together last year in order to decide which genres the students ought to master by the end of the first year. The teachers had agreed that their students should be able to write an expository essay when they finished Year 1. Some teachers believed the students should also be able to write a persuasive essay. However, T1 pointed out that there were teachers who believed that it was important for the students to master structuring a text, which ought to be the focus in Year 1. Furthermore, T1 believed that the core of the essay remains the same regardless of whether it is an expository or persuasive essay. Thus, if the teacher teaches the students how to structure the essay, they can easily adapt that to a persuasive essay. Nevertheless, T1 felt that if the students were not given the opportunity to write a persuasive text in Year 1, they ought to at least be informed about its characteristics. When questioned whether the teachers collaborated about writing instruction, T1 answered that the school had common guidelines on writing and that these were important because the students received the same guidelines regardless of which class they belonged.

Strategies

T1 claimed not to focus on strategies. However, she reported:

I try to talk to each student and find out what works for them. I try to make them think about it. I have not taught it [strategies] at all, I have just talked to them and make them focus on how they learn best, make them talk about it. For example, if they read a text, I can make them write a summary about it and then I can go around to each one and how they go about reading, skimming, how they extract information from the text.

Furthermore, T1 claimed that the students in her class were self-sufficient in the sense that they were able to approach the task in the correct manner. She gave an example of a girl who brought a sheet of paper with her that she filled in before she started to write. T1 believed that the students had learned to apply different strategies from their compulsory education.

Instructions on writing

The teacher stressed that the students had already learnt how to write an expository text in Year 1. T1 gave an example of how she instructed the students on writing an expository text in International English. She explained:

What I do, I introduce the task and then I talk about the genre with the help of a Power point. What is expected of the genre and how to do it and give a copy of an expository essay and then we talk about it together and then in groups and try to find out what works and what does not work and if the writer had applied the different things that ought to be applied to an expository essay. A thesis statement, topic sentences, a proper conclusion here. The different elements.

T1 expected the class to improve being able to express themselves during this course and being able to back up statements with valid arguments. In addition, more was expected in terms of referencing and use of sources. In fact, T1 commented that the students should be able to master the Harvard style of citing that they used at this particular school.

They should be able to make a bibliography and they should know that they need to cite throughout the text. But this is something we try to teach them the first year. We have a librarian here that teaches this (...) she comes to every class and shows how to search for sources and it takes some time to learn this, but I think in Year 2 they should know, and they do.

When questioned about what she found most challenging in terms of teaching writing on this course, T1 referred to structuring a text. In addition, she thought that it was a challenge to teach the students to use credible sources, as many of her students were eager to use Wikipedia. Nevertheless, she pointed out the benefits of having a librarian at their school who came to their class and taught the class about where to find credible sources. This contributed to making the students more prepared for higher education.

When I started higher education, I did not know anything about that, so I feel like even though they find it really hard work, and they get annoyed when we are too meticulous about it, I still feel like that is one of the main things we can do for students in regards to preparing them to be able to make solid arguments because, no matter what you are

going to study, you will get asked to write a text where you are going to argue either about this or about something else.

Assessment

T1 usually gave writing tasks that the students wrote outside school, i.e. at home. She believed that one English lesson, i.e. 90 minutes, was not sufficient time for the students to write a well-structured essay. She reflected that it would be possible to have a school-test on a 'Fagdag'⁴¹ (English subject day), where the students had a triple lesson. However, this would depend on the school's prepared annual assessment plan and if the English subject day coincided with an assessment. T1 emphasised the importance of not stressing the students when they were writing. She recognised that the students had individual preferences when it came to writing and that some needed more time than others: 'I would not like to rush someone and make them hand-in something they are not completely happy with. I am always thinking about that, so I think if I give them a week, give them some time at school and some at home.'

However, there were some different opinions among staff about whether or not the students ought to have their assessments at school or be given home assignments. T1 pointed out that:

One of our English teachers here said that he really wanted the students to have 90 minute test at school here because he felt that some of his students had gone home and had had help of their parents and then of course it is not their writing but their parents. So he wanted to give them a task at school to see how **they** write. And I can understand that - I mean that is not the impression I get from my students because you can kind of tell.

When asked if it mattered if they received help from their parents, T1 stated that a little help from parents was fine. The teacher that T1 referred to had not had these issues previously, but had experienced that some parents had been somewhat too helpful this year.

The students had only participated in product writing thus far in the school year. However, as T1 had taught the same course last year, she had an example from a writing task at one of the triple lessons (English subject day).

⁴¹ Fagdag: the elective subjects have a triple lesson three times a semester.

Last year, at a 'Fagdag' (English subject day) [They were] able to do process writing [and] hand in in class. [I could] talk to them in class and say yes this is good but then point at where they have to work more on structure, right. If I could choose and had the time, I would do that all the time.

T1 felt that the students learnt much more when they received feedback and had the opportunity to revise before submitting the final text. She usually received the essays, went home, wrote comments, and then gave them back to the students.

T1 encouraged the students to study the feedback from their previous writing assignments in order not to repeat the same mistakes. In addition, she instructed her students to have their last essays up on their computer screens simultaneously when writing on their current text. She was uncertain about how much emphasis her students put on the feedback they received on their written tests and was also concerned that they might not always understand the comments.

It is more effective if you talk face to face and then you can also see if they understand what you are telling them. Comments written down - I don't know if they read them or understand but in person they can ask why and we can have a conversation going on a [I] did this once last year, in first term towards the end. The students told me that they really liked that and enjoyed the feedback.

All in all though, T1 considered her students to be well-prepared for higher education.

5.2.2. School One student focus-group interview

The focus group in School One consisted of 13 students out of a total of 14 in the class. They are referred to as S1, S2, up to S13. All the students in the focus group planned to study after upper secondary school. Some planned to study English, while others planned to study in an English-speaking country and therefore found the course useful for preparing them for higher education. All the students read English literature regularly, though some more than others. The students came from different first year classes and had therefore had different English teachers in Year 1. As a result, the students related to different experiences from Year 1.

Instructions on writing

The students usually wrote essays, but they had not written that much yet in this semester. They had written two essays so far, where they had been given the option to write a persuasive text, personal text or an analysis of a poem or song lyrics. The teacher had used a Power point presentation as an aid when giving instructions on how to write the different genres. The students explained that their teacher (T1) had given a Power point presentation where the different layouts of the genres were explained. S1 explained that her class had written both an expository and a persuasive text last school year. Some had been given the opportunity to write a personal text last school year. When the interviewer asked what they remembered as being important to think about when writing expository and persuasive texts, S1 responded by listing up the following elements ‘Examples, thesis statement, formal language, citations, and sources, structure (...)’, while S7 noted, ‘ability to use (...) a conclusion, an introduction, a middle part, paragraphs in between. Punctuation. Important to use words, the proper vocabulary. Transitions’. In addition, they reported that T1 had showed them examples of texts written in different genres. The students liked this very much and found it helpful because it became easier to know what to write.

When asked if they had common guidelines at the school, only two responded affirmatively.

S7: I don't know what they are, but I know they exist.

S8: Last year my class complained about how the teacher corrected their essays (...) to prove she was correct she had the whole class look through every rule we had to follow. From ‘Utdanningsdirektoratet’ (the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training) and stuff.

S1: (...) and it is the same that our teacher use, the Power point she uses. That is the same Power point that they used last year [on how to write]. And she said someone else had written it, someone else had made it, the presentation.

The students agreed that it may be positive to follow the same guidelines. However, S7 had some doubts and elaborated in the following exchange with S5:

S7: Well it makes you very good at writing in one particular way. And it can also be negative because you only learn to communicate in one way.

S5: We generally just write formal essays where you have it formal, and not expressing your own opinions.

S7: It is just the article we are practising writing, not writing in general.

The interviewer then asked the students if they would prefer to write in other genres and they all responded with a clear and loud affirmative. They elaborated that they would prefer to have more options in their written assignments when it came to genres. For example, they would have liked to have the option to choose to write a short story. When the interviewer asked them why, they thought they mostly got assignments where they had to write a type of formal text. S2 believed it was probably the type of writing you used the most ‘unless you want to become an author’.

Feedback

When asked if they received feedback during the writing process, for example on a draft before submitting the final text, the following conversation took place:

S4 We don't hand in half-way, (...) we just hand it in when it is supposed to be handed in.

S1: But when we are writing in the class, we can ask her. We can ask her to read it and then she can comment and stuff. Have that option.

S8: I don't think she has enough time to go through all them either. I just grab her when I have the opportunity to, no set time where they can meet the teacher. But you can ask, especially the week we have a written assessment if he/ she is available on 'It's Learning'⁴², and send a message to ask her something, but then it would be the more simpler stuff. You can't like send in a whole paragraph and ask her to comment on it.

S7: We can try.

The students related how their teacher commented throughout the text (in the margins) and then there was a summary at the end where good aspects of their writing and details that needed improving were pointed out. They usually received the feedback a few weeks after they had submitted their assignments and had to check it before they were allowed to look at

⁴² A digital learning platform where the students may submit and receive feedback on their assignments.

the grade. All the students revised their texts after the feedback, but this was just for their own benefit and the revisions were not submitted to the teacher. In addition, they all studied their previous feedback before they were given a new written assignment. As they struggled with different aspects of their writing, they could ask the teacher to focus on specific elements when she assessed the text, such as the overall structure of their text.

Strategies

The students reported using different strategies when they wrote expository and persuasive texts. They explained the different strategies that they used as follows:

S12: Well it depends. If I don't really know where to start, then it is nice to read an example. But, if I know what to do, then it just goes very quickly. If we were doing this in school, like in two hours or something in school, then I would probably write from the beginning and then just finish. But, if I do this in the course of say four weeks, then I would probably like start somewhere in the middle and do the introduction and conclusion last. If I did not really know what to write in the main part, or if I did not know what to write in the introduction or conclusion, then I would just spare that for last.

S1: I usually start with the paragraphs in the middle, then like the introduction and then maybe like the thesis statement quite late, and then the conclusion last. (They make their own thesis statements)

S2: I like to organise my thoughts a bit before I start writing and find my three main ideas and find out what the middle part is going to be about and then I write the introduction, mentioning those four or three main ideas and take it from there.

S1: (...) but I actually like to find my thoughts before I start, I like write them, and plan what I am going to write about.

S4: I write the introduction first and then the main part, and then the conclusion.

S5: Start with middle part, try to figure out what to write about then take the conclusion and introduction in the end.

S6: I outline, plan the paragraphs and then I start from the introduction. But I always go back and revise to check that the introduction and the conclusion fit together.

Interviewer: Do you write your essays at home?

S6: Yes, the essays, we write both of them at home.

S7: And that is why we don't need to avail ourselves with ask for help here. I don't know about everybody here, but I find it easier to write at home. I don't ask the teacher for help as I am writing because I don't usually write here.

S13: I make mind maps to sort of see the topics we are discussing, and then I start with the body paragraph and then the conclusion and the introduction.

S3: I don't think I do the same every time. I jump back and forth when I write. I use sources.

Interviewer: Do you all use sources and add citations when you write?

All: Yes!

S12: It depends, like not in personal essays.

S7: Go for it! Just start and finish. It's quite simple, just start the sentence or the opening sentence I actually come back to. I just write chronologically. I sort of know which information I am after as I start writing and I know what type of information I will find ...I just find the sources and exact facts that I already know. I do go back and see if there is another word that fits better. I rely on what I actually wrote the first time. Unless it is absolutely terrible. Then I give up and just don't hand in the essay then.

S8: Again, it depends on the essay. A persuasive and expository essay, I find my sources out what I am going to write about. I find my sources. I kind of like start wherever I have the idea. If like I know what to write about, then in the middle if I don't know what I am writing about. But if I know, then I start with the introduction and use the introductions to check that I have included everything, kind of use the introduction as a guideline, and then I write the conclusion, and then I go back to the introduction and check that I have included everything that I said in the introduction.

S9: I always try to write an outline because I think it is easier to organise my thoughts, and then try to write the whole essay, then take a break for two days, and then I go back to see what I wrote, and fix on what I don't like, and then I take another break and then go back.

S7: (...) that's very specific (referring to S9): 'And then I take a coffee break for 35 minutes'.

Interviewer: Why do you take a break S9?

S9: I like to take a break because I get a distance to it, because I think you get kind of blind to it when you have written for four hours and you don't see your mistakes any more.

S10: I outline first, and then just write from the introduction and just finish it. I am normally quite late so...

Interviewer: How much time would you spend on writing?

S10: I would spend a couple of hours...

S11: I usually start with like a brainstorming, so I write down all my ideas about whatever we have, whatever theme we have. Then I just outline the ideas into a structure, then start with the middle part, end with a conclusion, and introduction.

Interviewer: is this what you have been taught?

S7: I like to think that I invented it.

All: We have been taught it...

S4: So back and forth as well, but I usually start with gathering information about what the main part is about and just write if I want to write the main part. I do that if I want to write the intro... I get the ideas first and work from there.

This exchange shows that the students could all relate to different strategies when writing. Moreover, the strategies that they used were not taught at the course, but were strategies that they had learnt previously in their education. It was notable that most of the strategies were tied to the organisation of the text and how to structure the texts. Most of the students seemed to have a set pattern that they followed.

Furthermore, the interviewer wondered if the students received any help or guidance when they wrote their texts. Several used their classmates for help, while the majority admitted that they received guidance from their parents, or as stated by several of the students, 'Use my mum and dad'. S10 explained, 'My dad speaks English at work so he can help me with words and so, and my mum is good on structure'. S8 reported that he did not receive any help because he did the writing task the day before, and usually in bed. S8 admitted that he would probably not have asked for help, even if he had started the writing process earlier.

Experiences

The interviewer wondered what the students and teachers could do to make the teaching and learning of writing better. The students answered that they wished there could be more variation in terms of the writing tasks.

S12: Sometimes it's fun to write for just writing and not worry about the grade, more fun to be creative. The personal essay is not that structured, but still has some structure.

S7: Yes! Just write without worrying [not] having to be evaluated afterwards.

Some of the students would have liked to have been given written assignments that were not assessed because they felt that they would learn from that. S13 said that in her Norwegian class, they wrote many texts just to practise at improving their writing. S13 would like to do the same in English class. However, the students strongly disagreed amongst themselves on this matter. S5 argued that if there were no deadlines and they were not being assessed, then they would not be as motivated to write well. When asked if they enjoyed writing, most of them answered affirmatively. However, they pointed out that it depended on the writing task. When asked if they had seen any improvement thus far in terms of their writing, most claimed it was too early to say, as they had only received feedback on one of their writing tasks. The interviewer then asked if they only paid attention to their writing when asked that question, and they collectively answered 'yes'. However, S7 stated that it was easier to begin the writing process now because they had focused on structure.

5.3 School Two

School Two is located close to a small town. The students from the elective English subjects were at the middle to low end on the achieved grade continuum (see section 2.4). The teacher (male) taught the Social Studies English course, which is one of the courses that build on International English and which the students have the option to elect in Year 3. All the students had studied International English the year before. There were 14 students on the course and six (5 females and 1 male) participated in the focus group. Both interviews were conducted during the first semester of the Social Studies English course, in November 2016.

5.3.1 School Two teacher interview

The teacher (T2) in School Two had taught English for over 20 years and had English 'mellomfag'⁴³ (English major). In addition, he had a Master's degree in ICT for learning. T2 did not have any experience of assessing the national written exams in the elective English

⁴³ 1,5 years of English

subjects. He felt that his education had prepared him to teach the course to a certain extent, especially since he also taught history and had a special interest in U.S. history and politics. However, he stated that he had learned most of the aspects of the course on his own initiative.

Instructions on writing

T2 taught the students how to structure their texts. He used example texts, where there were examples of an introduction, a main part and a conclusion. He focused on how to structure the texts and how to connect the ideas together and build a paragraph. The students had written two texts so far. Throughout the school-year they would have three main texts on which they would receive thorough marking. When asked if they collaborated at School Two, T2 answered, ‘No, not really, no. But I study a lot of examples texts for Udir⁴⁴ and see what they expect for the different levels and try to convey that to my students but I rarely rate with anyone’. However, T2 reported that they had common guidelines for writing at the school. As he was also a Norwegian teacher, T2 taught the same items on how to structure the text in his Norwegian classes. He used the guidelines to some extent.

Strategies

When asked how T2 focused on writing strategies when instructing the students in writing, he answered the following:

Teaching writing is to let them write and also use examples and try to structure their texts from a disposition. Last time they wrote, they had a task about the [U.S.] election and then it was a bit complicated for some of them (it would be a bit complicated) to structure the text. So then I structured it for them, or at least I gave them an option at least on how they could organise their texts. I go through these examples. We try to organise the structure together. We try to come up with examples together on how to (...) structure the text.

T2 did this before they had a writing test but not directly on the task they would be writing. For example, last time he sent them the topics beforehand. T2 pointed out that as they approached the end of the year, they would focus more on the types of tasks that the students

⁴⁴ Utdanningsdirektoratet (the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training).

would get at the exams. When the interviewer asked if T2 had any experience of ineffective ways of teaching writing, T2 responded as follows:

When you focus on grammar, they tend to grasp it there and then but it's very difficult (...) to use it later in their own texts. (...) There are in a way two levels that you have to evaluate texts on in English: it is both what you write and then it's the language and grammar. The least effective writing strategy is focusing on language (...). But it is better when I hand back texts. Last time, for instance, since they are only 14 they can work and I can talk to them individually about their texts, and that seems to help. Some of them said that that was useful.

T2 regarded the students who struggled to write English as a problem because when you have chosen the specialised subjects you ought not to struggle in writing English. T2 reported that he had students who struggled to organise their texts, and it was possible to teach these students by using examples from other students on how to structure a text. T2 informed that he could show how to tie the texts together by using sentence connectors and how to structure paragraphs. Thus, T2 could report an improvement on this amongst his students at the end of the course. T2 elaborated:

You can also see that when they are given an outline, or we make an outline together, then they stick to that. Also we focus on, or have focused on up until now, on how to structure a paragraph and given them example paragraphs where we have clearly written with colour coded topic sentence and then examples in the paragraphs and how you end a paragraph. And how you begin the next paragraph to the end of the previous paragraph and they have these examples and I can see that does students who really use this and make use of this are able to improve their texts. But there is a group of students that will make the same mistakes again and write the same [type of] texts over and over again.

Assessment

T2 saw some improvement amongst his students' writing compared to earlier in his teaching career. However, he believed much of the improvement in the students' writing skills were due to the introduction of the computer in education. For example, the students today had

online dictionaries. T2 reported an improvement in vocabulary and thought this was because the students were exposed to much more English now than they were 20 years ago. Thus, T2 felt the students were better writers today, and elaborated:

And as a Norwegian teacher, I even feel like they are (...) well they get a certain distance to their texts [when they write in English] in a way that they are able to see it and be a part of it, so some of them are even better writers in English than what they are in Norwegian. At least on a structural level. They are able to focus on the task and the structure of their texts. And also I think [they] look through it when they have written it with a distance.

T2 believed the use of the computer had played a part in the students' improvement in writing in recent years. He claimed that when they were given the topics or tasks in advance, they could gather information and save texts. His students were allowed to bring sources with them to their writing tests. The two previous years they had also been allowed to use the Internet at the exams, so therefore he had prepared his students for this. T2 tried to make the test situations similar to the exams.

T2 gave thorough feedback in order to meet the needs of mixed ability students. He gave very detailed feedback and he used a programme called Markin. In his feedback, there were codes for different errors and in addition there were some codes that were also more positive. In Markin there were different categories of errors and you could add links to the type of mistakes they made and write comments in the text. The poorer the text was, the more comments they would receive. In addition, T2 wrote a long final comment. T2 did not practise process writing and made the following argument:

To some extent it can be useful, but then I feel like they are not really showing the level they are at and the final results will not reflect their level and I'll finish the different parts of the curriculum with a written text or an oral test too and I feel like I have to have assessments that (...) reflect the level they're at. But when it comes to writing, perhaps that is something I could do more.

T2 found it most challenging to give students who struggle to write English feedback on their language in order for them not to repeat the same mistakes. He struggled with the same issue in Norwegian as well and noted that it was especially challenging to assist foreign students when it came to syntax. T2 elaborated:

It becomes a struggle with foreign students who bring their own syntax, which is foreign to him and strange to him. I feel it is difficult to explain to them. But I try to be as detailed as possible and go through it with them. But sometime that can be a bit overkill too, [and]there is no use. So this time, when I mark the last texts, I will not be as detailed as I was last time. Then I will print out the texts and just mark the mistakes (...) that they had last time as well. (...) And then maybe rewrite some sentences and hand that in.

T2 had tried to co-write with his students, but he had not done that recently as it had not been a success (though it had a certain appeal to him), because he felt as if the students did not contribute and thus it ended up with him writing the text on his own. T2 went on to point out that his students were not very talkative:

They are from different classes and I think of them as one class because I only meet them there, but to them they are strangers to each other and they don't want to expose themselves. So it's difficult to get them to talk and when we try to write things together, it's usually I [who] end up doing all the talking and writing.

5.3.2. School Two student focus-group interview

There were six students in the focus group interview in School Two. The students reported that they were interested in the subject and wanted to continue with English. In addition, they thought that it was useful for further studies and work life. One student spoke English as his mother tongue and thus expected it to be an easy subject. None of them had plans to study English.

Instructions on writing

The students were not familiar with the names 'expository' and 'persuasive' texts, but when the terms were explained to them, they noted that it was usually those types of texts that they wrote. Furthermore, they related that they did not write any personal texts in Social Studies English. They had written two texts so far in the course. One was an assignment and the other was a test at school. The teacher had given them a model of how to write that included examples and some ideas. Previously they had written a five-paragraph essay and they had

used the visual tool called ‘paragraph hamburger’⁴⁵ when writing. On their last written test, the teacher had given them the topic beforehand and encouraged them to find sources. They were allowed to bring these sources with them and use them at the test, since they were then not allowed to use the Internet. S1 reported that it was difficult to know what kind of text they were to write at the test. However, S1 pointed out that the teacher had a model they could use for their answer that included examples of how they could write and structure the text. All the students found this very helpful. In addition, they could use their course book. However, according to the students, the course book, i.e. *Access to Social English*, did not include any help on how to write the different types of texts⁴⁶.

Feedback

The students felt there was more emphasis on content in this course compared to the Vg1 English foundation course. Furthermore, they believed T2 expected them to be competent writers at this point and, according to the students, this explained why there was less focus on the language. S3 expressed that, ‘I feel like this year they focus (...) on the actual content rather than the language’. S4 elaborated that, ‘He (T2) is saying that now it’s a given that we know how to write’. T2 gave oral feedback as well as written feedback. The following discussion took place when the students were asked about how their teacher gave feedback to their written work:

S3: We don’t do first drafts.

S4: He often gives us the grade and in class maybe takes us out of the classroom and tells us what we can do better.

Interviewer: Do you also get written feedback?

S5: Yes, he gives us like a document with comments.

S3: With notes on them. Notes on the document.

Interviewer: Does it include errors?

All: Yes.

Interviewer: Does it also include what you have succeeded at?

S4: No.

S5: Yes.

⁴⁵ The ‘paragraph hamburger’ visually outlines the elements of a paragraph in the form of a hamburger. The different elements in the hamburger represent a topic sentence, details, examples and closing sentence.

⁴⁶ The researcher can report that *Access to Social English* does include writing instructions.

S4: No.

S5 I had one that said 'nicely written' or something like that.

S4: Okay, I guess.

Interviewer: Is there a concluding comment at the end?

S4: Yeah.

S3: Is there? I don't remember.

S4: Yeah.

S3: I think that is only two or three sentences though. It's not very extensive though.

Interviewer: Do you look at the feedback a lot that you get?

S5: No.

S1: Well, he gave me oral feedback, so okay.

Interviewer: Do you prefer the oral feedback to the written feedback?

S3: Yes, because then you can elaborate more and discuss more.

S4: I think the feedback should be written and oral because if he had written a bit more then we can go back before the next test and see what we need to focus on and what we often do wrong. So if he (T2) only does it oral, then we forget what he says.

S1: And he also (...) I remember the last test we had he gave us like a site that we can click on. So for example if I had problems with grammar, then he included a site where I could go and check and learn more. That was very helpful.

The discussion then turned to grading:

S5: You cannot get like a top grade without a perfect grammar.

S3: Yeah, no.

S4: Yeah, or if you forget to put like a capital letter. He is very strict on that. I don't know why.

S5: Yeah, like if your grade is a 6, but like you forgot a capital letter, you get a 5+.

Some of the students revised, but this was on their own initiative. However, they reported that this was difficult when the feedback was only oral and thus it was difficult to remember the details of the feedback. Furthermore, S4 stated that he found the comments to be specifically for the topic on the test and thus did not see how it could be useful for the next written assignment.

Strategies

The students were hesitant when asked about writing strategies. Most reported that they simply ‘wrote as they went along’. S1 responded that she sometimes wrote notes before she wrote the text because she tended to forget things. S5 then stated that she planned beforehand when writing more extensive texts. Most of the students claimed that they just started to write when given a writing task because that worked for them. However, when questioned further, the following exchange took place:

S5: I think like you just take the easy route, because you just want to be done. You don’t want to be like sitting there for five hours writing⁴⁷.

S3: Actually, I don’t think about that. I’m more concerned about the quality of the text than going home.

S5: Yeah, but you don’t want to sit like when you don’t [have to].

Interviewer: Do you usually sit for the whole time out?

All: No.

S3: For like English no.

S4: We often have quite a long time. Mostly we have the time we need.

S5: I think that if you sit towards the end, then its more that you started slowly because you did not have any ideas. I don’t know (....) you have a bad day or something.

The students reported that they used NDLA⁴⁸ to revise the course material. In addition, T2 found relevant videos that the students could use when revising. The students preferred to watch videos when preparing for the tests.

Experiences

When asked how the students would teach writing in order to make it better, S5 stated that she would be more creative. The students wanted more writing options to choose from. S4 wished they could get more information before the writing tasks. S4 explained that on their last writing test, they had only gotten the topic beforehand and they did not know what to do. S2 wanted to focus more on the writing task and what they were to do before the test. S4 felt unprepared for the writing tasks and wished that T2 could show them an example of how to write. S5 wanted more feedback from T2. The students would prefer to have had more but

⁴⁷ Which is an option at their Subject days, i.e. triple lessons.

⁴⁸ Nasjonal Digital Læringsarena.

smaller written tests in order to prepare them for the next written assignments. They would have liked to have had feedback on some smaller writing tasks, as this would have had prepared them for the writing tests.

The students sometimes felt as if they lacked adequate vocabulary when they wrote. For the written assignments, they needed vocabulary that they were not able to learn outside of school. Furthermore, they found it confusing to know what the teacher wanted from their written assignments. In addition, they reported on conflicting feedback.

S4: I find it quite challenging to know what the teacher is looking for in a text.

Sometimes I feel like he asks me to do like a certain thing like to write in a certain way and then when I get the grade for the text, then he focuses on something completely different that I should have [done].

S5: Like one time he told you (i.e. S4) that you used a lot of fancy words and that was a bad thing, [that] he knows many words.

S4: (...) I feel like sometimes the information he gives us is a bit like contrary to each other. So, obviously, he says like, it's quite apparent that a broad vocabulary is a big plus like but on the test I was marked down for having too advanced language.

S3: So that was really weird.

S4: So sometimes I find that the information is contrary (...).

The conversation then developed into a discussion about what it took to get a top grade, i.e. grade 6. The students were annoyed that T2 had not included what it took to get a 6 when he went through the criteria for the different grades. S5 had been awarded a 5+ on an oral presentation and would have liked to have known in the feedback how she could have received a 6. The students stressed that they found it unclear what T2 was looking for. The students reported that T2 had not really taught them writing this year, and explained that that this was because he probably expected them to know how to write now. When the interviewer asked if there was anything that could have been changed or done differently in the course, the following conversation occurred:

S5: I think that we use a lot of time speaking about something that we could have just read, because our teacher [spent time] speaking about something in the book and then we had to read it afterwards and he said like the exact thing just and we spent like 5 minutes reading about it and then it already passed 60 minutes speaking about it. So sometimes he is not focused on the right things maybe.

S2: He should use more different ways.

S3: Yeah, it's a lot of Power Points and speaking.

S2: Show more movies. And in small groups.

S5 Yeah, the group is always really silent. Nobody wants to speak out because he is kind of harsh sometimes when you answer.

(...)

S3: Sometimes if you answer, then he is like not yeah that is kind of correct, he is like No!

All: Laughter.

5.4 School Three

School three is located in a suburban area. The students from the elective English subjects at this particular school were at the middle to high end on the achieved grade continuum (see section 2.4). The teacher (female) taught the Social Studies English course which is offered to Year 3 students. There were 22 students on the course and six of them (5 females and 1 male) participated in the focus group. Both interviews were conducted during the first semester of the Social Studies English course, in November 2016.

5.4.1 School Three teacher interview

The teacher (T3) in School Three had taught English for over 20 years and had a Master's degree in English. T3 felt prepared to teach the course, but did not have any experience of assessing the national written exams in the elective English subjects.

Instructions on writing

T3 expected her students to write expository and persuasive texts. She showed her students examples from the written exams that illustrated the need to be able to write in these genres. However, T3 did not use the terms 'expository' or 'persuasive', but rather used the broader term 'essay'. Furthermore, T3 pointed out that in the written exams, these two terms were never used but instead the longer questions in the written exam used the term 'essay', or it simply said: 'Write a text'. When T3 taught her students to write, she presented them with model essays. The model essay T3 had used this term was at an intermediate level. The example essays were from 'Utdanningsdirektoratet' (the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training). In addition, she asked her students to grade different examples. When teaching

writing, T3 focused on instructing her students on how to write a paragraph and to use linking words. T3 explained:

I think we have been doing this more and more throughout the years. We used to spend less time (...) on showing them these examples. So perhaps we are holding their hand more, but my impression is that many of them aren't all that great writers, but if you provide them with this framework then they fill out this framework and then (...) they have an essay. Wow, I can do this. So next time, they can work on their own.

The students had two written assignments each term. In addition, they had some short answer writing tests that also counted as part of the final continuous assessment grade. In the beginning of the term, the students were required to write one essay when they had a writing test. Later in the term, the students would have one short text in addition to the essay in their writing test. In the spring term there would be a mock exam that would include an entire exam, which included two short answers and one essay. At the mock exam the students would be allotted five hours. T3's writing assignments and writing tests were very much geared towards the exam. They did not have common guidelines at T3's school, nor was there much corroboration amongst the teachers when it came to writing. T3 explained that this was partly due to the fact that she taught the course on her own. Nevertheless, T3 stated that she had previously collaborated with another teacher when it came to grading the papers.

Strategies

Before the students started a new topic, T3 gave them a two-column worksheet where they were to fill out what they already knew before beginning the new topic, in the one column, and what they had learned after reading the chapter, in the other column. In addition, T3 had used the board game *Alias*⁴⁹ when they studied social and economic conditions in relation to learning new vocabulary. T3 did not focus on grammar in this course, but rather on enhancing their vocabulary. T3 defended her lack of focus on grammar by arguing that the criteria for the written exam emphasised communication in the students' texts. T3 elaborated: 'I would say that for the exams they are much more concerned with vocabulary, structure (logic structure) and comprehensions of numbers and statistics. Grammar is you know not very high on the list.'

⁴⁹ A board game where the players are to explain words to each other.

When asked about how she would characterise a good writer, T3 responded:

A person [who] has an interesting introduction, relates to the essay question, and then brings in the most important things first and then links every paragraph with a new paragraph and has a very precise and varied vocabulary. And are able to use the concepts to the topics and because if you are able to use a bit more advanced vocabulary, then you are much more efficient in your language. Don't use a whole sentence to explain, just say the word. (...) So a good writer answers the question, doesn't waffle and answers the question. And [has a] wide vocabulary, and precise vocabulary. And is not personal.

T3 did not give her students any personal essay assignments. She believed that they were not as confident at writing as earlier students. According to T3, the teachers spent a good deal of time teaching the students how to write. While there was more focus on how to write today, T3 was unsure if this was due to the students being poorer writers, or if it was a new form of pedagogy. T3's students wrote their written tests at school. She claimed that her students were busy and therefore it was best to have written tests at their 'fagdag' (English subject day) at school every fifth week.

My impression is that (perhaps this is particularly for Norwegian) my students they don't read all that much. And if you don't read then you don't have the illusions, you don't have the references, you don't have the vocabulary, you don't have the structure. So in that sense I think that they aren't [as good writers], everything is just very middle of the road-ish, it's not brilliant but perhaps it wasn't brilliant earlier as well.

T3 felt her students needed to read more in order to be more prepared for higher education. She pointed out that the students read on the Internet and explained this process as being fragmented. Thus, it became a problem when they were to read longer texts, as well as in writing. T3 felt everything was superficial and that her students did not spend enough time with the texts.

Assessment

T3 focused on preparing her students for the written exams. She usually included the goals on which the students were evaluated. T3 felt the competence aims were obvious and thus did not include these in written assignments, although she claimed she would have done if she

had had the time. The relevant aims were understood amongst her students. T3 thought the exam questions covered too much and therefore made it difficult to know what to focus on in the teaching. When asked if she evaluated the students' texts during the writing process, T3 responded: 'I know that of course that comments during the process is perhaps more fruitful (...) I usually comment on their finished work but perhaps I could try to do any evaluation in the process (...) We do that a bit in Norwegian.' T3 thought the students did not have the time to write drafts because they were busy. She used the programme Markin⁵⁰ when assessing the writing tasks. T3 corrected errors and, in addition, she made comments and suggestions on how to improve the texts.

5.4.2. School Three student focus-group interview

There were six students in the focus group interview in School Three. They had elected the course because they found it interesting. Many of them had plans to study abroad. However, they were all planning to have a gap year before continuing on to university.

Instructions on writing

The students reported that they did not have common writing guidelines, but that there were guidelines in the different subjects. The students usually wrote essays. They were not familiar with the terms 'expository' and 'persuasive' texts and could not say which kinds or types of essays they wrote. The students had a student teacher co-teaching the class at the time of the interview, who had presented a Power Point with tips and suggestions on what they should include in the text. The Power Point included instructions on formal language and on structure. In addition, T3 had shown them many examples of sample essays. They had evaluated the samples and come up with suggestions on how to improve them. The students reported that the samples were not very good, referred to them as basic, and thus they did not learn anything new from them. The students would have preferred to have been shown a more advanced sample text to aim towards.

When asked if they had experienced conflicting writing instructions, S2 gave the following example:

When I went from primary school, I thought that the whole point of the text was showing your grammar and that the grammar was good because that [was] what we

⁵⁰ <https://www.cict.co.uk/markin/>

focused on. And then when I came to secondary school, they did not focus on this at all. It was kind of what you put into the text and I was not used to that so I did not think very much about what I included or I thought about it of course but I thought more about grammar and structure of the text, but suddenly that was not the point of writing anymore. So that was kind of strange.

The other students agreed with this and S5 pointed out that they focused more on content here. S5 did not perceive this to be important before and felt as if English was now similar to any other subject where you learnt about different topics. They considered language to be the only factor in lower secondary school when writing English texts.

Strategies

The students reported a good knowledge of how to structure a text and that this was something they had worked consistently on for several years. Most of the students wrote an overview that included key points before they wrote their texts, and sometimes they revised. The others started straight on the introduction. S5 had tried to use a mind map but it did not work for him because the mind map consisted of random words and he found it difficult to connect to this. The interviewer asked if they had ever been taught to use a structured mind map. While the students were familiar with this strategy from primary education, they had forgotten how to do it. S2 reported that she did in fact use the strategy ‘spoletekst⁵¹’ (spooling out a text) when planning her essays, and that this functioned as a disposition. None of the other students wrote dispositions.

Feedback

All their written tests were conducted at school. When the interviewer enquired if they would have preferred to have some home assignments in addition, the following discussion took place:

S2: Sometimes but they [i.e. home assignments] are always bigger, so no.

S5: Because then you come to school and you're done. It not like you [postpone] it to the last day.

S2: You can't push it out.

⁵¹ http://www.skrivesenteret.no/uploads/files/i_skrivende_stund_tipshefte_nygiv.pdf

S1: When I do assignments at home, then it's usually like well now its 12 o' clock and then you start. Usually two hours before the time limit dies.

S5: So [you start] too late, and then it's not quality work.

S1: It's best to do it at school.

The students did not practise process writing. They had just had a conversation amongst themselves before the interview about whether they received comments on what they could improve or not as part of their written feedback. They had concluded that the feedback was not specific enough and explained:

S3: We all write what we've learned, so when she tells us something is missing, I don't know what has been missed so.

S2: And also you can get perhaps like bullet points on what you can practise on and practise for next time. That would be great.

Interviewer: Do you look at the feedback and revise?

Several: Yeah.

S2: It depends on the teacher actually. For example, last year we had a teacher [that] was very good at follow-ups because she only had our class, so she wrote very precise directions on what to do and those I read because I wanted to do better.

The students wanted more smaller assessments and more specific guidance on what they ought to work on in order to improve their writing. Furthermore, if they had more but smaller tests, they thought it might be easier for the teacher to give more specific feedback. For example, when their teacher said that they needed to work on their grammar, it never happened according to S5, since it needed to be more specific for them to know what to improve.

Experiences

The students would have preferred to write some informal and creative texts in addition to the formal writing tasks. For example, they liked to write short stories. The discussion then turned to what kinds of writing tasks they enjoyed writing. S2 gave the following example: 'I am not interested in the [U.S. Presidential] election and therefore I don't think it is a fun topic to write about, [and thus] I write worse than if I were able to choose something that I was interested in'. The students felt they learnt a good deal from feedback on their written work.

However, they wished it could be more detailed and precise. In addition, they valued the student-teacher conferences on their written work, which they had experienced in other classes, because they could then ask questions. However, S2 stated that she disliked these conferences.

When asked what they found most challenging when writing, several students stated that starting the writing process was the most difficult part. However, S3 found it difficult to write academically and the other students agreed. In addition, they would like to expand their vocabulary. The students did not feel that their writing had improved over the period they had studied the elective English subjects. They reported that they had learnt about different topics, but not that much about writing. They did not feel that writing had been focused on. They would also have liked to talk about the different topics before writing about them, as they believed this would improve their writing. They believed the oral evaluations affected the written evaluations. They thought reading had influenced their writing the most. In addition, some stated that speaking, watching videos, and learning about the topics, had also contributed to their writing skills.

5.5 School Four

School Four is located in an urban area. The students from the elective English subjects were at the low end on the achieved grade continuum (see section 2.4). The teacher (female) taught the Social Studies English course. There were five students on the course and four of them (1 female and 3 males) participated in the focus group. Both interviews were conducted during the first semester of the Social Studies English course, in January 2016.

5.5.1 School Four teacher interview

The teacher (T4) in School Four had studied the 'lektor' program to become a teacher and her Master's thesis was in English. T4 had taught English for over five years, but did not have any experience assessing the national written exams in the elective English subjects. T4 felt prepared to teach the course.

Instructions on writing

T4's students were expected to master different genres. They had to write a five-paragraph essay and sometimes an argumentative essay, book reports and texts that were formally structured, in addition to literary analysis. However, T4 used the term five-paragraph essay

when she informed the students of what kind of text they were to write, as this helped them to understand what kind of text they were expected to write each time and, more specifically, how to structure it. T4 did not use the terms ‘expository’ or ‘persuasive’. However, if the students were expected to persuade the readers in their texts, T4 would then explain to her students how to do this. T4 did not use a textbook, but used *Nasjonal Digital Læringsarena* (NDLA)⁵² where there were workshops on how to write a five-paragraph essay. In addition, T4 used One Note from Microsoft, where she posted information, links and texts to her students. One Note functioned as a course book. The students had written two longer texts. They were given time at school to spend on their written assignments and they continued working on them at home. T4 explained:

They always get time at school. (...) They would have to finish at home. But we like instead of ‘tentamen’ or the mock exam I gave them a book report instead. I can split the exam and give them the tasks as we move along instead of giving them the whole exam. Because I think that guiding them as they are writing is more important than just putting a grade on a paper. So I would like to read their writing, I would like them to ask me questions while they are thinking so I can help them along.

Although there was no scheduled collaboration amongst the teachers, T4 had collaborated on her own initiative with another ‘good’ colleague who taught English. They did not have any common guidelines on writing at T4’s school. T4 would have liked to have had common guidelines on writing, but doubted whether the teachers across the different disciplines would ever have agreed on these.

Strategies

T4 focused on teaching the five-paragraph essay when she taught writing. She gave an example of a writing strategy that she had used:

For example, [we] create a mind map and I have also had like a document where I have inserted a five-paragraph essay recipe, but they can write key words next to the recipe before they start on their writing. Some students like that.

⁵² Nasjonal Digital Læringsarena. A national learning platform offering free digital resources to upper secondary schools.

T4 reported that her students had asked for guidance on how to write in class even though they had recipes of how to write in One Note. T4 asked if the students knew how to write a five-paragraph essay before their writing tasks, and they had responded that they needed to go through it again.

When the interviewer asked whether T4 had any experience with strategies that were inadequate when teaching writing, she responded:

Well, this is where I have ended up after all these years (...) We talked before about the genres giving them all these different names when they all can be structured in the same way they just have a different purpose. All texts need an introduction, a mid part and an ending and what you put into them depends on what you write about. So if you give them different names then it's easy for them to get confused 'what am I writing - am I not writing an essay?'

T4 explained that she had found it a challenge when the students were to write a text about, for instance, a painting, because this could not be structured as a five-paragraph essay and as a result the students became confused. Nevertheless, the students were familiar with this from Norwegian class and were thus able to transfer writing skills from their L1 to L2.

When asked how T4 would describe a good writer, she responded:

A good writer is able to catch the readers' attention, is able use the vocabulary necessary to talk about the specific subject that [they] write about. They use linking words and paragraphs are clear and you understand that one paragraph is one topic and you avoid clichés and [you] have a clear ending. And of course you are able to discuss, or talk, or write about the topics.

T4 believed that she had prepared her students for higher education when she had focused on referencing and being critical to sources. Her teaching was aimed at how to reference in the MLA style.

Assessment

T4 did not believe that one English lesson was sufficient for her students to write an essay and thus they were given time to write at home for each writing test in addition to time at school.

T4 used the planner on It's Learning, which is where she posted the relevant competence aims that they were targeting.

T4 used a criteria sheet (i.e. a rubric) and marked the different achieved criteria. The students received the rubric together with the written assessment. In other words, the students received written feedback on their texts, a rubric that showed their accomplishments, and oral feedback. In the texts, T4 would put a circle around something that needed attention, restructure different elements, and she corrected errors. She would explain her corrections further when she gave oral feedback. In addition, T4 gave feedback during the writing process and elaborated: 'I just walk around as they are writing and look at their screens and I skim through to see if there is something that I see right there that I can (...) point out that they can improve.'

The students did not write drafts on which they received written feedback. T4 reported a lack of time was the reason and therefore thought it was better to do this on the spot as they wrote.

T4 found the exam questions difficult and, in fact, noted that she believed that they expected more from her students at the exam than when she took English the first year at university. She found the exam questions to be very specific and to include several elements. In addition, they required the students to write in a specific genre. Furthermore, the use of the Internet was counter-productive as her students felt they could relax more and also struggled to find relevant sources, which they spent much time on. However, T4 felt that her students would be prepared for academic writing and higher education. In contrast, she had not felt prepared for higher education and academic writing herself when she had started university. In conclusion, T4 felt she had little time to focus on language aspects, even though she considered her students still learners of English who needed to learn more. However, T4 felt there was very little time to spend on language.

5.5.2. School Four student focus-group interview

There were four students in the focus group interview in School Four. They enjoyed English and the topics within the subject Social Studies English. Some were planning on studying further, while others were unsure whether they would continue to university. One had plans to work after he finished upper secondary school.

Instructions on writing

The students reported that they usually wrote five-paragraph essays. They were not familiar with expository and persuasive writing in English. However, some were familiar with persuasive writing from their Norwegian class. The first written assignment they referred to was in fact a persuasive text. They liked being able to choose between several writing tasks. They reported that they received extensive feedback. In addition, the teacher provided them with forms and recipes of how to write. The students seemed to have a good grasp of how to write a structured text. They could not think of any examples of conflicting writing instructions throughout their education. S3 noted that there were high expectations relating to the use of sources this school year. The discussion turned to the expectations of the course and the focus on instructions, which led to the following observation by S3: ‘You need to be very talented not to follow instructions. It needs to be structured anyways, but if you follow something it might be boring.’

Feedback

The students related that they were very few students in the course and thus believed this contributed to the extensive amount of feedback they received from T4. S1 explained:

S1: Normally we get feedback on what we need to work on, what was good and what we should do next time and what we should look at and she marks for instance words that should not be in there if something is wrong or written wrong or something like that. And normally we get a grade or for instance high, middle or low [marking].

The students reported that they received feedback midway as well, but this was oral feedback. S3 had specifically asked to be given written feedback on his draft and he could thus report that he had also received written feedback on his unfinished product. However, this was on his own initiative. The others had not. S2 explained that they had sent a draft on which they received oral feedback. S1 stated that they received an extensive amount of feedback and thus he did not think it was necessary to focus more on this. While the students did not revise, they used the feedback later when they received their next written assignment. S2 stated that on one of their written assignments, they had used several lessons at school to complete the assignment, while the other times they were allocated some time at school and some time at home. The students liked being allocated plenty of time to complete their written assignments.

Strategies

When asked what strategies they used when they wrote, the following conversation occurred:

S2: I usually look up the basics on the Internet and also [I] get some help from my teacher on how to write. And that is basically all.

S4: I do the same but [I] also sometimes use a brainstorming map.

S1: I just start to write.

Interviewer: Why do you brainstorm S4?

S4: Because when we like get the assignment, normally I get a lot of ideas and then if I don't write them down then I kind of like forget when I start writing.

Interviewer: Do you ever rewrite (...) and make changes to the text?

S1: Yeah, for example when I write a text I normally read over it and see if there is something I can change, for example make a better beginning. For example [I check] if an argument would fit better in the beginning than towards the end. But mostly I formulate everything as I am writing, so sources and quotation marks and everything like that, so if I need to change something then normally [it is] just a misspelled word or something like that. Maybe if I wrote it in very basic language first because that is what I thought of and then I did not want to stop (...). Then I might want to go through the text afterwards to see if I find words that are better suited for my text.

S3: If I understand what I am writing about then I try to find what I think is interesting (...) because now I am talking about [the] five-paragraph essay because that has been the start of the test and then I try to find something so that I can have some like for example another source.

When the conversation turned to the use of sources, the students mentioned that they used One Note and that the teacher posted sources for them in their One Note. The students stated that it was difficult to get into the habit of using One Note as they only used it in English. It was nice to have one place where they could find everything, but since they used It's Learning in all the other subjects, they automatically went in there to look for items related to English. If they could not find something there, they remembered that it would probably be in One Note. The students received help from each other in class when they wrote, and in addition used NDLA⁵³. All the boys used Google Translate, but they claimed

⁵³ Nasjonal Digital Læringsarena

they only used it to look up words. They found it easier, quicker and more convenient than online dictionaries.

When asked what they would do to make the students better at writing, S4 noted that she would make the students write diaries. The diaries were not to be personal, but the students would create a persona. The students would write every day and thus practise their writing. Furthermore, S1 would check with the students what they liked to write about. The students reported that they found writing formal texts, structuring a text, and the use of linking words challenging. S2 found the content most difficult. S3 found it challenging to visualise an overview of the text. The students all believed that their writing had improved throughout the course. S3 noted that feedback was really important when it came to improving their writing and that it was really up to the students what they did with the feedback. Furthermore, S3 stated: ‘If I were the teacher, I would find it really important to get that message (i.e. the importance of feedback) out to the students because it’s the most important thing. And I get irritated now if teachers don’t give feedback because it is the most important thing’.

5.6 School Five

School Five is situated in a city and the students from the elective English subjects were at the middle to high end on the achieved grade continuum (see section 2.4). The teacher (male) taught the International English course. There were 27 students on the course and ten of them (5 females and 5 males) participated in the focus group. Both interviews were conducted during the first semester of the International English course, in January 2017.

5.6.1 School Five teacher interview

The teacher (T5) in School Five had a Master’s degree in English. T5 had taught English for four years and he was teaching International English for the second time at the time of the interview. T5 felt somewhat prepared to teach the course. Content-wise, he felt prepared, but he struggled to know which methods to use in order for the students to learn. He noted that the students in his International English class were very quiet. He did not have experience of assessing the national written exams in the elective English subjects.

Instructions on writing

T5 felt that in English, the ‘essay’ genre was always prioritised, and he was thus afraid to give the students informal writing tasks, such as personal letters, as this was not the focus.

Although he wanted his students to write academic texts, he knew they were expected to master both writing formal and informal texts. T5 did not use the terms ‘expository’ or ‘persuasive’, but rather referred to such writing through the term ‘essay’. He taught how to write a formal essay and by doing so, his students would know how to answer tasks where they were to write an expository or persuasive text. Furthermore, he stated that he knew that his students knew how to write persuasive texts from their Norwegian class. In addition, he had taught rhetoric to his International English class the previous school year.

When he taught writing, T5 focused first on the topic and then on working with relevant texts for the essay questions. He believed that his students learnt much from the process of writing. Therefore, while his students were writing in class, they had the opportunity to write their names on the blackboard, which would indicate that they wanted T5 to take a look at their texts. The students would then sit at the desk with the teacher to receive feedback. However, he had some concerns with this strategy: ‘I guess that worked in the beginning of the term but after they have been given back a few tests from me they have become a bit afraid.’

When asked how many writing tasks the students had had and were to receive next semester, T5 responded: ‘Well this semester (...) and the beginning of the last one, more than before Christmas because of what I have realised, so now I guess they get –now they are supposed to write a five-paragraph essay every week I guess.’ Before Christmas the students had written seven essays and T5 had assessed two of them. T5 emphasised that the students would write considerably more the upcoming semester. All of their writing had been formal essays. He instructed his students that they could write as much as they wanted and made it clear that he did not expect them to write long texts every time. This gave the students who wanted to become better at writing the opportunity to write more than those who did not have the time. He assessed two essays each semester and these were written at school. They never got to write at home because T5 was concerned that the students would get too much help from their parents.

Assessment

T5 used a revision tool for writing that the students received. The revision tool was in the form of a worksheet, where he asked them questions such as: ‘Have I included a topic sentence?’ This was considered a type of self-assessment. T5 planned to use this tool at the next written test and the students would be allowed to submit another version after they had used the revision tool.

I think that is really important in writing that you know how to assess yourself. You can't improve otherwise. Well I guess you could improve just by writing, but I guess you won't get any direct help from that but [you will] by assessing yourself and by getting my feedback as well.

The interviewer then asked when the students received the teacher's feedback, and T5 responded:

Formally they have gotten it after the tests obviously (...) They always get a chance to revise my in-text comments and comments in the end in class. I focus a bit on it then but I know that is not ... in the modern world that is not pedagogical[ly] the way so well I walk around and help them when for example they are wondering why was this a verb mistake.

T5 used a programme called Easy Correct, in addition to making comments in the margin and having an end comment. Easy Correct included codes for typical mistakes, such as verb concord and a link that informed about rules. The programme made the comments in Word function easier and one could also use audio comments.

Sometimes I have difficulty with not marking everything, so sometimes I tend to mark all the mistakes (...) when that might make them lose their motivation, but then at the same time I think... I am a bit unsure what to do there because on the one side I feel it may make them lose their motivation, but on the other hand I feel like well if they want to correct all their mistakes, they should be able to do that.

The interviewer then asked if T5 expected the students to revise after the feedback and T5 explained that he did, but he did not check whether or not this was done. However, he explained to his students that if they corrected the different paragraphs, then they would improve their writing.

The discussion turned to process writing. T5 informed that he planned to give his students a writing task where they could write one draft at school, hand it in, receive feedback, and revise accordingly before submitting a new version. However, T5 did not want the students to know about this beforehand and gave the following reasoning:

Because then it can be unfair. I want it to be fair for all of them so that I know that they have produced [the texts] themselves in a way(...). If they get help with removing all the subject-verb agreement [errors] when they don't really know how to remove these mistakes themselves and it's a student who had not produced any depth in an essay before who suddenly produce depth at a professor level or something like that and sometimes It's Learning isn't always able to catch those who cheat so well.

T5 reported that cheating had been a problem previously. He felt it was important to be able to write formally and to use sources appropriately, which prepared his students for higher education. Thus, T5 spent extensive time teaching his students how to use sources and how to reference in Word. Furthermore, T5 believed that to be good at writing formal papers, one ought to have practice in writing such papers. Furthermore, T5 stated that he believed that he did not need to assess all of the students' texts. He would not have the time to assess all their writing.

Strategies

T5 stated that he began with the structure when teaching writing strategies. The students started by formulating a topic question. However, if they struggled with this, he asked them to spend five minutes writing whatever they thought about the topic, and then they were to reduce this to one sentence. Thus, they were to sum up what they had written down in one sentence and then transform this into a question. Furthermore, they were to come up with five different questions and these would be turned into their topic sentences for each paragraph, resulting in a five-paragraph essay. T5 gave explicit information about how he instructed his students to structure the text and he gave them a plan of how to do this. Furthermore, T5 focused on both the overall structure and the structure on the sentence level when he explained what a good writer was. In addition, T5 emphasised the importance of depth in relation to content.

At his school, they did not have any common guidelines for writing. However, they did collaborate and the English teachers cross-assessed a few essays.

5.6.2. School Five student focus-group interview

There were ten students in the focus group interview in School Five. The students were interested in the subject and felt it was important for later in life. One student reported that he

felt it was an easy subject in which to achieve a high grade. Some had plans to study abroad and felt the subject would prepare them for that. Some reported the importance of English in today's society and thus felt it was a benefit to master the language.

Instructions on writing

The students were not familiar with the terms 'expository' and 'persuasive' texts in English. However, they were familiar with persuasive writing from their Norwegian writing. All their writing was formal. They were given a topic that they were to answer in a formal way. They had received information about how to write a five-paragraph essay. S5 stated that T5 gave them suggestions on how to write, but it was not expected that you had to follow the instructions; you could still write in your own way as long as you stayed within the genre. The students felt they were developing their writing skills further from what they had already learnt. S1 felt that the biggest difference this year was the focus on writing formally, as this had not been focused on in the Year 1 English foundation course.

In addition, the students reported about the system T5 had of giving feedback on their writing in class by students writing their names on the blackboard if they wanted feedback. The students claimed that this was voluntary. They hesitated to do so because either they could not be bothered, or because they felt it was uncomfortable to receive feedback in class. They would have preferred to have received feedback privately, on which all the students were in agreement. S3 concluded: 'It's not that the system is bad, I think it is also part of our problem'.

The students found it challenging to meet the formal criteria for their written texts. They believed that T5 had rather strict ideas on formality. S5 and S3 found it unnecessary to focus on sources so much since they were not allowed to use the Internet on their tests. They felt as if they were simply doing it out of formality and the whole process felt construed, as they did not know the tasks beforehand and were therefore not able to download or prepare sources beforehand. However, they were to include sources and reference according to the Harvard method. They wanted access to the Internet at their tests and some found it very annoying that they did not have this access.

Feedback

The students related that T5 had a complex and extensive system of giving feedback. S2 and S5 explained:

S2: He links like different talks on how to write, for example subject-verb agreement, or grammatical tutorials, for instance if there is an error so you can go in there and look at the basics on how you [are] to improve.

S5: He also has audios, he comments sometimes on what is wrong. It depends on the grandness of the test, for example if it is a big test he comments more (...).

They had been assessed on two written tests so far. T5 used a system that had add-ons to Word and the students found this system beneficial. S4 gave an example: 'For example, if you have written a word that is informal, he'll comment that it is informal but he does not say what you can write instead. So he just points out that it is informal but not [what you can write instead].'

Furthermore, S4 explained that he was not able to see what was wrong and would have preferred his teacher to give him an example of what to write instead. In addition, S3 would have preferred not to have the audio feedback and preferred written feedback, as they found the audios awkward and at times funny. However, they were mostly happy with the feedback. The students felt there was much 'clicking', i.e. they had to select documents and open files or tabs in the system that T5 used.

The students struggled to conform to writing formal texts. They noted a shift from using 'we' and contractions, to not being able to use these in their texts. S3 was used to using contractions and felt it sounded very weird when he did not contract. The following conversation developed:

S3: It feels better with the contractions because that is what I have heard and then he [T5] pulls it out and [comments] what is this [and remarks that it] does not make sense to [him].

S5: It sound like you're a British nobleman, the 18th hundreds like 'I will this' specifically, 'I will do this' or 'won't do this' right?

S3: Won't just sounds so much better than will not, I just, I don't know...

S5: We're the generation that grow up with efficiency, we shorten down for more efficient use. This long and unnecessary formal use becomes tedious and it annoys me to the core sometimes when I read it.

Strategies

Some of the students made a quick disposition. However, they did not always write it down. They wrote their texts in 90 minutes and thus did not have much time. All but two found the time to be sufficient. Some plotted down all the things on paper and then began the writing process. Others just began to write whatever came into their heads. They were happy with the number of assessments. However, they stressed that they would never complain about having too little to do. Furthermore, they had discussed writing in class and decided that they were to do more writing this semester and write shorter essays. S5 claimed that: ‘You improve by doing’.

None of the students revised their written tests. They felt it was pointless because nobody would check them anyway. Some would have preferred their teacher to check them after they had revised. However, they would have preferred to write drafts and receive feedback, then revise and check if they had understood the teacher’s comments and corrected appropriately. None of the students were familiar with writing drafts and, furthermore, none of them had practised this in lower secondary school either. Thus, they had no experience of process writing.

When the interviewer enquired what the teachers could do to make the teaching of writing better, one student reported that it would be good to be shown an example of a top grade so that they could learn from it. When the interviewer asked if they considered themselves to be better writers now, S3 answered: ‘Well I definitely am better at writing formally, I know a lot of formal words now, but I don’t know if I am a better writer.’

Experiences

The group discussed why students were struggling to write formally today and S5 commented:

Honestly, I think the problem started a lot earlier because it used to be very loose in grammar school and up to middle school. Most educational problems in Norway can be traced earlier. This is more of an echo of these problems. I feel like they can be a lot stricter about writing because like the requirement for getting a high grade are high but the strictness I don’t feel like the strictness is being hit hard down on writing. When I get feedback, a low or a good grade, I don’t feel struck by it (...) I don’t feel like there is someone who really pushes me to be better at writing (...). For example, in Math there is a wall you need to hit to get further and it feels that strict and it is hard, it’s like

an iron glove. But I do not feel that in writing, [as] it is more loose. It's more chill and it shouldn't be that or it isn't in terms of grades. It's been that way since middle school, since elementary school. In middle school, it's like write a text and if it's not trash then okay, you pass.

The other students agreed with this observation. The students would have liked to have been pushed more and to have been required to correct their errors. Their errors were pointed out, but they were never enforced. In addition, there had to be a motivational aspect to it. They had to be forced to revise and there needed to be incentives for them to revise. For instance, they noted that they seldom used the revision sheet because it felt as if they did not have to use it.

6.0 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The present chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 5 in light of the theory and literature presented in Chapter 3. The teacher interviews are discussed in section 6.2 with a focus on the extent and manner the teachers taught expository and persuasive writing. The student focus-group interviews are discussed in section 6.3 with a focus on the extent and manner the students experienced the teaching of writing and expository and persuasive writing. The implications of the study and recommendations are addressed in section 6.4, and finally the limitations of the study in section 6.5.

6.2 The extent and manner the teachers taught expository and persuasive writing

The first research question relates to the extent and manner the teachers taught expository and persuasive writing in the elective English classes. This was investigated by using semi-structured interviews with five teachers. The teachers taught one of the elective English subjects at five different upper secondary schools in Rogaland county. T1 and T5 taught International English, while T2, T3 and T4 taught Social Studies English, which builds on the former.

Genre awareness

In terms of genres, only one of the teachers (i.e. T1) specifically used the terms ‘expository’ and ‘persuasive’ when teaching writing. T1 explained that they introduced these terms in the Vg1 English foundation course at School One and most of her students were thus familiar with the terms. Furthermore, most of the students’ writing tasks were in these genres. The students who studied the elective English subjects during the last school year (i.e. 2015-2016) at School One achieved the highest results in both their continuous assessment grades in writing and on their written exam compared to the other schools in the case study. This might explain why, according to T1, the teachers at School One felt it would not be too advanced for their students to learn to write in these genres and relate to them as such. In contrast, the teachers at the other four schools thought it would be too challenging for their students. Since School One had a seemingly unified and focused approach to teaching expository and persuasive writing, their students may have accordingly achieved higher grades in writing.

Several scholars emphasise the benefits of learning how to write expository and persuasive texts in education (e.g. Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987; Hammann and Stevens 2003; Hyland 2003a; Silva 1993; Weigle 2002). According to Hammann and Stevens (2003: 732), 'Writing expository text is an important part of academic learning, and students' ability to present information and ideas through their writing is "an integral role" in academic success'. One of the specifications in the core curriculum (see section 1.2) is that students are to be prepared for higher education. Hyland (2003a: 18) points out that teachers who focus on genres when instructing writing regard writing not only as an act of composing, organising a text and expressing knowledge, but they also regard writing as communicating with an audience, i.e. readers. Thus, the purpose of the writing task may become more accessible to the students if they are taught to write within the confines of genres. However, there is an important distinction to be made between *genre acquisition*, where students are instructed in how to read and write in specific genres, and *genre awareness*, which emphasises the relationship between different types of texts, linguistic aspects, and the contexts of the texts (Johns 2011: 57). Furthermore, to teach the students genre awareness can thus make the writing process more accessible and meaningful. According to Hyland (2005: 88), teaching genres has sometimes had an excessive focus on the similarities of the text types within the same genres, which is unfortunate as teaching the variations within the same genres is just as important. Furthermore, even though texts within the same genre have similar traits, these common traits should not be regarded as fixed. To have a focus on structure may constrain the students' creativity. As pointed out by Hyland (2005: 88), 'Genres are not (...) overbearing structures which impose uniformity on users'.

When one considers the above-mentioned benefits of teaching students to write expository and persuasive texts, it was arguably a disadvantage for them that the majority of the teachers did not explicitly teach the aforementioned genres. Nevertheless, some of the teachers explained that when the students received their writing tasks, the prompts were formulated in such a way that the texts became expository or persuasive. Furthermore, some of the teachers explained that in practice they did in fact expect their students to write expository and persuasive texts, but the texts were not labelled as such. Instead, they used a broader term, 'essay', and in some cases they used the term 'five-paragraph essay'. According to Johns (2011: 57), much writing that is conducted in classrooms is referred to as 'essays'. This was also the case in the present study, where the teachers explained that they felt it would be too complicated for their students to relate to several genres and terms and therefore found it more beneficial to stick to one term, i.e. 'essay'.

However, the lack of focus on teaching genres amongst most of the teachers in the case study may be a result of the curricula for the elective English subjects, which do not specify which genres the students are to master by the end of the courses. Perhaps the lack of explicit instructions in terms of genres in the curriculum influenced most of the teachers in the case study to omit teaching other genres than the essay. On the other hand, the competence aims in the curricula state that the aims of the studies are to enable students to elaborate, discuss, reflect and analyse different texts, as well as issues and topics that are related to the course⁵⁴. These elements are often incorporated in expository and persuasive writing.

In addition, as pointed out by T2, the exam questions do not use the terms ‘expository’ or ‘persuasive’, which may legitimise the lack of focus on genres in teaching writing in the elective English subjects amongst most of the interviewed teachers. For example, the exam questions (i.e. Task 2 long answer) in the elective English subjects from Spring 2016 do not state which genres the texts are to be written in⁵⁵. However, all of them include the verb ‘discuss’, without giving more instructions about text type (see section 2.4)⁵⁶. If the exam questions do not require the students to write in specified genres, this could be interpreted as if the students are not expected to be able to write in different genres, and thus the teachers of the elective courses do not need to teach them in order for the students to master the written exam. However, the prompts for the written exam questions often set the writing task in a context and for an intended audience. In addition, the writing tasks often entail expository and persuasive elements. Nevertheless, the lack of explicit instructions on genres in the written exam may be interpreted as being the norm, and thus to focus on genres may be regarded as redundant by some teachers. There is therefore a risk that the exam questions could set the framework for the planning of the course at the expense of the competence aims in the curriculum. According to Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987: 182):

The conscientious teacher *conspires* to see to it that there is a congruity between the way students encode knowledge on acquisition and the retrieval requirements of course assignments and tests. “Teaching for the test” is an epithet applied to going to the extreme in this effort, but testing for what was intended to be taught is considered a virtue.

⁵⁴ https://www.udir.no/kl06/ENG4-01/Hele/Komplett_visning

⁵⁵ Note: password protected. <https://www.udir.no/eksamen-og-prover/eksamen/finn-eksamensoppgaver/>

⁵⁶ One Spring 2016 exam question from the course, English Literature and Culture, i.e. Task 2c, included ‘Compare and discuss’.

It may be questionable to teach solely in relation to the exam. Although the students need to be prepared for the written exam, the focus ought to be on teaching the subject according to the competence aims in the curriculum, as well as following the Framework for Basic skills⁵⁷. Level five (i.e. the highest level) in the schema called ‘Writing as a basic skill’ states that the students are to be able to ‘apply and make full use of specialized subject-related terminology and text types’, as well as be able to ‘build a holistic argumentation’ and ‘critically explore and problematize subject-related topics’⁵⁸.

Structure

Even though some of the interviewed teachers differed in how they taught writing, they had a shared focus on teaching the structure of an essay. In addition, most of the teachers’ strategies when teaching writing⁵⁹ were linked to structure. T1 claimed not to focus on strategies, although she emphasised structure when instructing her students on how to write the five-paragraph essay. T2 had the most interactive approach to instructing his students in structuring their texts. He gave the students examples of how they could structure the texts and together they organised the structure of the texts. Furthermore, T2 found it especially beneficial to use an essay outline and colour coded important aspects when teaching students who struggled to write. He claimed that some of the students showed an improvement when they used the outline and essay examples that included indications of topic sentences, concluding statements, and so on. Moreover, all the teachers used example texts when they taught writing. Most of the teachers in the case study used essay examples from ‘Utdanningsdirektoratet’ (the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training) when teaching structure. This gave the students opportunities to study a finished written product. However, it did not illustrate how the students who had written the example texts had achieved the written product or what processes they had been through.

Furthermore, as reported by T1, T2 and T4, the structure remained the same in most of the writing tasks the students received⁶⁰. T4 elaborated that if she taught the structure of a five-paragraph essay, her students would know that they could use this recipe for more or less

⁵⁷ https://www.udir.no/PageFiles/66463/FREAMEWORK_FOR_BASIC_SKILLS.pdf?epslanguage=no

⁵⁸ https://www.udir.no/PageFiles/66463/FREAMEWORK_FOR_BASIC_SKILLS.pdf?epslanguage=no

⁵⁹ Apart from T1, the teachers did not explicitly teach expository and persuasive writing. Instead, they instructed their students in how to write an essay.

⁶⁰ T1, T2 and T4 explained some exceptions, such as when writing a book report, poem or writing that involved analysing an image

all their writing tasks. All of the teachers seemed to be in agreement that structure was important to succeed in writing in English and thus focused on this when they taught writing. However, according to Hammann and Stevens (2003: 731), students who received instructions on text structure when writing a compare and contrast expository text scored higher on structure, but had lower scores on content. The teachers in the case study seemed to focus on teaching how to build paragraphs, link the paragraphs, and the overall structure of the text as opposed to having a more detailed approach as to how the students retold and transformed knowledge when they wrote.

Therefore, although focusing excessively on text structure makes students good at structuring a text, there is a risk that they may struggle with other aspects, such as retelling and transforming knowledge. According to Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987: 11), *knowledge transformation* involves the use of writing in order to produce new knowledge, as opposed to *knowledge telling*, which is writing based on knowledge that is already attained. In knowledge transformation, the act of writing leads to acquiring new knowledge and the writer develops and changes ideas in the process of writing (Weigle 2002: 32-33). An excessive focus on structure might hinder the development of knowledge transformation. In other words, to emphasise the structure of a text may be at the expense of developing the content of the text. According to Weigle (2002: 36), L2 writers revise content less than L1 writers, which was also the case amongst the students who participated in the focus groups in the present study. If writers revise the content, changes often need to be made to the organisation and structure of the text as a consequence. If the focus is first and foremost on organisation, this might hinder the students' motivation to spend time on gathering new information and knowledge as well as editing and changing their existing texts, as this might disrupt the overall organisation and structure of the text. To make changes to an existing text based on new acquired knowledge or insight may be challenging and may require a higher skillset of writing, as well as more complex language skills. Thus, this might explain why L2 writers revise less than L1 writers. Nevertheless, the content of the text is perhaps of higher importance when composing, as it may be understood as a prerequisite to the organisation and structure of a text. This might especially be the case for the elective English classes, as they are expected to perform at a higher level, both on language and content.

Process writing

The teachers did not practise process-writing in the sense that they required their students to write drafts or rewrite a text based on previous feedback. For instance, although the students

in School Four often received feedback while writing, this happened as they wrote in class and, furthermore, the feedback was solely oral⁶¹.

The lack of process writing in the current study supports the findings in the studies by Bø (2014) and Vik (2013), which also found that none of the upper secondary teachers involved practised process writing, even though they considered it important. As in Bø's (2014) study, the teachers in the current study referred to a lack of time when explaining why their students were not given the opportunity to participate in process writing. For example, T3 believed the students did not have time to write drafts. However, scholars such as Sommers (1982), Barkaoui (2007) and Hyland (2003b) advocate the benefits of process writing. Sommers (1982: 154) claims that process writing is important both because it forces writers to restructure their ideas and opinions and because teachers will provide different comments to a draft than to a final written product. Moreover, students are likely to respond differently to comments made on a draft as opposed to a final product because they would use the feedback to improve the text before submitting the final product. The lack of process writing experience in the current study could be seen as hindering the students from developing and improving their texts.

Modelling

Two of the teachers in the case study had practised modelling in relation to writing instructions. T2 had modelled writing an outline of an essay question in class for his students, and, in addition, he had attempted at co-writing a text with his students. However, he had experienced that it was he who did most of the work and that the students did not engage sufficiently. At the same time, it is perhaps not always necessary for the students to participate in the early phases when the teacher models, as they may still learn from solely observing the teacher. For instance, the teacher or peers can model how they start the writing process and illustrate the different strategies that they apply in the process.

T1 had used modelling when teaching expository and persuasive writing where she had analysed expository and persuasive example texts in class. Thus, T1 had modelled how to understand and interpret a text, which Barkaoui (2007: 39) refers to as text modelling. Equally important, as pointed out by Hyland (2003b: 21), teacher modelling is an important method in achieving autonomous writers. Teacher modelling may involve the teacher discussing and analysing a text as well as modelling how to plan, structure and compose a text. The idea of

⁶¹ S4 reported that he had received written feedback on a draft once because he had requested it.

teacher modelling draws on the theories of Vygotsky's (1978) *zone of proximal development* and Bruner's (1986) concept of *scaffolding*⁶². Thus, the teacher is functioning both as an expert and as an assistant in this process. Hyland (2003b: 21) points out that the teacher needs to give explicit instruction in the beginning of this process. Barkaoui (2007: 37) also argues in favour of process writing as it allows for teacher and peer modelling. According to Min (2016 :45), the combination of modelling, reading, and applying different strategies in the writing process, together with adequate writing practice and feedback, is essential for developing proficient writers.

Assessment and feedback

The teachers at the case study schools had different approaches to assessment. The students had between two and three written assignments with post-product feedback in the first term. At School Two, Three and Five, the students had their writing tests at school. Even though they were allowed to bring notes and use their course books, the students at School Three and School Five were prohibited from using the Internet during their written tests. They were either allocated one English lesson or they did their test during a 'Fagdag' (English subject day). This was the normal practice at these schools because the teachers were concerned that the students would not submit texts that were fully their own work if they allowed them to do the tests as a home assignment. T2 mentioned that when he had previously given home assignments, he felt that the students had received too much help and there were issues related to plagiarism. In contrast, at School One and School Four the students were usually allocated several English lessons for their tests and, they could also write at home. At these schools, the written tests were a combination of a school test and a home assignment. T1 stated that she did not want her students to be stressed and therefore wanted them to have sufficient time to complete their texts. T4 also noted that she did not believe one lesson (i.e. 90 minutes) was adequate time for writing an essay. T1 made a similar remark, but stressed that it was not enough time to write a well-structured essay. In other words, the students at School Two, School Three and School Five received their written tests during one school lesson or a triple lesson (i.e. Fagdag).

In terms of feedback, the teachers expressed that they gave written feedback and conducted student-teacher conferences. The interviewed teachers explained that they gave extensive post-product feedback to their students' written work. The researcher was shown

⁶² As referred to in Hyland (2003b).

different schemas and rubrics that they used. T5 believed the students improved their writing by a combination of self-assessment, teacher feedback and by being given plenty of writing practice. The teachers all gave specific comments in the written texts, as well as writing a final comment. T5, T2 and T3 used code programmes when giving feedback to the students' written tests. In addition, T5 used a self-assessment sheet. All the teachers in the case study gave both comments throughout the texts as well as final comment in the end. The teachers expected their students to revise their texts based on the feedback they gave on the written tests, but the revised texts were not resubmitted, checked or followed up. However, T1 instructed her students to have their previous texts with her feedback on the screen while writing the new test.

None of the interviewed teachers had experience of assessing the written exams in either the elective English subjects or in the English foundation course. However, T3 believed that the examiners were concerned that the students had an appropriate vocabulary, logical structure and understanding of statistics. The exam questions often involved statistics in the form of graphs, charts or tables that the students were required to interpret and include in their answers. T3 claimed grammar was not very important for the examiners who assessed the written exams for the elective English subjects. Thus, T3 did not focus on grammar in teaching the course. This might be considered an example of a negative effect of the exam, called 'washback' (Weigle 2002: 54), in the sense that assumptions are being made that do not necessarily represent the actual assessment situation. T4 also noted that she had little time to spend on teaching language, as there was so much to cover in the course. The competence aims are very broad and it may be difficult to cover all the aspects.

The lack of experience of assessing the written exams in the elective English subjects is a drawback when preparing the students for the written exam. For example, T3 seemed to put a good deal of emphasis on what she 'believed' the written exam assessors prioritised when they assessed and chose to focus on these aspects in her planning and teaching of writing in the course. If the teachers had actually been examiners, they would have been able to confirm what was emphasised in the assessment.

6.3 How the students experienced the teaching of writing and expository and persuasive writing

The second research question relates to how the students of the elective English subjects experienced the teaching of writing and of expository and persuasive writing. This was

investigated by conducting focus-group interviews with a selection of the interviewed teachers' students. The participants in the focus groups at School One and School Five studied International English, while the participants in the focus groups at School Two, School Three and School Four studied Social Studies English, which builds on International English.

Writing instructions

As indicated by the teacher interviews, only the students at School One were familiar with the terms 'expository' and 'persuasive' texts, though some of the other students provided correct explanations when asked about them. To stick to one general genre, i.e. the essay, may hinder the students' development both in terms of writing and language. The students who focused the most on learning genres (i.e. those in School One) did not express that it was overwhelming or too complex to be taught to write expository or persuasive texts. The students reported a good understanding of their characteristics and expressed confidence in writing in these genres. In fact, the students at School One would also have liked to practise writing in other genres. As most of the teachers in the case study had adapted the course and the writing instructions according to the level of their students, it may have been challenging for the students to write complex texts. Thus, simplifying the genre requirements may have led to less complex texts from the students, both linguistically and content-wise.

As pointed out by Grabe and Kaplan (1996: 137), teaching genres such as the five-paragraph essay may result in 'teaching arbitrary models and textual organization with little connection to a student's learning purposes'. The students at both School One and School Five expressed that they more or less solely wrote formal essays and would very much have liked to write other genres and have less focus on formality. In addition, some students expressed a strong desire to write more creatively. Several students found their teachers to be excessively preoccupied with formal writing. The students who were taught to write an essay also reported that they were sometimes unsure of what was expected of them when they received writing tasks on a test. The students may have used the same template and structure for every genre without possibly understanding the traits of the different genres. While the teachers may have been trying to make it easier for the students by focusing on one type of genre, it may have been confusing for the students to know what the text was to contain, apart from the structural elements, e.g. an introduction, main part and conclusion. Even though focusing on teaching the structure of an essay has benefits on a structural level, it may sometimes be at the expense of the content and language.

In terms of language, most students experienced little focus on it. Some students felt there was more focus on teaching and learning content and less on language in the elective English subjects, as opposed to during the Year 1 English foundation course. At School Two, S3 stated that their teacher (i.e. T2) expected them to know how to write properly at this stage. At the same time, they felt that they lacked the adequate vocabulary to achieve this. As argued by Hyland (2003a: 18), 'The importance of genre orientation is that it incorporates discourses and contextual aspects of language use that may be neglected when attending to structures, functions, or processes alone.' When the students learn to write in different genres they use language that is appropriate for different situations and purposes. The language may differ in relation to the different genres and when students are given the opportunity to write in different genres they often expand their language. Furthermore, Hyland (2013: 244) found that faculty members at a university in Hong Kong tended to blame poor writing skills on a lack of mastering writing in the different genres, and not poor language skills. The students develop and refine their language and writing skills by practising writing in different genres. Thus, the students have the opportunity to expand their language by learning to write different genres. Therefore, to limit the students to writing in mostly one style may in consequence limit their linguistic development.

On the other hand, the students reported positive experiences from studying example texts. Both the students and the teachers agreed that studying example texts was useful and beneficial in preparing for the writing tasks. Furthermore, most of the students stated that they found it useful to study example texts as a way of understanding the teacher's expectations to the tasks they received at the tests. However, some students explained that they would have preferred to have studied more complex text examples. The students at School One stated that T1 had shown them examples of different genres and the students had appreciated this as they found it beneficial in preparing them to write in the same genres. The other students at the remaining schools had also been shown example texts, but there had not been a focus on genres. Some were thus confused as to what and how they were to answer the writing tasks that they received at their tests. Furthermore, the students from School Three complained that the example texts they had been shown were not at a very high level and they would have preferred to have studied more advanced example texts. This is in line with Hyland's (2003b: 22) recommendation, that the students benefit from reading example texts, but that these texts ought to be 'expert texts'.

The students' experiences seem to illustrate that it may be an advantage to teach reading and writing expository and persuasive texts conjointly, as recommended by

Hammann and Stevens (2003). Furthermore, the students at School Three believed reading had influenced their writing the most. Thus, it may be beneficial to give students reading material that is written in the form of an expository or persuasive text before students are instructed to write an expository or persuasive text of their own. Reading comprehension is strongly linked to writing performance. Krashen (2011: 381) explains that reading leads to language proficiency. Furthermore, to read texts in a specific genre leads to an understanding of what is expected from that particular genre and what writing such a text entails. In addition, students may need assistance in interpreting the texts in these genres. For example, if students struggle to write an expository or persuasive text, it may be because they have not been able to retrieve knowledge from their reading material, and thus need guidance and instructions in how to achieve this. Thus, the lack of reading instructions of expository and persuasive texts may hinder the written performances when writing in these genres.

At the same time, it would perhaps be a benefit to introduce different genres, such as expository and persuasive texts, earlier in the students' education. The genres could be presented in a simpler form in compulsory education and developed further in upper secondary school. The students would then not be presented with many different genres for the first time in upper secondary school. As a result, it might not be too complicated for the students to relate to several genres in the elective English classes.

Strategies

The students reported that there was no focus on writing strategies, which was confirmed by the teachers. The students stated that they mostly used writing strategies that they had already acquired and found beneficial. Some of these strategies included creating an outline of the essay or brainstorming. Students often claimed that they had a solely linear approach to writing. However, when questioned further, it became apparent that they did use strategies, even though they did not necessarily write them down. For example, one student from School Three reported that he created a mental outline before writing. The researcher noted that some students seemed pleased that they could report that they mostly used a linear approach and wrote from the beginning to the end in more or less one go. Furthermore, they claimed that they used this approach as it worked for them and had been a success. This might indicate that they may not have been adequately challenged in their development as writers.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), Grabe and Kaplan (1996), and Weigle (2002), emphasise the benefits of revising and developing a text in order to improve the writing performance. It is thus of concern that, based on this study, none of the students engaged in

process writing. In fact, the students from School Five reported that none of them had ever, throughout their entire education, participated in any form of process writing. The teachers seemed to have a broad understanding of process writing as they often referred to instances where they gave oral feedback while the students were writing in class as being a form of process writing. However, most of the students did not appreciate this form of feedback. In addition, it became evident from the focus groups that the students did not regard T5's system of giving feedback while they were writing in class as a form of process writing.

In terms of composing practices, some of the students reported that they might write the main part first and the introduction and conclusion last. However, most students did little revision or major changes to their original text. Krashen (2014: 20) points out that a characteristic of a 'good writer' is their understanding of the importance of revision. In addition, according to Weigle (2002: 33), much learning may take place when students revise and develop their texts. It seemed as if most of the students were 'knowledge telling', that is writing about what they had learnt, as opposed to 'knowledge transforming', which includes gaining knowledge and insight during the writing process. At the same time, this may have been difficult to achieve since the students did not engage in the writing process. Nevertheless, the majority of the students had written assignments where they could have had the opportunity to receive feedback and time to revise before submitting the final written product.

In terms of common guidelines on writing, most of the students either did not know if they had any, or they were unsure what they were. The information was rather unclear to the students when they were asked about common guidelines in writing. For example, the students in School One reported that T1 used a Power point presentation on how to write that was the same as they had been presented with in Year 1 in English. However, they were unable to report whether this information was linked to the common guidelines on writing.

Written tests

During tests, most of the students felt that they were usually allotted sufficient time to write their answers. S5 at School Two pointed out that if a student could not finish on time, it was likely that either this student had a bad day or that the writing process had started late because the student lacked ideas. This statement may be understood in light of an example from Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987: 9), who referred to the writing strategies of a 12 year-old who, when she received a writing task, simply started to write down what she knew and wrote until she ran out of ideas. This strategy often stops when the writer runs out of ideas or things

to write about, and this was confirmed amongst the students in the case study. Furthermore, the students from the case study were generally content with the number of written tests. However, as pointed out by the students from School Five, they would never complain that they had too few written tests or assignments. At the same time, some students expressed that they would have liked to write more. Students from School Five received written assignments in addition to the written tests, but these were not assessed by their teacher. Nevertheless, it gave these students practice in writing and, additionally, the students seemed to value and enjoy this.

The students who had their written assignments at school were not allowed to use the Internet. The students at School Three and School Five expressed their annoyance when it came to this. At School Five, they found it especially strange in relation to the use of sources. Their teacher wanted them to use sources and reference correctly, but at the same time they were not at liberty to access the Internet and find relevant sources for their writing tasks. The whole process of referencing thus seemed unnatural and construed. The test situation seemed to lack authenticity because in the 'real-world' the students would use the Internet (Brown and Abeywickrama 2010: 36-39). In an authentic context, they would refer to sources that they had retrieved from the Internet instead of referring to already downloaded material that they had gathered when preparing for the test and that may be relevant to the written tasks they received on the tests. As a result, the students at School Three and School Five stressed that they wanted Internet access during their tests. In comparison, most students who could write at home in addition to at school stated that they received help from their parents when they had written assignments. According to Vygotsky's (1978: 86) zone of proximal development, such help may benefit and develop the students' written performances, assuming the parents may be categorised as having a skill set higher than their children. However, as stated by T5, this system might be considered unfair as it benefits students who have parents who are able and willing to assist in the students' writing process. Arguably, it would thus be better if the teachers practised process writing and functioned as the more capable and skilled guider.

Feedback

In terms of feedback, there were mixed opinions both in terms of the methods the teachers used and the amount of feedback which they received. The students at School Three wanted more specific feedback. For example, if something was missing in the text, they wanted to know specifically what was missing as opposed to being informed that something was

missing. In addition, they did not find it beneficial to be informed that they needed to work on their grammar. For the feedback to be constructive, they needed to know specifically what to improve in terms of grammar. As pointed out by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010: 38), ‘One way to enhance washback⁶³ is to comment generously and specifically on test performance’. Even though all the interviewed teachers explained that they gave extensive feedback, this did not always correlate with the students’ experiences. Some students claimed the feedback was not extensive and several reported that they would have liked more specific feedback. In addition, some students stated that when they only received oral feedback, they struggled to remember it, which made the feedback unproductive.

Furthermore, S2 at School Three reported that the extent to which they studied the feedback depended on the teacher and the type of feedback they received. If the feedback was vague and unspecific, they gave it less attention than very precise feedback. The students in School Four were most satisfied with the amount of feedback they received and how it was communicated. They were a very small group of five students. According to the students, T4 gave information both on what they had succeeded in and what they needed to improve or could study further. They received both written and oral feedback, and found this combination useful in improving their writing.

All of the students reported that they received written post-product feedback. Although the students received written feedback, they did not revise their texts and explained that they were not required to do so. Nevertheless, most of the students explained that they studied the feedback given by their teachers. Some found it pointless to revise since nobody (i.e. the teacher) would read it. Some students stated that they would have liked to have revised their texts if the teacher had read their revisions. This may suggest that students still need to be held accountable for their own learning of writing and that they need incentives to develop as writers. Furthermore, the students wanted their teachers to read their revisions in order for them to check if they had understood the teacher’s feedback correctly. As Hyland (2003b: 190-191) claims, students may misunderstand the teachers’ feedback, especially if the feedback is written in an indirect manner. The combination of reading feedback written in a foreign language together with ‘mitigating’ comments⁶⁴ in order to soften the criticism may be unfortunate. The feedback may become counter-productive, as the students either ignore the comments they do not understand or revise incorrectly. Thus, if the students had submitted

⁶³ i.e. increase the positive effects of the test.

⁶⁴ Mitigating comments frame criticism in a positive manner in order not to offend the students (Hyland 2003b: 190).

their revisions, this might have decreased the probability of creating misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Writing development

When it comes to improving written performance, most of the students were unsure whether their writing had improved thus far in the course. The students at School Three expressed that they did not believe their writing had improved. In their opinion, writing had not been focused on. They believed it would be beneficial for their writing performance to learn about and spend more time on being taught about the topics they were to write about. They believed it was reading that had influenced their writing the most. This correlates with a comment made by their teacher (i.e. T3), who expressed that the students lacked appropriate readings skills and ought to read more extensively. She noted a correlation between the students' lack of extensive and in-depth reading and the students' written work, which also lacked depth and could at times result in simplistic texts. This might suggest that in order for the students' writing to develop, they need to study written texts that can function as a foundation for their written performances. In terms of the amount of reading, there was a clear difference between the schools. More or less all the students from School One claimed they read English texts voluntarily and books regularly. However, this was much less the case at any of the other schools in the case study. According to Krashen (2014: 20), writing skills derive from reading. When students read, they learn the language of writing⁶⁵. Thus, a lack of reading may have contributed to the level of the students' writing skills.

6.4 Implications and recommendations

First of all, it is important to note that the size of the classes varied and this may have implications for how the students experienced the teaching of expository and persuasive writing. This might especially be the case in relation to feedback, where having five students in a class (i.e. School Four) versus having 22 students (i.e. School Three) might affect the teaching. In fact, the students at School Four were content with their feedback, while the students at School Three had complaints about it. In addition, in School One and School Four, the focus groups consisted of all the students⁶⁶, while a group of students were selected by their respective teachers at the other three schools.

⁶⁵ However, to be able to use writing to solve problems derives from knowledge of the composing process (Krashen 2014: 20).

⁶⁶ In School Four, one student was absent the day of the interview and thus they were four participants.

A significant finding in this study was that only one out of five of the teachers specifically taught expository or persuasive writing, which was confirmed by the students. However, the teachers pointed out that in practice the tasks and essay question probes were formulated in such a manner that the students were expected to write these types of texts. The students confirmed this when they explained the different writing tasks they had written thus far in the respective courses. As some students reported that they were unsure how to respond to the essay questions, it might have been beneficial to specifically teach the two genres in question, as the students would have received more specific guidance in how to write the texts they were expected to write. In addition, as most students are required to write expository and persuasive texts at university, this focus would be beneficial in terms of preparing the students for higher education. To learn how to write expository and persuasive texts can function as an introduction to academic writing.

Another key finding was that none of the students participated in process writing. In fact, none of the students at School Five had ever participated in process writing at any stage in their education. Bø's (2014) study reported that most feedback was given post-product, and this was further confirmed by the present study, as none of the teachers gave written feedback before the final product. However, the findings in the present study differed from Bø's (2014) study in that she also reported that it was uncommon with oral feedback. The finding in this study found that there was extensive use of oral feedback to the students' writing. Some of the oral feedback was given in class as the students wrote, while others had teacher-student conferences, where they discussed the students' written work (i.e. post-product).

Furthermore, the students had several strategies that they used when they wrote, but most of these were linked to the organisation of the texts. The pre-writing strategies had been learnt prior to upper secondary school. Some of the teachers admitted that they did not focus on writing strategies. T2 had an elaborate system in terms of structuring and building a text. While most of the teachers stated that they did not teach writing strategies⁶⁷, it may have been beneficial for the students if the teachers had revised some of the writing strategies the students had previously been taught, in addition to perhaps adding some new strategies that might be especially useful for writing in the elective English subjects.

In addition, changes could be made to the essay questions in the written exams for the elective subjects, as most of them ask the students to write a text without specifying in which genre. This might have influenced how the teachers taught writing and perhaps to some extent

⁶⁷ However, they referred to strategies in relation to the organisation and the structure of a text.

explained the lack of focus on genres. One can understand why teachers would try to simplify the teaching of writing by limiting its scope, but the result may be counter-productive if the students find that what is expected from the writing task is unclear. At the same time, perhaps one ought to be able to expect more from students who have chosen a specialised course in English. The question thus becomes how much one should simplify and adapt the course to students who have poor writing skills in English. The result might be that, as reported by some of the students, the courses receive a reputation for being easy as opposed to other perceived more difficult subjects, such as Chemistry and Mathematics. At the same time, according to some of the teachers and students, the exam questions are challenging and require good writing skills in English, which is confirmed by studying the exam results, where most students do not receive high grades (i.e. a 5 or a 6)⁶⁸. In the Spring 2016 written exams, the grade average was 3,3 for International English, 3,2 for Social Studies English and 3,6 for English Literature and Culture (see section 2.4). Thus, these elective subjects are not easy in terms of achieving top grades in the written exams.

Furthermore, according to Weigle (2002: 35), skilled writers are often not able to perform well when they receive writing tasks that relate to a genre that is unfamiliar. The exam questions often require students to write texts that are expository or persuasive, even though these terms are seldom used. Thus, the students who have been taught explicitly to write in these genres might have an advantage as they might more easily recognise the text requirements from the exam question prompts, and answer accordingly. Therefore, it might be beneficial to focus more on explicitly teaching expository and persuasive writing, as it might lead to students performing at a higher level and, as consequence, gain higher scores.

One recommendation would be that teachers of the elective English classes explicitly teach expository and persuasive writing as taught by T1 and in School One. In School One the students were introduced to the aforementioned genres in the Year 1 English foundation course. Furthermore, according to T1 the English teachers at School One had a unified approach to teaching writing in English. In the elective English class, T1 started by giving her students examples of expository and persuasive texts which the students studied before she gave a Power point presentation of some expository and persuasive characteristics. Lastly, the students were given writing tasks where they had to write expository and persuasive texts. A further recommendation in order to facilitate the students understanding of how to write expository and persuasive texts, would be to allow the students participate in process writing.

⁶⁸ <https://statistikkportalen.udir.no/Pages/default.aspx>

The students could write a draft, receive feedback from the teacher on the draft, and revise accordingly before submitting the final written product. This might enhance the learning of writing expository and persuasive texts. In addition, the students might benefit from the teacher modelling how to analyse⁶⁹ and how to write expository and persuasive texts before they start writing.

Another recommendation would be to focus more on writing in teacher education and the benefits for students of spending time developing a text. Some students in the case study reported that they wanted to focus more on writing. Having two or three written assignments each term seems insufficient, especially if students are to gain experience in writing different types of texts. In addition, the elective English subjects in upper secondary schools could be reorganised to facilitate a focus on writing by including time for process writing.

Students are also likely to benefit from receiving feedback in the process of writing, and this should not be voluntary or simply conducted orally, but rather in writing. In order for this to be achievable, the class sizes could perhaps be limited to a maximum 20 students. The class sizes varied in the case study, and it was evident that the smaller group was the one in which the students were the most content with the feedback.

In addition, teachers at the lower school levels should focus more on developing writing skills amongst students. Expository and persuasive writing could be introduced earlier in order for students to be accustomed with this type of writing. The teachers in the case study seemed to use many different methods in their teaching. Most of them had made a conscious choice not to focus on teaching genres and the lack of focus was explained by poor writing skills amongst some of the students.

Furthermore, some of the students' poor writing skills may be attributed to the lack of formally qualified English teachers in compulsory education. There are reports from Lagerstrøm (2000), Drew and Vigrestad (2008) and Lagerstøm et al. (2014) that all show that a considerable number of teachers who teach English in primary and lower secondary school are formally unqualified to teach English. The latest report from the *Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training* (2016)⁷⁰ shows that as many as 54 per cent of English teachers in primary school were formally unqualified, while the number was 34 per cent in lower upper secondary school. The lack of qualified English teachers teaching writing is of concern and probably has contributed to students lacking writing skills in English when they enter upper secondary school. This link was also expressed by the students at School Five. They claimed a

⁶⁹ T1 had modelled how to analyse an expository and/ or persuasive text.

⁷⁰ http://utdanningsspeilet.udir.no/2016/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Utdanningsspeilet_2016.pdf

lack of writing skills stemmed from compulsory education. S5 from School Five expressed discontent with how writing in English was taught in primary school and lower upper secondary school. In his experience, the English teachers from compulsory education did not focus on developing the students' writing. To have an English teacher teaching students to write in English without having formal qualifications in English is not an ideal starting point to produce good writers. In comparison to compulsory education, Turmo and Aamodt (2007) conducted a survey that showed all English teachers at upper secondary level (who responded to the questionnaire), were formally qualified⁷¹.

6.5 Limitations of the study

The present study is firstly limited in relation to the number of subjects. The case study comprised five upper secondary schools that included five teachers and 39 students. It is thus not possible to generalise the findings to teachers and students teaching and studying the elective English subjects in general in upper secondary school in Norway. There were notable trends amongst the five upper secondary schools as well as differences. In addition, when referring to the level of the different schools in the case study, it is important to stress that these achieved grades were based on the classes from the previous school-year and therefore may not represent the classes in the case study.

Secondly, in terms of methods, some of the findings from the interviews might have been interesting to follow up on had the study included follow-up interviews. The teachers were interviewed once, and after analysing the data, there were issues that could have been investigated further. For example, the researcher could have asked to look at some of the written tests that the students had received and thus studied the essay question prompts in relation to the texts' intended audience. This would have given insight to the types of texts the students were expected to write, which again probably would have revealed how many of the writing tasks were expository and persuasive. In addition, follow-up interviews might have resulted in richer data, as well as providing the opportunity to clarify certain aspects concerning various forms of feedback. For example, it was not always clear if the teacher-student conferences were specifically used to give oral feedback after and in addition to the written post-product feedback. However, since the present study comprised of single interview sessions, this was not possible. In addition, classroom observations of the teaching

⁷¹ The report is from the school-year 2006-2007 where 150 schools participated in the survey (all counties were represented) and on average 51,1 % of the teachers responded to the questionnaire.

of writing might have been beneficial to help visualise some of the teachers' and students' experiences that were expressed in the interviews. The data collection is solely based on the perspectives of the teachers and their students. The researcher has not viewed any of the students' writing and therefore cannot check if the students' or teachers' references to writing tasks and written products were accurate.

Furthermore, the present study was a study of the current situation and what the teachers had taught so far in the course. In contrast, several teachers explained that they had either had previous experience of giving midway feedback to students' writing from other courses, or they had plans to practise this in the actual courses in the future. Nevertheless, as the present study is a case study of the elective English subjects and the current situation, the researcher needs to focus on what has been practised thus far in the respective classes. In addition, it may be difficult to know whether the interviews influenced the teachers and resulted in some of them expressing that they might try to practise process writing the following semester, or whether this would have been the case had they not participated in the study.

7.0 Conclusion

The present study has investigated the extent to which and how teachers at the upper secondary level taught expository and persuasive writing in the elective English classes and how the students experienced the teaching of writing and the aforementioned genres. A recent report by Lødding and Aamodt (2015) reported that first year university students in Norway struggled to write academic texts⁷². The researcher thus wanted to find out how writing was taught in the elective English subjects in the light of lecturers reporting poor writing skills amongst first year university students. The written exam results also functioned as a backdrop, as few students nationwide were able to achieve the highest grades in the elective English subjects' written exams⁷³. Furthermore, the elective English classes seemed appropriate subjects to investigate as the researcher had expected that much of the writing instruction in International English, Social Studies English and English Literature and Culture would be expository and persuasive. This expectation was based on three elements, namely the assumed English proficiency level of the courses, the competency aims⁷⁴ of the courses, and the written exam questions.

This was a case study of the elective English classes offered to Vg2 and Vg3 (i.e. the second and third year) in five upper secondary schools in Rogaland county. It was a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with five teachers and five focus-group interviews with a total of 39 students. The researcher was thus able to gather data from the two different perspectives and thereby increase the study's validity. The researcher collected data on how the students were instructed in terms of writing expository and persuasive texts, what strategies they used when they wrote, and how they were assessed when they were given writing tests. In addition, the research investigated how the teachers gave feedback to the written tests and how the students experienced the feedback to their writing.

The teacher interviews revealed that only one of the five teachers explicitly taught expository and persuasive writing. Considering the benefits of learning how to write expository and persuasive texts, both in terms of developing as a writer and in being prepared for higher education (e.g. Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987; Grabe and Kaplan 1996; Hammann and Stevens 2003; Hyland 2003a; Weigle 2002), this was a surprising result. The other

⁷² The report was across disciplines i.e. it did not solely refer to English.

⁷³ In 2015-2016 the national average exam results were 3,3 for International English, 3,2 for Social Studies English and 3,6 for English Literature and Culture. <https://statistikkportalen.udir.no/vgs/Pages/Karakterer-i-videregaende.aspx>

⁷⁴ From the curricula.

teachers taught the essay or the five –paragraph essay. However, it is important to note that even though these teachers did not refer to the essays as expository or persuasive, they mainly gave their students writing tasks that could nevertheless be understood as expository essays or persuasive essays. Most of the writing instruction was on a structural level. In addition, all the teachers used example texts when they taught writing. Many teachers remarked that they did not focus on language or grammar when they taught the course. Furthermore, none of the teachers had practised process writing thus far in the course in the sense that they had not provided their students with written feedback to drafts. The study showed that most of the teachers gave post-product feedback and this was usually written feedback, and reportedly extensive. In addition, some teachers gave oral feedback while the students wrote in class, and some conducted teacher-student conferences in order to find out if the students had understood the post-product written feedback. The findings on feedback are similar to those in Vik's (2013) and Bø's (2014) studies on written assessment and feedback at the upper secondary level.

The student focus-group interviews confirmed that only one of the five classes was familiar with the expository and persuasive genres. The remaining classes wrote primarily essays. However, a number of students wanted experience in writing in more genres. In terms of the deployment of strategies, the majority of the students adopted a linear approach when writing. Furthermore, most students used writing strategies that they had acquired from compulsory education and which they found beneficial. The teachers confirmed that they did not focus on strategies in the elective English classes.

Moreover, some students were discontent with the type of feedback they received on their written work, which they wanted to be more specific and extensive. This contrasted with the teachers claiming that they gave extensive feedback. While most of the teachers used a code programme when they assessed the students' written work, the researcher interpreted that the students preferred more conventional⁷⁵ and personal ways of giving feedback.

There were also differences in how the students were assessed. Two out of three of the schools gave their students tests in the form of written assignments that they could continue to work on at home, while the other three schools used timed tests at school in which the students were not permitted to use the Internet.

This thesis has added to the research on English writing at the upper secondary level in Norway by shedding light on how students are instructed in writing in the elective English

⁷⁵ For example, T5 used audio remarks which his students found to be either redundant or they regarded it as a curiosity.

classes and by studying to what extent and how the teaching of writing includes expository and persuasive writing.

One may argue that because few of the students in the present study were explicitly taught to write expository or persuasive texts, they may have been less prepared for higher education than if they had acquired experience of writing in these genres. Sparboe's (2008) study concluded that the students of the elective English classes were not prepared for academic writing in English, while Shirazi's (2010) study was inconclusive. She concluded that although the *LK06* instructions in theory prepared students for academic writing, this was not necessarily the case in practice⁷⁶. In addition, the present study also confirms the finding of Horverak (2015), namely that most teachers instructed their students in writing the essay or the five-paragraph essay⁷⁷, as opposed to other more specific genres, such as expository and persuasive. A possible change could thus be made to the written exam questions and the curricula, in that they could specifically state the types of texts the students are expected to write. In terms of the written exams, it may be beneficial to be more explicit about which type of texts the students are to write.

In addition, students at the upper secondary level would most likely benefit from being taught to write in more genres, such as expository and persuasive, in compulsory education (grades 1 to 10). Furthermore, to raise the level of writing in English amongst the students, one could require that all the teachers were formally qualified to teach English in compulsory education. This would give the students a better starting point when writing in English at the upper secondary level, and later in the elective English classes.

In terms of future research, one could interview first-year university students of English about their experiences of writing at that level in relation to what they were taught at school in order to find out how well prepared they were and what challenges they met. Another possible study could be the effects of teaching expository and persuasive writing, for example by studying student texts. Finally, a questionnaire survey among teachers and/or students about the teaching of expository and persuasive writing would gather data from a much larger sample than in the present study.

⁷⁶ Due to a small sample size, Shirazi (2010) was unable to conclude if the students in practice were prepared for higher education.

⁷⁷ Her subjects were mostly from the Vg1 English foundation course.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Student Focus-group Interview Guide

Opening

Welcome to this focus-group session. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about your experiences studying one of the specialised courses in English. My name is Melisa McIntosh and I am writing a Master's thesis in Literacy Studies at the University of Stavanger. You were selected because you are studying one of the specialised courses. The purpose of the interview is to collect as much data as possible about your experiences. I am only interested in your honest opinions and there are no wrong answers, only different points of view. Please feel free to share your opinions even if they may be different from what others have said. I am just as interested in negative comments as positive comments. The interview will be recorded because I do not want to miss any of your comments, as well as taking notes throughout the interview. I have placed name cards in front of you so we can address each other by our first names. However, your name and school will be anonymous in the thesis. Everything you share here is confidential and I ask that you please do not share what is discussed here. The conversation will take approximately one hour.

Guidelines

Mobiles are to be switched off

My role is to guide the discussion

It is best if you are able to talk to each other as opposed to speaking to me

As the interview is being tape recorded it is important that only one person speaks at a time

You do not need to agree with each other but you must listen respectfully

There are no right or wrong answers

Background

Why did you want to study the elective specialised subjects in English?

What do you plan to study after you graduate from upper secondary school?

Instructions

What kinds of texts do you usually write? Are you familiar with expository and persuasive writing?

Expository writing is writing that explains (expose) something. It can be an essay, a magazine article, a text in your textbook etc. as long as it seeks to explain a topic or issue. A persuasive text (argumentative essay) tries to convince the reader of an opinion. The text is often argumentative, and often considers

arguments both in favour and against an issue. They are often structured as continuous texts and consist of an introduction, main body (consisting of several paragraphs), and an ending.

How have you learnt to write expository and persuasive texts? (process writing, modelling, co-writing, digital tools/programmes, examples, the five paragraph essay, metaphors (the hamburger), studying similar texts, videos/ YouTube, etc.)

Does your teacher model? for example, how to either, plan, search for sources, compose, or revise. If, so.

How helpful is this?

What do you remember as being important when writing these texts? What are the 'rules'/ guidelines?

Do you receive conflicting instructions when it comes to writing conventions?

Do you have common guidelines for writing at your school?

Assessment

How is your writing assessed?

How does your teacher give feed-back on your written work? before, or after the text is finished? Is there a focus on language, content or structure?

Do you revise and learn from the teacher's feedback?

What kind of feed-back is the most effective?

Are you happy

with the amount of writing tests/ assignments and type of writing tasks you receive? If not, what would you change?

Are you familiar with the written exam questions? What is your opinion about the essay questions in the written exams?

Do you feel like this course has helped prepare you for higher education? (i.e. studying at a university or college)

Strategies

What strategies do you use when writing?

What are the strategies that have been most successful when writing expository or persuasive texts?

What are the strategies that have been least successful when writing expository or persuasive texts?

What use do you make of sources, notes, and classmates when writing?

Do you use NDLA for help on how to write?

Do you use Google translate when you write texts? If so, how often? and why?

Suppose you were in charge of the teaching of writing and could make one change that would make you learn better. What would you do?

What can both the students and the teachers do to make the learning of writing better?

Experience

How do you experience writing expository and persuasive texts?

What is most challenging about writing these texts?

Has your writing improved throughout the course? In what way?

Think back to a time your teacher taught writing? What went particularly well? Why? What needed improvement?

Think back over this semester and tell me of an enjoyable memory related to a writing task?

Can you give an example of an expository or persuasive text you were happy with?

What (who) has influenced your writing the most?

Further comments

Of all the things we have discussed, what to you is the most important?

Is there anything that you think is relevant that I have not asked you about?

Is there anything that you would like to add?

Appendix 2

Teacher Interview Guide

Opening

I would like to ask questions about your beliefs and teaching practises about teaching and learning to write expository and persuasive texts in your course in order to gain information for my Master's thesis in Literacy Studies at the University of Stavanger. The purpose of the interview is to collect as much data as possible about your experiences, views and beliefs. The interview will be recorded for my convenience, and I will take notes throughout the interview. Your name and workplace will be anonymous. The interview will take approximately one hour.

Background

What are your teacher qualifications?

How many years have you taught English?

How many years have you taught the elective specialised subjects?

Which elective specialised course are you teaching this school-year?

How many students are there in the course / class you are teaching?

How well has your education prepared you to teach the elective specialised subjects?

Have you any experience working as an examiner for the written exams (for the elective specialised subjects, i.e. VG2, VG3)?

Instructions

Are the students expected to master different genres when they start this course? If not, how are they taught it throughout the course?

Do you specifically teach expository and persuasive writing? If so, how?

How often are the students given expository or persuasive writing tasks?

Do you have collaborations for writing at your school? If so, are these specific for English or are they also cross-disciplinary?

Do you collaborate with other teachers about the teaching of writing? If so, in what way?

Strategies

Do you focus on learning strategies in this course?

What are some of your most effective strategies in teaching writing?

What has turned out to be least effective in teaching writing?

How would you define a good writer? What strategies do they use? Can these strategies be transferred to students who struggle?

What do the students find most challenging with this kind of writing?

How do you approach the issue of mixed student abilities?

Has the students' level of writing changed over the years? How? What are they better at, worse at?

How do you prepare the students for higher education?

Assessment / the competence aims

In what way is your teaching geared to the competence aims?

In your opinion, how achievable are the competence aims on writing?

How do you assess your students' writing? (written tests at school, home assignments etc.)

Do you give feed-back? If so, how?

Do you give feed-back during the writing process? If so, how?

What is your focus when you give feed-back?

What do you think about the essay questions in the written exams?

What are some of the challenges of assessing writing?

Do you feel like your students are prepared for academic writing in higher education by the time they have completed the course?

Further comments

Is there anything that you think is relevant that I have not asked you about?

Is there anything that you would like to add?

Appendix 3

Information letter teachers

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet 'Fagskriving i programfagene i engelsk Vg2, Vg3.'

Bakgrunn og formål

Jeg heter Melisa McIntosh, og er masterstudent ved Universitetet i Stavanger. Jeg ønsker å gjennomføre en undersøkelse av programfagene i engelsk i videregående opplæring. Formålet er å undersøke hvordan lærere og elever forholder seg til fagskriving i programfagene i engelsk. Et utvalg lærere i Internasjonal engelsk, Samfunnsfaglig engelsk og Engelsk litteratur og kultur samt deres elever inviteres til å delta i undersøkelsen.

Hva innebærer deltakelsen i studien?

Deltakelsen innebærer et intervju som tar ca. en time. I tillegg ønsker jeg å gjennomføre et gruppeintervju av ca. 5-6 elever fra klassen din. Du vil inngå i en gruppe med 4 andre videregående skoler i distriktet. Spørsmålene omhandler innholdet i faget, arbeidsmåter og undervisningspraksis. Det vil bli tatt notater og lydopptak av intervjuet.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Intervjuene vil bli tatt opp på en lydfil. Det er bare meg og min veileder som vil få tilgang på opplysningene om deg og ditt bidrag. Prosjektet er anonymt og ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes i publikasjoner. Prosjektet skal etter planene avsluttes innen mai 2016, og alt datamateriale vil da bli slettet.

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helt trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli slettet. Jeg håper at du har en mulighet og ønske om å være med på dette prosjektet. Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med Melisa McIntosh.

På forhånd takk for samarbeidet.

Med vennlig hilsen,

Melisa McIntosh, Masterstudent ved UIS

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta i et intervju

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Appendix 4

Information letter students

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet 'Fagskriving i programfagene i engelsk Vg2, Vg3.'

Bakgrunn og formål

Jeg heter Melisa McIntosh, og er masterstudent ved Universitetet i Stavanger. Jeg ønsker å gjennomføre en undersøkelse av programfagene i engelsk i videregående opplæring. Formålet er å undersøke hvordan lærere og elever forholder seg til fagskriving i programfagene i engelsk. Et utvalg elever i Internasjonal engelsk, Samfunnsfaglig engelsk og Engelsk litteratur og kultur samt deres lærere inviteres til å delta i undersøkelsen. Når du får dette brevet, er det fordi jeg har forespurt skolen, som har sagt ja til å være med i undersøkelsen.

Hva innebærer deltakelsen i studien?

Deltakelsen innebærer at du inngår i en gruppe med ca. 5 andre elever fra programfaget ditt i engelsk og svarer på og drøfter spørsmål som jeg stiller. Spørsmålene omhandler innholdet i faget, arbeidsmåter og undervisningspraksis. Gruppeintervjuet varer ca. en time. Det er viktig for undersøkelsen at jeg får med bredden i elevenes erfaringer. Jeg innhenter ingen andre opplysninger om deg enn de du selv gir under intervjuet.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Intervjuene vil bli tatt opp på lydfil. Det er bare meg og min veileder som vil få tilgang på opplysningene om deg og ditt bidrag. Prosjektet er anonymt og ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes i publikasjoner. Prosjektet skal etter planene avsluttes innen mai 2016, og alt datamateriale vil da bli slettet.

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helt trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli slettet. Jeg håper at du har en mulighet og ønske om å være med på dette prosjektet. Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med Melisa McIntosh.

På forhånd takk for samarbeidet.

Med vennlig hilsen,
Melisa McIntosh, Masterstudent ved UIS

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta i et gruppeintervju

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

(Signert av foresatte, dato)