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Author: Iren Karlsson

.....*Iren Karlsson*.....  
(signatur author)

Supervisor: Kjetil Vikhamar Thengs

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## Abstract

This thesis is about the homework practices of English teachers at lower secondary schools in Norway. The aim of the thesis was to learn about what attitudes, practices and considerations English teachers have when assigning homework, and to connect this to existing international and national research on the field. A qualitative method using semi-structured interviews was used to gather the data. Six different teachers from different schools across the western part of Norway were interviewed individually.

The review of established research on homework and the data collected for the current study have found that research demonstrates that the effects of homework are variable and inconclusive. The uncertainty reflected by the research on the field is also shown by the participating teachers in the current study. This thesis has found that the participating teachers make numerous considerations when it comes to homework decisions. There is agreement on many topics between the participants, at the same time, there is also disagreement and various practices. All the considerations made are possible to link to research findings. The teachers mention considerations and practices that are discussed in studies and research; however, none of the participants refer to any of these studies. This indicates that there are common understandings of homework principles and practices; however, the teachers seem unaware of the connection to research.

This thesis contributes with valuable research and adds further inquiry into a field where studies are inconclusive, and the debate is still going strong in research, politics and media across the globe. Furthermore, this thesis adds to a broader understanding of the homework practices of Norwegian lower secondary school teachers in the English subject. At present there is little over all research focusing on teachers of English as a foreign language. There are very few studies done in Norway within the context of homework in English. By concentrating on teachers the aim is to give insight into the important work teachers do for their pupils and to help the participating teachers and others to continue to develop their practices. Contributing to a discussion about homework and prompting teachers to have a look at their own homework practices is especially interesting and important in Norway as there are no national guidelines on homework.

## List of abbreviations

CDC	California Department of Education
EFL	English as a foreign language
K06	Kunnskapsløftet
NSD	Norwegian Centre for Research Data
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
UDIR	The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training
TIMSS	Third International Mathematics and Science Study

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The present study and its aims

This thesis is a qualitative case study of the homework practices of English teachers in Norwegian lower secondary schools. Six different teachers from different schools across the western part of Norway were interviewed individually for this study by way of semi-structured interviews. The aim of this thesis is to learn about what attitudes, practices and considerations English teachers have when assigning homework, and to connect this to existing international and national research on the field. The research questions addressed in this thesis are thus:

1. What are the homework practices of English teachers in different Norwegian lower secondary schools?
2. How are the homework practices of these English teachers connected to research on homework?

Homework is defined as “tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are intended to be carried out during non-school hours” (Cooper, 2015: 4). Since the 1980s arguments for and against homework have continued to surface and it is a large debate world-wide. Arguments against homework are becoming more popular. At the same time, several studies have provided growing evidence of the positive effects of homework (Marzano and Pickering, 2007: 74). Research conducted on homework usually investigates if doing homework improves achievement and if there is a relationship between time spent doing homework and learning outcomes (Cooper, 2015: 18-23). Other aspects commonly covered by literature and research is if homework affects pupils’ attitudes and behaviours (2015: 35), if homework should be individualised (2015: 48), effects of teacher feedback (2015: 51), and home and community influences on homework, especially parental involvement (2015: 59-67).

Some of the perceived purposes and advantages of homework presented in literature and research are that homework can increase academic learning and assist in the development of generic skills, such as using different resources, develop good study habits and taking responsibility for one’s own learning. Homework can also be beneficial to promote collaboration and dialogue between home and school, and to encourage parents and children

to work together (Hallam, 2006: 1). Other suggested positive effects of homework are that it can promote better critical thinking, improve pupils' attitudes toward school and promote greater self-discipline and self-direction (Cooper, 2015: 10). On the other hand, scholars who oppose homework argue that it can increase negative attitudes toward school, reduce pupils' participation in leisure activities and everyday life, reduce motivation to learn, and cause anxiety and exhaust pupils (Hallam, 2006; Kohn, 2006). Research has found that the number of hours spent on homework can also be positively related to stress, depression, anxiety and mood disturbances (Kouzma and Kennedy, 2002: 196).

In Norway, according to *The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training* (henceforth UDIR), it is up to the respective schools whether to assign homework or not. There is no law or policy regulating homework practices in Norwegian schools. The national curriculum does not have any specific guidelines or requirements with regards to homework. However, according to Education Act §2-3 the pupils are supposed to actively engage in their own learning, and homework can therefore have an important role here. UDIR also states that homework can be positive for cooperation between school and home by giving parents an opportunity to engage in their child's education (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2014b).

## 1.2 Relevance and contribution

This thesis will attempt to contribute to a broader understanding of the homework practices of Norwegian lower secondary school teachers in the English subject. At present there is little over all research focusing on teachers of English as a foreign language, henceforth EFL. The majority of research on homework is done in the United States and the focus has largely been on the effects of homework, especially in subjects such as maths and physics. There are very few studies done in Norway within the context of homework in English. By concentrating on teachers the aim is to give insight into the important work teachers do for their pupils and to help the participating teachers and others to continue to develop their practices. Contributing to a discussion about homework and prompting teachers to have a look at their own homework practices is especially interesting and important in Norway as there are no national guidelines on homework. Studies on homework are diverse and inconclusive, and homework is still a major topic of debate in research, politics, and media across the globe. This paper will contribute with valuable research and add further inquiry into the field.

### 1.3 Outline of the thesis

Chapter 2 presents literature and research on homework and is divided into five main sections: definition of homework, international research on homework in general, research on homework for EFL pupils, research on homework in Norway and homework policies in Norway. The method used in acquiring the data will be presented in chapter 3. This chapter describes the data collection process, data analysis, reliability and validity, and ethical considerations of this study. Chapter 4 contains the collected data. The data is presented as a summary of each interview. A discussion of the findings is presented in chapter 5. Finally, a brief conclusion will be presented in chapter 6, including limitations and suggestions for further research.

## 2. Theoretical framework

This chapter presents theory and previous research done on homework, both world-wide and in Norway. A definition of homework will be presented first in section 2.1. Section 2.2 focuses on international research done on homework. This section is further divided into research on homework and achievement, research on non-instructional purposes of homework, and research on homework in relation to stress and motivation. In section 2.3, research on homework for EFL pupils is presented. Research on homework in Norway is then introduced in section 2.4. The last section 2.5 is about homework policies in Norway.

### 2.1 Definition of Homework

One of the most prominent researchers on homework, Dr. Cooper of Duke University, NC, defines homework as “tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are intended to be carried out during non-school hours” (Cooper, 1989: 7; Cooper 2015: 4). This definition is widely used across research on homework, e.g. Marzano and Pickering (2007), and Lacina-Gifford and Gifford (2004).

Homework assignments may be divided into instructional and non-instructional purposes. Cooper (2015: 6-7) identifies four instructional goals that are most commonly associated with homework. The most common purpose is to practice or review material to enforce the learning already presented in class. The second purpose is to prepare for future classes, while the third common goal for homework involves transferring learned skills to new situations. Finally, homework can serve the aim of skill integration. This involves applying separately learned skills and concepts to produce a new, single product, such as book reports or science projects. Typical non-instructional purposes of homework are to establish communication between school and home, and parent and child. Homework is also suggested to be a means to enhance critical-thinking, improve pupils’ attitudes towards school and their study habits, self-discipline and better time organisation (2015: 10). However, homework assignments rarely reflect a single purpose and often serve several different purposes at the same time (Cooper *et al.*, 2006: 2).

### 2.2 International research on homework

The majority of the research done on homework is conducted in the United States. Studies conducted on homework have typically investigated if doing homework improves achievement and especially if there is a relationship between time spent doing homework and



achievement (Cooper, 2015: 18-23). Other aspects commonly covered by literature and research are if homework affects pupils' attitudes and behaviours (2015: 35), and home and community influences on homework, especially parental involvement (2015: 59-67).

Research also focuses on motivation and the amount of stress, anxiety and worry pupils experience in connection with homework.

### 2.2.1 Research on homework and achievement

Several synthesis studies have been conducted on homework and achievement. Two of the most comprehensive ones have been conducted by Cooper *et al.* (Cooper, 1989; Cooper *et al.*, 2006). Cooper's meta-analysis from 1989 looked at research from the 1930s to the late 1980s, while their study from 2006 reviews research from 1987 to 2003.

In the 1989 synthesis, cited in Cooper *et al.* (2006: 47), Cooper conducted a review of nearly 120 studies of the effects of homework. The review included three types of studies. The first compared the achievement of pupils that were given homework with pupils who were given no homework. Out of 20 studies, 14 showed better results with homework and 6 of them showed no better or worse results with homework. The studies also reflected that upper secondary pupils who did homework outperformed 69% of the pupils with no homework assignments, as measured by grades or standardized tests. In lower secondary school the effect was half of what it was with upper secondary pupils. No association between homework and achievement were found in elementary school. The second type of studies reviewed compared homework with in-class supervised study. In-class supervised study proved superior. Thirdly, Cooper also reviewed 50 studies that examined the relationship between time spent doing homework and achievement. 43 studies indicated that pupils who spent more time doing homework showed a higher degree of achievement. 7 of the studies indicated a negative correlation between time and homework. A majority of the different studies showed a positive correlation between homework and grades.

In Cooper, Robinson and Patall's 2006 review they focused on studies that examined homework as opposed to no homework, and studies that researched time spent on homework in relation to achievement. Cooper *et al.* found that within the 32 documents of research there were 69 correlations between homework and achievement. 50 of these showed a positive correlation and 19 showed a negative correlation. Cooper acknowledges that each study has its flaws; however, the studies tend not to share the same flaws. He also points out that a variety of pupils provided data and the effects of homework were tested in multiple subject areas. Overall, the studies controlled for many plausible hypotheses. The majority of the

studies found a positive relationship between homework and achievement, and Cooper, therefore, concludes that doing homework causes improved academic achievement. At the same time, he asserts that this claim should not inhibit future research to establish a firmer relationship (Cooper, et al., 2006: 48).

However, the syntheses of Cooper and his colleagues have not gone uncriticised. Trautwein and Köller (2003: 119) argue that most of the studies reviewed by Cooper in his 1989 synthesis involved methodological shortcomings. Their argument is that the internal validity of many studies was limited because randomization procedures were not used, and a large number of the studies had very small sample sizes, making the statistical validity rather weak. They also claim there are shortcomings in the statistical handling of the data. Because of these methodological weaknesses, final conclusions should not be drawn. Trautwein and Köller state that many of the studies conducted after Cooper's review still suffer from the above-mentioned methodological limitations. Another shortcoming in large-scale studies is the unclear direction of causal effects. In his 1989 synthesis, Cooper looked at the results of 11 time-on-homework studies and controlled for additional variables such as IQ, motivation and socioeconomic status. Taken together, the studies showed a positive relationship between homework and achievement after controlling for possible confounding variables (2003: 120). Later studies by Keith *et al.*, cited in Trautwein and Köller (2003: 121), qualified Cooper's work somewhat. They found a positive correlation between achievement and time spent on homework. However, no meaningful effect was found between time spent on homework and achievement after controlling for motivation, ability, quality of instruction, course work quantity and some background variables. Trautwein and Köller (2003: 131-132) argue that using multilevel analysis gives more statistically credible results. They found that studies who did not use multilevel analysis or focused only on student-level effects found no positive correlation between time spent on homework and achievement. They further claim that future homework studies should employ multilevel analysis and be more closely connected to psychological theories of learning to be more valid (2003: 115).

Following the 2003 study, Trautwein conducted a research in 2007 examining three studies on homework and achievement. The three studies tested the popular claim that time spent on homework is positively related to achievement. The first study examined the relationship between homework and achievement using data reported by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000 test with additional data from the large German extension to the test. The second study looked at data from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) from 1996 to contrast time on homework with

homework frequency in a longitudinal design. Third, the relationship between pupils' effort on homework and their achievement were analysed in more detail using a longitudinal data set tailored to homework research. All data sets focused on mathematics for lower secondary pupils (Trautwein, 2007: 374). Time on homework was compared and contrasted with other indicators of homework assignments such as frequency, pupils' behaviour and effort. The results indicate that homework is positively associated with achievement; however, the "time on homework" measure is not good enough to capture this. Extensive research that controls for important confounding variables is necessary to understand the association between homework and achievement. Trautwein (2007: 385) argues that the negative association between time spent on homework and achievement is possibly because it takes weaker pupils longer to complete their homework. Spending a large amount of time on homework can also signify a rather inefficient and unmotivated homework style which results in low achievement gains.

Just like Trautwein and Köller, Buell, author of several books against homework, criticises homework research in general for not considering the implications learning theories have in the debate. He also points out that most research fails to measure the long-term effects of homework. Buell disagrees with the practice of measuring achievement based on grades or scores on standardised tests taken shortly after a homework regime has been instituted. Better grades or test scores are not good enough indicators of pupils' ability to retain and use knowledge later (Buell, 2003: 9-12).

Another critique of Cooper and homework research comes from the lecturer and author Alfie Kohn. Kohn agrees with Buell and criticises the way most homework research measures achievement, because most of the research focuses on scores on tests designed by teachers, grades given by teachers or scores on standardised exams. Grades and test scores do not necessarily translate into learning. He points out that grades are not reliable sources because they are highly subjective. An assignment might get two different grades by two different teachers. The studies that involve tests are not reliable either because the tests are aligned to the homework that the pupils did, and the consequence is therefore only to measure if the pupils could remember the facts they reviewed. Of course, these pupils would do better on such a test than pupils who did no homework for the same test (Kohn, 2006: 31-33). Kohn (2006: 34) also claims that standardised tests do not measure achievement, it only measures how skilful the pupils are at taking standardised tests, and how much time has been spent to prepare them for this. In addition to being sceptical to the research, Kohn is sceptical to Cooper himself, and especially the fact that Cooper has found no significant achievement

gains by doing homework for elementary pupils, yet he still widely recommends younger pupils to do homework (2006: 81).

In addition to research that proves there is no significant link between homework and achievement, there are also plenty of newer studies that present a more positive view of homework. Hong *et al.* (2004) point out how homework can be positively linked to achievement in their research. In their paper, they bring up how pupils, teachers, and parents are all important in determining the degree to which homework is effective. Teachers assign homework, parents provide the environment in which the homework is done, and the pupils do the homework (Hong *et al.*, 2004: 197). Hong *et al.* underline how much environment and letting the pupils do the homework in their preferred ways can be crucial to pupils having positive experiences related to homework. They refer to research which shows that the greater the gap is between the pupils' preferred conditions and the actual conditions, the lower the achievement is. Matching the pupils' learning preferences with environmental support increases achievement and positive attitudes toward homework (2004: 199). Hong and Tomoff, cited in Hong *et al.* (2004), conducted an intervention programme study in 2000 where pupils were analysed to determine their learning preferences. Parents were then encouraged to accommodate those preferences and pupils were encouraged to use their preferences when doing homework. This group of pupils was compared to a control group. Self-assessment was used to review the results. The pupils in the intervention programme saw themselves as doing their homework better than the other group. This group also had more positive attitudes toward homework. Hong *et al.* also refer to another study by Dunn *et al.* from 1990 where pupils' learning styles were assessed and explained to them. The pupils were advised to do homework according to their strengths, preferred time of day and preferred environment. Another class by the same instructor served as a control group. Scores from three examinations indicated that the group of pupils who were aware of their strong preferences and learning style whilst doing homework outperformed the control group. Hong *et al.* conclude that homework can be a powerful tool that contributes to the advancement of children's education; however, it depends on the quality of decisions as to how homework is implemented (2004: 201-203).

Other researchers, on both sides of the debate, also offer practical tips and encouragement when it comes to homework. Throughout his book *The Battle Over Homework*, Cooper (2015: 44-51) offers his own thoughts and advice based on his interpretations of different studies and what he calls "common sense". He recommends homework that includes practice of past lessons and preparation for future lessons, and

homework that mix brief and challenging problems or questions. He also advises teachers to provide pupils with choice as this can improve their interest, motivation and achievement. Individualising and giving pupils homework based on their learning-style can also help improve pupils' achievement, attitudes and conduct. There are mixed results of studies about feedback on homework; nevertheless, Cooper concludes that some feedback on homework is important. Even Kohn (2006: 166, 178), who is sceptical to the effects of homework and offers a considerable critique of Cooper, believes banning homework all together is too difficult and extreme. He recommends teachers to only assign homework when they are sure it will be beneficial, leading to fewer and better-quality assignments. He also strongly urges to let the pupils have a say in homework decisions.

Marzano and Pickering (2007) look at the case for and against homework and discuss the different sides of the debate, as well as offer a set of research-based guidelines about homework. They advise teachers to assign purposeful and challenging homework that pupils are able to do independently, but not fluently, and assign homework that provides opportunities for them to explore topics of their own interest. They also recommend thinking about the way parents are included, they should not be required to act as teachers or to police homework completion, but rather as sounding boards to help pupils summarise what they have learnt from the homework. Finally, they recommend educators to combine research-based generalisations, research from similar areas and their own personal judgment based on experience to develop good practices (Marzano and Pickering, 2007: 78-79).

Another stance in the debate is about offering solutions that include no homework, rather other types of activities. In their book *The Case Against Homework: How Homework is Hurting Our Children and What Parents Can Do About it*, Bennett and Kalish (2006: 89-91) point out that whilst many studies show no or little positive effects of homework on children's overall achievement until upper secondary school, there are plenty of studies showing that physical activity has a positive impact on children's lives. A review of 850 studies by the California Department of Education (CDE) in 2005 shows that physical activity positively impacts grades, scores on standardised tests, memory and classroom behaviour. Bennett and Kalish also refer to another study in 2002 of 353,000 fifth-graders, 322,000 seventh graders and 279,000 ninth graders, conducted by the CDC, discovered that pupils who scored higher on a state-mandated fitness test also had high scores on the SAT-9 standardised test in reading and mathematics.

### 2.2.2 Research on non-instructional purposes of homework

In addition to the claim that homework enhances achievement, some researchers also state that homework has several additional purposes and benefits. According to Hallam (2006: 1), some of these perceived purposes and advantages are that homework can foster initiative and independence, develop skills in using libraries and other sources, promote training in planning and organising time, develop good study habits, self-discipline, and responsibility for learning. Homework can also promote a better relationship between the school and home by encouraging parents and children to work together. Cooper (2015: 10) also lists these benefits in his book and adds that homework can foster positive attitudes towards school and learning. He also refers to five studies that present correlations between the amount of time spent doing homework and pupils' attitudes. More time spent on homework was associated with better attitudes. Two of the studies; however, produced inconsistent results and the evidence is limited and needs to be researched further (2015: 35).

Both Cooper and Hallam recognise that there are also perceived disadvantages of homework. Some of these disadvantages are that homework can reduce the time for leisure and community activities, cause arguments and friction within the family, and cause anxiety, stress, boredom and negative attitudes towards school and learning (Cooper, 2015; Hallam, 2006). Cooper points out that some of the disadvantages attributed to homework contradict the suggested positive effects and that both the negative and positive effects of homework can occur together. For example, homework can improve study habits whilst it limits access to other activities (2015: 11-12). He also brings up the point that homework can be used to foster parent and school collaboration in a positive way to accelerate children's learning, at the same time, parent involvement can also interfere with learning and cause anger and frustration. Cooper, Lindsay, and Nye, cited in Cooper (2015: 58-60), conducted a survey in 2000 where they collected responses from more than 700 parents. Their results show that negative forms of parent involvement do occur at least some of the time in most families; nevertheless, the majority of the experiences between children and parents with regard to homework are positive. Kohn questions the value of homework as a way of creating collaboration and communication between the school and the home. He wonders why this has to be done through homework instead of having teachers sending occasional descriptive memos to the parents, call them, invite them to the classroom or have the pupils talk about what they have done at school. Kohn (2006: 50-53) believes doing this would be more effective at keeping the parents involved without placing a burden on the pupils and their families. Kohn also

criticises the character-building properties of homework, because there is little or no research that supports the claims that homework helps pupils to take responsibility, build study skills, develop self-discipline or learn time management skills. Except for his survey about parental involvement, there is no research on non-instructional purposes of homework mentioned in Cooper's book *The Battle Over Homework* (2015) and research on the field is clearly needed, as is underlined by Kohn.

### 2.2.3 Research on homework, stress and motivation

Kouzma and Kennedy conducted a study in 2000 to investigate the relationship between hours of homework, stress and mood disturbances in upper secondary school pupils. 141 boys and 228 girls from 7 upper secondary schools across Victoria, Australia, participated in the study. They found that both girls and boys spent between 10 to 65 hours on homework per week and this number was positively related to scores for stress, depression, tension-anxiety, fatigue, confusion, anger and mood disturbances (Kouzma and Kennedy, 2002: 193-196). Kouzma and Kennedy (2002: 197) argue that there is a possibility that the pupils have overrated the number of hours they spent doing homework, possibly due to procrastination or dramatization. Further research should check whether the results are robust. Nevertheless, the results of the study suggest that the way pupils perform or perceive homework is directly or indirectly negatively associated with their psychological well-being. A 2000 report by the American Psychological Association, cited in Bennet and Kalish (2006: 32) also argues that pupils experience higher amounts of anxiety and stress than previously. The report shows that pupils report more anxiety than did child psychiatric patients in the 1950s. Bennet and Kalish (2006: 32) also refer to another study from 2006 that surveyed 1300 pupils at a public upper secondary school in Massachusetts found that more than 42 percent of the pupils reported homework as a cause of "a lot of stress" and nearly 16 percent of the pupils claimed that it caused "extreme stress." Furthermore, Bennett and Kalish (2006: 60) argue that parents, as well as pupils, experience homework as a major source of stress. A survey by Public Agenda, a non-profit, nonpartisan research group, found that over half of the 1,200 parents who participated said they have had a serious argument with their children over homework, and 43 percent of the parents felt that homework had become a source of struggle and stress for themselves and their children.

Research suggests that many pupils feel stressed and anxious because of homework, and it is also pointed out by Hong *et al.* (2015: 492-493) that motivation and value placed on homework may also relate to anxiety and level of achievement. Evidence indicates that when

pupils are motivated, positive outcomes such as persistence, high performance, and positive emotion are likely to follow. Highly anxious pupils tend to freeze cognitively and are not able to regulate their attention and emotions effectively during the homework process. There has been little research on to what extent homework anxiety influences the completion of homework and achievement. Further investigation is needed; however, based on test anxiety literature it is postulated that if pupils worry about homework whilst doing homework, they may not process information efficiently and this can result in poor homework performance. In other words, feeling stressed and anxious whilst doing homework can worsen homework performance, which may lead to even more stress, anxiety, and negative attitudes towards homework.

Kohn also argues that homework causes stress and affects motivation in his book *The Homework Myth: Why Our Kids Get Too Much of a Bad thing* (2006). He makes the argument that homework is not motivating because the pupils often do not have a lot of autonomy when it comes to homework. The benefits of experiencing autonomy range from better physical health to better emotional adjustment and greater academic self-confidence (Kohn, 2006: 57). Sparking and sustaining pupils' intrinsic motivation is one of the main challenges for teachers, and giving them homework they are forced to do and that often feels like drudgery will harm the pupils' motivation and the quality of learning. Kohn (2006: 116) states that so many pupils do not feel autonomous when it comes to homework, and rather feel that they have to finish it as quickly as possible, or experience homework as a significant source of stress, help to explain why there is so little evidence of academic advantages of homework.

Trautwein *et al.* (2009: 176) researched whether teachers' homework objectives, implementation practices and attitudes toward parental involvement are associated with the development of pupils' homework effort, homework emotions, and achievement. 63 teachers of French as a 2<sup>nd</sup> language, with a mean teaching experience of 17,5 years, and their 1,299 Grade 8 pupils participated in the study in the school year of 2003 to 2004. The study indicates that what teachers think and do about homework is associated with their pupils' effort, emotion, and achievement connected to homework. The results showed that assigning a large amount of drill and practice assignments were associated with negative developments in homework effort and achievement. Teachers who were occupied with their pupils' motivation resulted in positive developments in homework effort and achievement over the course of Grade 8. In their study, Trautwein *et al.* (2009: 184) also point out that several researchers have emphasised that homework assignments should promote self-regulation and



motivation to be effective, and their present research supports this view. When looking at the link between the home and school, the research revealed that pupils whose teachers did not see the enrichment of the collaboration between school and home as a major reason for assigning homework showed more favourable developments in homework achievement and effort. At the same time, pupils whose teachers wanted them to do their homework on their own, without relying on parental help, showed comparatively positive development of homework effort and emotions, whereas there was an unfavourable development of achievement in classes where the teacher wished for parental homework control. Trautwein *et al.* (2009: 184-185) point out that their findings disagree with research on and educators' calls for increased parental involvement in homework. At the same time, their findings match self-determination theory and other theories that emphasise the need for autonomy and self-regulation for pupils. Studies have shown parental help to be beneficial; however, it is also likely to have negative consequences. The researchers of this study argue that a possible explanation for their findings might be that research on parental involvement has focused on elementary school pupils and it is possible that help from parents may be more beneficial for younger pupils than the eighth graders who participated in their study.

Another result from this study shows that a controlling homework style impacts homework effort negatively and increases negative homework emotions, while an emphasis on pupil responsibility positively affects homework effort. These findings are again compatible with self-determination theory and run counter to research that states that collecting and grading homework would be associated with positive outcomes. Possible explanations to these findings could be that if the teacher is overcontrolling and always grades homework, pupils may feel tempted to copy from high-achieving classmates to avoid negative consequences. Homework control is not bad per se; however, the quality is crucial. Informational and positive feedback, for example, may have favourable effects on pupils' morale and achievement. Trautwein *et al.* conclude their study by arguing that it is important to systematically include critical discussions of homework in teacher training curricula, which is not yet standard practice (2009: 185-186).

### 2.3 Research on homework for English as a foreign language pupils

As already pointed out, the majority of the research done on homework is conducted in the United States and studies tend to focus on homework in general or in mathematics and science. There is very little research done on homework for EFL pupils. However, one

interesting study was done by Mohammad Amiryousefi on EFL teachers and learners in Iran in 2016. He investigated EFL teachers and learners' perspectives on English homework by first interviewing 8 EFL teachers and 19 EFL learners to construct a questionnaire that was answered by 283 learners and 46 teachers from two different institutions in Iran (Amiryousefi, 2016: 35). The results of Amiryousefi's research showed that the majority of teachers and pupils have a positive view of homework and they believe homework is a good way to practice, learn and review what they have gone through in class. They also expressed that homework is good for improving English reading, writing, and vocabulary. However, the current homework practices, consisting of mechanical workbook exercises were not effective, and both teachers and pupils expressed a wish to change this. English assignments should be more communicative, engaging and based on the pupils' needs and interests. Amiryousefi concludes his study by claiming that homework can be beneficial, and both teachers and pupils agree with this; however, the homework needs to be varied, suitable, communicative and interesting to have positive effects (2016: 42-48).

Another study has been conducted by North and Pillay (2002: 137-138) in Malaysia. They argue that the workload generated by homework can be so time-consuming that teachers rarely stop and reflect on what they are doing and why. Homework makes up a large part of language teachers' workload, yet it is not often discussed and rarely featured in books about language teaching. Despite this, homework is given, and it clearly gets done and most teachers have well-established homework routines. North and Pillay set out to investigate whether schools have a coordinated homework policy as part of the overall curriculum and how teachers make decisions to ensure that homework is effective in contributing to course objectives. Their study involved distributing questionnaires to 85 secondary school English teachers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Their results show that the majority of the teachers (73%) give homework two or three times a week for each class. They expect their pupils to spend 1 to 2 hours (34% of teachers) or 2 to 3 hours (32% of teachers) a week on homework. North and Pillay comment that these figures seem surprisingly high since the pupils have at least 7 other core subjects. The most frequent materials used were the teachers' own worksheets, textbooks and commercial workbooks (2002: 138-139). The majority of the teachers said that the biggest reasons for assigning homework are related to its role in encouraging and facilitating learning. Homework is seen as important to provide practice for the pupils and diagnostic information for teachers. The teachers also stated that they give homework to finish work started in class, to individualise learning, to apply recent learning in creative ways, to motivate pupils to pay

attention in class, to provide preparations for future lessons, and to provide information to parents on their children's progress. The teachers were also asked about how they give feedback to their pupils. The results suggest a preference for traditional approaches. This includes the teacher indicating mistakes and giving corrections, giving overall comments to the class, written comments, grades, oral comments or providing extra practice in class. Learner-centred approaches employing self or peer assessment were rarely used. Writing is prioritised as homework, while other skills are largely neglected as homework activities. North and Pillay argue that a possible explanation for this could be that writing provides visible evidence that the homework is completed and makes it easier to check on the pupils' progress and give feedback (2002: 140-142).

When analysing the syllabus, North and Pillay (2002: 141) found that a communicative approach was highly advocated. Their study suggests that the teachers' practices, on the other hand, appear to follow a traditional approach in the types of homework they assign and the feedback they give. This includes giving traditional activities such as grammar exercises, guided writing and reading comprehension questions. In the earlier questions concerning the aims of homework, the teachers showed concern for pedagogical issues such as individualisation, creativity, motivation and diagnostic feedback; however, when they were asked to evaluate the overall effectiveness of homework, these issues were rarely mentioned. The majority of the teachers seemed occupied with the problem of pupils who did not do their homework or did not do it properly. 40% of the teachers said they were satisfied with their pupils' performance in their homework and 60% said they were not satisfied. If this is a widespread problem, the teacher's work may be to little purpose. The teachers were also asked if they were generally satisfied with the way they dealt with homework, 68,3% said yes and 30,7% said no. In their conclusion, North and Pillay point out that "to make matters worse, while a teacher can turn to the textbook for help in planning lessons, few textbooks include material explicitly designed for homework or provide guidance on how to adapt activities as homework tasks" (2002: 143-144). With little or no guidance to be found in textbooks and few discussions going on about homework, North and Pillay claim there is a need to re-examine homework routines. This is also becoming more important as the internet increases English language resources into the community and changes the relationship between school and home. They also advise teachers to look closer at how homework can be co-ordinated with the curriculum, how to best exploit available resources, how to design both motivational and useful homework tasks and to think about effective ways of providing feedback (2002: 145).

## 2.4 Research on homework in Norway

Research in Norway that includes Norwegian pupils is very limited. Rønning conducted a study in 2010 with data on Norwegian 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders from the TIMSS 2007 report. Rønning investigated whether time spent on homework in mathematics varied across pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds and the effect of homework on pupil achievement (Rønning, 2010). The number of books at home was used to measure the socio-economic background, meaning that no or few books at home equals a lower socio-economic background. The results show that pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to spend no time on homework than pupils from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Rønning (2010: 23) also found that when pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds spend time on homework, they spend more time on it than pupils from higher socio-economic backgrounds. She offers some possible explanations for the results. One reason why pupils from lower-socio economic backgrounds are more likely to spend no time on homework could be due to lack of interest or necessary skills, or because of poor learning environments with parents who cannot help or make sure they complete their homework. Possible explanations as to why these pupils spend more time on homework when they do it could be because they need more time if they find the homework difficult. More time spent on homework may also reflect problems with motivation, frustration or concentration, nevertheless, it could also reflect high educational ambitions, regardless of background.

The results of Rønning's analysis of homework's effect on achievement indicate a positive effect of homework in mathematics on average. However, pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds actually perform better if less homework is assigned. One explanation for this may be that homework leads to declining motivation and indirectly affects the achievement negatively. It is well documented through literature and research that pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds learn more while in school than at home, compared to pupils from higher socio-economic backgrounds (2010: 23). Rønning concludes that there seems to be a positive correlation between homework and achievement; however, these findings merit further research, due to unobserved variables.

Rønning's findings when analysing the Norwegian pupils in the TIMSS report align with the results of her and Falch's findings from their 2012 study of 16 OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries in the same 2007 TIMSS report. This research also indicates that there is a small positive effect of homework overall. However, the effect varies between countries. 12 of the 16 countries analysed show positive effects of

homework. Nevertheless, the effects vary greatly. For example, pupils from The Netherlands and Hungary perform relatively well on test scores, but pupils in Hungary get the most homework and pupils in The Netherlands get the least homework (Rønning and Falch, 2012: 10). Norwegian pupils have the lowest test scores in both mathematics and science and they often receive homework. Falch and Rønning (2012: 23) confirms Rønning's previous findings, that homework has a positive effect for children from higher socio-economic backgrounds, at the same time, it has little effect for pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Falch and Rønning (2012: 25-27) offer a possible reason for the difference between countries. They argue that it could be because the organisation of school is different, and homework is most likely assigned differently. For example, there might be differences in the way homework is used as a supplement to teaching in school or to compensate for lost time in school. They find that the effects of homework is higher in countries where the pupils and teachers spend more time in school, which is consistent with the hypothesis that homework is more beneficial when used as a complement to the learning that takes place in the classroom. Falch and Rønning claim that the above-mentioned differences can lead to the different results in their study.

Grønmo and Onstad have also analysed the findings of the 2007 TIMSS report on Norwegian pupils, presented in their research report *Tegn til bedring* (2009). In their chapters about homework they present the findings based on the teachers answers about homework and conclude that Norwegian teachers are below the international average when it comes to checking if the homework is done and giving feedback to the pupils, letting the pupils check their own homework in class, using the homework for discussions in class and letting homework count towards their grade. This is true for both mathematics and science. Norwegian teachers are especially far below the international average when it comes to checking if the homework is done and giving feedback on homework. The authors admit that they do not know why this is the case; however, they argue that since the TIMSS report in 2003 the number of Norwegian teachers who check their pupils' homework has gone up from 21% to 44% in 2007. They claim that this might be because there is a larger focus on research that speaks up about the importance and value of systematically following up the pupils' homework (Grønmo and Onstad, 2009: 134-135, 201).

The research on homework in Norway is limited, but the debate is going strong and there are plenty of newspaper articles written about the subject by politicians, educators, parents, and teachers. Some newspapers also conduct their own research to contribute to the debate. The Norwegian news agency TV2 organised a national survey in 2018 where they

asked all elementary and lower secondary schools to answer a survey about homework practices. 1512, or about 54%, of the headmasters asked to participate answered. The results showed that 5% of the schools do not give any homework, 6% of the schools only give homework for some classes and 30% of the schools are considering to stop the practice of giving homework altogether. Thus, the results are inconclusive, and the feedback is varied. The survey also shows that 20% of the headmasters believe that the pupils and the school acquire better results with no homework, 46% say the results are the same with or without homework, 1% claim the school's results are worse with no homework and 33% answer "they do not know". In addition to presenting the results of their survey the journalists for TV2 talked to two schools with different experiences. Smiodden skole in Stavanger stopped giving homework in 2014. The headmaster says that the results on tests and evaluations are not the highest in town; however, the pupils are motivated, enjoy school and the attendance is high. Kjøkkelvik skole in Bergen tried being homework free, but it only lasted for six months before the headmaster felt that she needed to introduce homework again. The reasons, she claims, are because the parents felt they lost control and the teachers saw that the pupils did not progress as expected (Figved *et al.*, 2018).

The little research there is in Norway on homework focuses mainly on mathematics and science or homework in general. There is; however, a recent master's thesis concentrating on homework in English. Volley conducted a small study in 2017 where she interviewed four teachers from a lower secondary school in Northern Norway. She set out to examine teachers' considerations when assigning homework in English to figure out if they were based on tradition or research.

When analysing and discussing the interviews she conducted she found that there are especially two arguments where the participants agreed; homework must be understood by the pupils, and the participating teachers do not base their practices on research. There seems to be a common agreement on the amount of homework, although the teachers do not assign homework based on any given guidelines. Homework tasks, adapted teaching and methods for processing homework in class differ between the teachers. The interviews show that the teachers make numerous considerations when assigning homework. They consider their pupils' understanding of the task, their ability to complete it and their opportunity to receive guidance at home. They also think about how homework affects the planned lesson and what their pupils are supposed to achieve. Some of the teachers claim that many of their practices are based on habits, at the same time, they continuously reflect on the purpose of the homework assignments and make considerations with their pupils' needs in mind. There is

little collaboration when it comes to homework at the school where the participants work and most of their decisions are made individually.

However, the teachers are positive to more cooperation and development of their practices. When asked about their pupils finishing their homework and how they review homework in class they all agreed that this is a challenge. There are always many pupils who come to class unprepared. When asked about parental involvement the teachers' experiences varied. The teachers claimed the parents to be involved to a highly varied degree, and the effects of parental involvement are both positive and negative (Volley, 2017: 39-41). Volley (2017: 51) concludes her thesis by claiming that too much of the teachers' practices are based on tradition rather than being grounded in research. She argues that the school system, with regards to homework practices, needs to be challenged and as a result become more research-based. She wants the Ministry of Education and Research to grant teachers access to research databases so that they have the opportunity to expand their understanding and knowledge of homework and keep developing their practices.

## 2.5 Homework policies in Norway

Homework is not mentioned in The Norwegian Core curriculum, which explains the overall aims of education across subjects. Homework is not cited in the specific curriculums for the different subjects either. It is not declared by law that pupils in Norway are required to do homework. It is up to each school to decide whether to give their pupils homework or not. However, it is required that the school organise the education so that their pupils can reach the competence aims set in the curriculum "Kunnskapsløftet" (K06). It is demanded by law, §2-3 in the Education Act, that pupils are required to actively engage in their own education. UDIR points out that homework can be tied to this paragraph and can, therefore, have an important function in the pupils' education. They also claim that homework can be important in the collaboration between school and home, as homework gives parents the opportunity to engage with their children's education (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2014b). Even though homework is not required by law in Norway, the Education Act §13-7a, requires all counties to offer homework guidance for pupils. This offer entails that pupils can meet with educators, counsellors or similar outside of school hours to work with homework. It must be free and voluntary for the pupils to seek help (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2014a).

Homework is mentioned in a document about motivation at lower secondary school in Norway called Meld. St. 22 from 2010-2011 given by the Ministry of Education and Research to "Stortinget", the supreme legislature of Norway. The Ministry of Education and Research

confirms that giving homework is a voluntary choice of each school; however, they assert that a good use of homework will probably enhance achievement and help neutralise social differences. It is important that both teachers and pupils are aware of the goals of the given homework and that homework is viewed as something positive that the pupils are motivated to do, and that they learn from doing it. The homework is required to be varied and help the pupils feel challenged, at the same time, they also need to be able to master it. The Ministry of Education and Research also stress the importance of teacher feedback on the homework. They advise homework not to take longer than two hours a day (Meld. St. 22 – Motivasjon – Mestring – Muligheter, 2011: 58).



### 3. Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used in this study to answer the research questions:

1. What are the homework practices of English teachers in different Norwegian lower secondary schools?
2. How are the homework practices of these English teachers connected to research on homework?

Qualitative research has been chosen as the most fitting method to answer these questions. The theoretical orientation of qualitative research will, therefore, be presented first in section 3.1. Section 3.2 presents the data collection and gives a description of how interview served as the main research instrument to collect data in the present study. A discussion about the interview guide and the sampling process is also presented in section 3.2. The process of data analysis is outlined in section 3.3. Section 3.4 contains the validity and reliability of the research. Finally, ethical considerations are addressed in section 3.5.

#### 3.1 Method

Since the aim of this thesis is to explore the personal opinions and practices of English teachers, a qualitative case study consisting of interviews has been chosen as the preferred method, rather than a quantitative method. A quantitative method usually consists of a large quantity of numerical data and focuses on variables which are primarily analysed by statistical methods (Dörnyei, 2007: 24, 33). Qualitative research is much more concerned with individual cases rather than variables, and studies subjective opinions, feelings, and experiences of individuals. This type of research is useful when researching highly complex situations (2007: 38-39). The aim of a qualitative study is not to generate as much data as possible, and a solid qualitative study usually requires a relatively small number of participants to yield rich data and produce valuable results about the phenomenon that is being researched (2007: 125-127). Qualitative research is also very labour-intensive and typically use, of necessity, much smaller samples of participants than quantitative studies (2007: 38). The data collection procedures usually result in open-ended and non-numerical data, which is analysed primarily by non-statistical methods (2007: 24). The data is fundamentally interpretive, and the results are ultimately the product of the researcher's

subjective interpretation of the data. This means that the researcher is the main “measurement device” in such studies (2007: 38).

Several methods can be employed in a qualitative study, including tools such as questionnaires and observation. Interview was chosen as the preferred tool to gather data for this study. Conducting interviews was deemed to produce rich and reliable data. Having the researcher present made sure the interviewees’ answers were not changed or rehearsed, as could possibly have been the case with a questionnaire. Using a questionnaire in addition to interviews could have yielded a larger set of data; however, this was considered to be too time consuming for the present study. As it was necessary to talk to the participants to establish what their homework practices are, interview was considered better and more appropriate than observation or questionnaire as a single method of data collection.

Interview is the most common research method in qualitative studies. There are different types of interviews with various degrees of structure. When discussing the degree of structure of an interview it is common to distinguish between what is categorised as structured, semi-structured or open interviews. Structured interviews follow an elaborate guide and are usually tightly controlled with little room for variation and spontaneity. An open or unstructured interview, on the other hand, does not usually follow a set guide and allows for maximum flexibility. By using a structured interview, rather than an open interview, it is easier to make sure that the interviewee focuses on the topic raised and that the interview covers a defined domain, which makes the answers comparable across the different participants (Dörnyei, 2007: 134-135). In the middle between a structured and an open interview is the semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview consists of an interview guide to steer the interview and the collection of data, but there is also room for follow-up questions and elaboration on issues raised (2007: 136).

Before conducting interviews and research it can be useful to test and evaluate the research instruments. When it comes to piloting the research instruments, Dörnyei (2007: 75) argues that this is more important in quantitative studies than in qualitative ones, because quantitative studies rely on the measurement properties of the research instruments in a different way than what qualitative research does. Qualitative piloting also differs from piloting in quantitative studies because the obtained data after the ‘trial runs’ does not have to be discarded but can be used for the final analysis.

## 3.2 Data Collection

### 3.2.1 Research instruments

Since the participants for this study were asked about their personal opinions and practices, a semi-structured interview was chosen as the best option to collect data. The interviews for this study were conducted as a one-to-one conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee in person, not online or through a telephone call. The interviewer's presence allows for a more natural and flexible approach, probing into any emerging topics. An interview guide, to help maintain systematic coverage of the subject, was used when conducting the interviews. The interviewer and the interview guide, therefore, served as the main research instruments for the current study (see Appendix 1 for interview guide).

When designing the interview guide, well-established research was used as inspiration, especially research focusing on teachers (Amiryousefi, 2016; North and Pillay, 2002). This was deemed to enhance the quality of the interview guide, and also to ease the comparison between the participants' answers and research on homework. The interview guide was initially designed with 11 questions. Possible follow-up questions and prompts were added to make sure the questions were open enough to make the participants reflect when answering, in addition to help the flow of the interview and make sure that the interview questions properly covered what was viewed as useful and valuable information to include in the research. Since piloting a qualitative study allows for the obtained data after the 'trial run' to be used for the final analysis (Dörnyei, 2007: 75), the researcher made a point of asking the first interviewee if the questions were okay, clear and understandable. The feedback and success of the first interview lead to a decision of not making any changes to the interview guide. The interview guide was also presented for feedback and approval from scholars in the English Department at the University of Stavanger before any interviews were conducted.

The participants were given the option to conduct the interview in Norwegian or English. The aim was to make them as comfortable as possible. There is, therefore, an English and a Norwegian translation of the interview guide available. Five of the teachers felt most comfortable answering the questions in Norwegian, whilst one of the teachers conducted the interview in English. The interview guide was initially designed with two parts, depending on if the teachers assign homework or if they never give homework or express their opinions against it. Before each of the interviews started the teachers were asked if they give homework or not to establish what type of questions they would be asked to answer and

discuss. All of the teachers expressed that they give homework, and therefore, the interview guide designed for teachers who do not assign homework was not used in this study

Since the interviews were semi-structured, what types of follow-up questions and what direction the conversation led to varied slightly between the different participants; however, all of them were asked to answer all the main questions on the interview guide. All of the interviews were conducted in a private room with only the interviewer and interviewee present. No external disturbances occurred during any of the interviews. The interviews were tape recorded and this was made clear and approved by the participants beforehand. At the end of each interview, the interviewees were asked if they had any questions or wished for anything to be clarified or added.

### 3.2.2 Sampling

The time limitations and the scope of this study, with the knowledge that qualitative data is very labour-intensive and does not require a large number of participants to yield rich and adequate data, led to a decision that using six participants was considered appropriate. Since the aim of this study is to research what the homework practices are for Norwegian lower secondary teachers in English, homogenous sampling was used. With a homogenous sampling, participants are selected from a particular group of people who share some important experience relevant to the study. This allows to identify common patterns in a group with similar characteristics (Dörnyei, 2007: 127).

The researcher asked acquaintances if they knew of any teachers teaching English at lower secondary school and reached out to random teachers based on the contact information received. This procedure was more personal than contacting the headmasters at different schools and, therefore, deemed to increase the likelihood of getting participants for the study. The teachers' age and years of experience and information about the schools they worked at were not known beforehand. However, the participants were chosen from different schools in different areas in the western part of Norway to get as wide a representation as possible. After the interviews were conducted it turned out that the age of the teachers ranged from mid-twenties to the late-fifties with teaching experience from a few years up to about twenty-five years. Three female and three male teachers participated in the study. Four of the teachers mainly teach at 9<sup>th</sup> grade, one of the teachers is primarily teaching at 8<sup>th</sup> grade and one of the teachers at 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative research involves data collection procedures that usually result in open-ended and non-numerical data which is analysed and interpreted by the researcher. This means that the researcher is the main “measurement device” in the study (Dörnyei, 2007: 24, 38). To ensure that the results in the current study do not only consist of the researcher’s subjective interpretations, the results are discussed and compared with already established research on the field.

To analyse the data in the current study, the interviews were summarised. With more than three hours of audio recordings it was not possible to transcribe all the interviews within the time frame of this thesis. However, the audio recorded interviews were reviewed several times when writing summaries. The audio recordings provided the possibility to play and pause so that the summaries could be written as accurately as possible. To further ease the comparison, emergent topics across the interviews were then coded and added to categories, such as *homework assignments, consideration and practices, benefits of homework, homework policy, differentiation, feedback* and so on. As a result of the data analysis process, the interviews are presented in the form of summaries and arranged thematically according to categories. This way of presenting the results aims to make the chapter well-structured and easy to follow (see Appendix 2 for summaries of the interviews). In addition to the summaries, the audio recordings were used to listen for interesting quotes. These have also been included in the results chapter (See Appendix 3 for quotes).

### 3.4 Reliability and Validity

Establishing quality in research is according to Dörnyei (2007: 54) less straightforward in qualitative research than in quantitative research. One reason for this lies in the fact that the terms reliability and validity have traditionally been associated with quantitative methods and principles. Reliability refers to the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings. The consistency and trustworthiness of the findings are often thought of in relation to whether the findings are reproducible in other settings. In qualitative research based on interviews this applies to whether the interviewee will change their answers during an interview and whether they will produce different responses to different interviewers (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 245). Validity applies to whether a method investigates what it sets out to investigate and it is often tied to measurement. With this definition, qualitative research can be seen as invalid if it does not result in measurements. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 246-249) argue for a broader

interpretation where validity is applied to the research process as a whole, not only tied to the data collected.

Common quality concerns when it comes to qualitative methods are about the researcher, as the researcher is usually the main or one of the main research- and measurement instruments in qualitative research (Dörnyei, 2007: 38). One concern is about the findings being genuinely based on a critical investigation of all the collected data and not only on a few well-chosen examples. This also concerns the fact that many researchers rarely provide any justification for selecting the specific samples and explaining how their field notes and collected data lead to the final conclusions (2007: 56).

#### 3.4.1 Quality, reliability, and validity in the current study

In this study, the researcher made a point of not knowing much about the teachers or the schools before conducting the interviews to avoid bias. As already pointed out, factors such as age, gender, years of experience and school policies were not known or considered before interviewing the teachers. By emphasising this process of choosing “random” participants it is shown that no teachers or schools were targeted because of specific homework practices or similar features that could result in biased and unreliable results.

If it is required of a study to be able to produce the same results if the study was replicated for it to be considered reliable, this is not easy to achieve in qualitative research where conclusions are shaped by the participant’s personal accounts and the researcher’s subjective interpretation of them (Dörnyei, 2007: 57). It is; however, possible to conduct reliability checks to increase the reliability of the study. In the present study, this was done by designing the interview questions based on well-established research on homework. By doing this the data collected would be easier to compare across the different interviews and to the established research, which enhances the trustworthiness and quality of the study. The results and possible conclusions drawn from the study will also be part of a larger research context which helps to avoid the research consisting of biased and subjective conclusions made by the researcher alone.

To enhance the validity of this research and to make sure the findings are as truthfully and correctly represented as possible, the participants were not given the interview questions beforehand. A common critique of research interviews is that their results are not valid because the participant’s answers may be false (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 249). By not giving the respondents the opportunity to see the interview questions and prepare their

answers beforehand, it was deemed to increase the chances for them to answer truthfully and instinctually instead of having prepared the 'right' answers that might not have been truthful. The researcher also made a point of continuously clarifying and repeating the answers and parts of the conversation to make sure that everything was clear and not misinterpreted, and therefore enhancing the validity of the interviews. Moreover, the interviewees were given the choice to conduct the interview in English or Norwegian. This choice was presented with the aim of making the participants as comfortable as possible, to avoid misunderstanding and allowing the interviewees to express themselves as freely and accurately as possible. As a further aim to make sure the collected data adequately reflects the phenomena being investigated, a summary of the interview was sent to each of the participants so that they could confirm that the summary correctly reflected their responses. All of the participating interviewees approved the summary. The approved summaries were used as a basis for chapter 4 of this thesis (see Appendix 2 for summaries of the interviews).

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Since qualitative research and interviews are concerned with close contact with people, some ethical considerations had to be made. Educational research usually imposes either minimal or no risk to the participants (Dörnyei, 2007: 64-65). Anonymity, voluntariness, and privacy are; however, very important. It is a basic ethical principle that the respondent's right to privacy should always be respected. Participants have the rights to refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time without offering any explanation. It is also a basic right to remain anonymous (2007: 68).

To ensure that anonymity, voluntariness, and privacy are respected in the current research, the results from the interviews are presented with complete anonymity and the participants signed a written informed-consent sheet before the interviews took place. This sheet includes information about the purpose and procedure of the study, that participation is voluntary, confidentiality, the participant's rights and the right to withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendix 4 for consent form). The interviews were tape recorded and this was made clear to the participants and accepted beforehand. The participants were informed that the researcher was the only one with access to the collected data and that all collected data would be destroyed after the study is ended. To further preserve anonymity and privacy the interviews were conducted with only the researcher and participant alone in a private room and all the participants are referred to by pseudonyms in the thesis. Furthermore, to make sure

this project followed legal requirements and recommendations the project was notified to and approved by the NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data (see Appendix 5 for NSD approval).

Another ethical issue besides voluntariness and confidentiality is about considering how the participants can benefit from the study. According to Dörnyei (2007: 67), it is important to remember that by spending time and energy helping with the research the participants are doing the researcher a favour and it is the researcher's responsibility to try and make the cost-benefit balance as fair as possible. This research aims to make the participants benefit from it, by giving them the opportunity to get access to the results when the study is finished. By concentrating on teachers this research will give insight into the important work teachers do for their pupils and help the participating teachers and others to keep developing their practices. Contributing to a discussion about homework and prompting teachers to have a look at their own homework practices are especially interesting and important in Norway as there are no national guidelines on homework (see also p. 19).



## 4. Results

The present chapter shows the findings of the research. It is divided into six sections; each section presents the findings from one of the six interviews. Summaries of the interviews have been structured under headings based on the main topics discussed. This has been done to make the chapter better structured and easier to follow. The heading *homework assignments, considerations and practices* covers questions 1 to 3 in the interview guide. The next heading, *benefits of homework*, covers question 4. The third heading, *Homework policy, pupil involvement, differentiation and feedback*, deals with questions 5 to 8. The heading *English input outside of school* covers question 9, whilst *Stress and motivation* covers question 10, and *Qualification* question 11 (see Appendix 1 for interview guide with numbered questions). All of the participants are anonymised, and the names of the teachers are thus pseudonyms; the first letter in the pseudonym corresponds to the letter of the respective interview. As previously stated in section 3.3, because of time limitations the recordings of the interviews were summarised, rather than transcribed. The way the interviews are presented in this chapter is very similar to the summaries written based on the recordings, and later approved by the teachers. However, the summaries are added to the appendices to increase transparency (see Appendix 2 for the summaries). Quotes written from the audio recordings of the interviews have also been included in this chapter (see Appendix 3 for quotes).

### 4.1 Interview A

Andrew is in his mid-twenties and he has a few years of teaching experience. He mainly teaches at 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

#### *Homework assignments, considerations, and practices*

When asked about how often Andrew gives homework and what his main reasons for assigning homework are, he explained that he gives homework on a regular basis, usually weekly. He said that he was much more engaged in the debate surrounding homework before he started teaching, and he was initially against assigning homework. However, when he became a teacher, he soon realised that homework can be valuable and a good way for many pupils to learn. Andrew stated that he believes the old definition of homework is changing, homework is no longer as separate from school as it used to be. He often gives his pupils the opportunity to do their homework whilst at school, or at least start at school and finish them at

home. He explained that he usually gives his pupils the chance to do their homework in class as a reward for working hard and finishing what they are supposed to do during the lesson. After talking about letting his pupils do their homework at school instead of home, Andrew pointed out that one reason for giving homework is so that his pupils can work through the material they have covered in class in a different setting than the classroom. He asserted that he thinks this is especially important for the pupils who concentrate and work better when they are at home.

When continuing his reflections around his decision about letting his pupils do homework at school, Andrew clarified that some of the pupils do not have parents or adults who are able to help them at home. These are often the pupils who struggle the most to get started with their homework, and also to get their homework done. Andrew argued that these pupils benefit from the help and guidance that is available if he sometimes lets them do their homework whilst in class. On the other hand, he pointed out that if the pupils have resourceful parents who want to be engaged in their children's learning, homework is a good way to meet this objective. He expressed that many parents of his pupils want their children to be assigned homework as a way for them to be informed about what their children do at school and to be able to actively participate in their education.

Upon the question if Andrew has any other reasons for assigning homework, he explained that he views homework as an extension and repetition of what the pupils have covered in class and it can, therefore, hopefully help the pupils to better retain knowledge. Andrew said that he sometimes gives homework as preparation for the next class to challenge his pupils in a different way; however, homework often consists of repetition.

This answer led to the question of what type of homework he usually assigns. To this, Andrew stated that he is particularly concerned with reading as a key to improve every aspect of language training. He also said that in addition to focusing on reading he loves to give creative and fun homework. He gave the example of an assignment where he asked his pupils to write down their answers on a napkin. Andrew pointed out that his pupils really enjoy these types of exercises and they remember them better because they are unusual and stand out from their regular homework assignments. When asked if he gives other types of homework, Andrew explained that he also gives writing and listening exercises as homework. He very seldom gives grammar tasks as homework, though he sometimes asks his pupils to correct their own grammar mistakes for texts they have previously written, handed in and gotten feedback on, as homework. Andrew further explained that he likes to encourage his pupils to find their own "homework". If someone comes to class and tells him about an interesting film

they saw, an article they read etc., he is incredibly happy. He thinks this is positive, even if they did not do their assigned homework.

### *Benefits of homework*

When asked about whether he believes homework is beneficial, Andrew said he believes that the pupils who benefit most from doing homework are also the pupils who benefit most from school, and they would probably benefit without homework too. He also presented the assumption that homework can be negative for the pupils who struggle because it could add to stress or prompt negative feelings if they are unable to do it. Andrew said he thinks the question of whether homework is beneficial or not is a tough one: “That is a really hard question to answer, I am unsure of how beneficial it is, because it probably varies so much from pupil to pupil” (my translation). Andrew continued his argument by stating that he believes that all or most of his pupils learn something from doing their assigned homework. Later when Andrew was asked if he wanted to add anything, he mentioned that an experienced colleague of his, who gives a substantial amount of homework and always checks if it is done, has a really advanced class in his Norwegian subject. Andrew does not believe homework is the sole reason for this, but he thinks it could be a contributing factor.

Andrew was further asked about if he believes homework has other benefits beyond learning outcome and achievement. To this, he answered that he does not think homework contributes a lot to learning study techniques and critical thinking because his pupils are not mature or skilled enough yet to manage this on their own. Andrew stated that skills like these need to be learned and practiced at school first and foremost. However, he also pointed out that pupils who are advanced learners might learn these skills from homework, nevertheless, most of his pupils need help to learn and practice them at school.

### *Homework policy, pupil involvement, differentiation, and feedback*

Andrew was asked whether his school or himself abides by any homework policies. He answered that the teachers usually contribute to a weekly homework plan that is accessible to pupils and parents. Besides this plan there is no formal policy at his workplace. It is up to each teacher individually to make decisions about homework, and Andrew argued that he loves having so much freedom of choice. He continued to answer the question by pointing out that the collaboration between his colleagues is extremely good and they often work in pairs and groups. However, he said that they rarely discuss homework together. Nevertheless, they all agree on not overburden their pupils with the homework assignments.

On the topic of involving the pupils when assigning homework, Andrew got really excited and said that he does involve his pupils. He explained that he often discusses homework together with his pupils in class and is occupied with knowing if they find the homework to be understandable and manageable. Andrew; however, pointed out that during many of these conversations the pupils express that they do not wish to have any homework at all. Nevertheless, when they give him constructive criticism and share their thoughts, he takes them into account. Andrew thinks these conversations are particularly valuable. He also argued that he tries to accommodate to his pupils' individual needs as much as possible. This involves differentiating the homework so that it is more challenging for advanced learners and providing more support for weaker learners. Andrew said, "I probably only differentiate for about 5% of my pupils" (my translation). He admitted that this is not enough, and he expressed a wish to be better at structuring his differentiation and also provide it for more of his pupils. He said he works on improving this.

In addition to admitting he is not doing as much differentiation as he should be doing, Andrew also admitted that he is not good at giving feedback on his pupils' homework. Providing pupils with feedback can be extremely time consuming. According to him, homework is part of his pupils' "job", and they are expected to do it even if he is not able to provide feedback. Nevertheless, he said he realises that when he usually does not check his pupils' homework this has an effect on their motivation, and some of them will not do their homework if they know it will not be checked. Andrew said he often uses the homework as a basis for discussions and exercises in class; however, he explained that everyone is able to participate even if they have not done their assigned homework. He pointed out that the pupils who have done their homework will experience the class to be better and more valuable. Andrew sometimes also checks if the homework is finished and explains to his pupils what his expectations are. When he goes through the assigned homework with his class, he makes a point of trying to get his pupils to realise that they fall behind when they do not do their homework.

### *English input outside of school*

Upon the question of his thoughts around his pupils' English exposure outside of school and how this relates to and affects homework, Andrew stated that he definitely sees that English input outside of school has a positive effect on his pupils. He pointed out that their English oral skills are quite advanced, and this is especially the case for the pupils who play a lot of video and computer games. Andrew explained that his pupils are weaker when it comes to

English writing skills, and this is probably connected to the fact that they are not as exposed to writing or reading as they are to listening and speaking English outside of school. He said he, therefore, makes a point of focusing on both reading and writing through homework. Andrew claimed that the pupils who enjoy reading and who read a lot for fun perform better at school, especially when it comes to writing, grammar, and vocabulary. Andrew expressed a wish for more of his pupils to read more but he also said he acknowledges the value of gaming and different English exposure outside of school. He clarified that he encourages his pupils to play different types of games in English, as well as reading.

### *Stress and motivation*

Andrew was asked about his impression of his pupils with regards to homework, stress, and motivation. According to Andrew some of his pupils seem stressed; however, he thinks it is impossible to say if homework is a large contributor to this. He argued that his pupils are stressed in what he termed a “normal” way, and he does not believe any of them struggle because of their homework. He explained that he notices that they are more stressed when it comes to tests and evaluations. Andrew said he found this question hard to answer, but he reflected around the thought of removing homework and concluded that this could possibly help reduce some stress for some of the pupils, on the other hand, he believes that the pupils who really benefit from homework could feel more stressed without it. As pupils are so different it can be hard to sometimes find a good balance, nevertheless, he always takes his pupils’ concerns seriously.

Andrew pointed out that even if his pupils from time to time express a wish of not having any homework at all, the majority of them do their homework and seem quite motivated most of the time. He explained that there is an environment in his class where both he and his pupils acknowledge that doing homework is positive. He explained: “it is “cool” to do the homework assignments and it is, therefore, “uncool” not to do the homework” (my translation). Andrew explained that viewing homework as “cool” has a waterfall effect on the class as a whole and consequently most of the pupils always do their homework.

### *Qualification*

Upon the question if Andrew feels qualified to assign homework, he answered: “No, I do not feel qualified at all” (my translation). He argued that he does know what works best for his pupils based on his intuition and his experience as both a pupil himself and as a teacher. There was; however, no formal or informal instructions as part of his teacher training or as part of

the environment at his workplace. Andrew pointed out that since the teachers at his school bases their homework assignments on individual decisions and practices, and since the teachers practice quite different learning styles with different focuses on how they structure homework, it does not seem natural to discuss homework to a large extent. Even though he enjoys this freedom, Andrew also acknowledged that more discussions around homework could be valuable.

#### 4.2 Interview B

Brenda is in her late thirties and she has more than ten years of teaching experience. She mainly teaches at 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

##### *Homework assignments, considerations, and practices*

During the interview, Brenda argued that she gives homework to her pupils because she believes it is important for her pupils to get the opportunity to work through, process and repeat what they have worked with in class. She also pointed out that some of her pupils express that they like to do work at home because they struggle to concentrate whilst at school. Brenda said an important reason for assigning homework is to check if her pupils learn what they are expected to, and also who pays attention and follow the instructions. If they are unable to manage this, they need to be accompanied to and homework is a good indicator to see who these pupils are, and consequently help them and offer assistance. She pointed out that another reason to give homework is because it can be useful to prompt discussions and collaboration with parents. She explained that none of her pupils' parents have expressed any dissatisfaction with their children's homework. However, Brenda was absolutely clear on the fact that she designs her homework assignments so that parental assistance should not be necessary. Brenda claimed: "My pupils are old enough to take responsibility for their own homework" (my translation). This lies behind her reasoning for not actively including parents.

Brenda clarified that she gives homework on a weekly basis, but she often skips homework if her pupils have tests, evaluations or larger assignments. When asked about what type of homework she usually assigns to her pupils she underlined that the homework is repetition of what goes on at school. The homework is often designed so that the pupils practice reading and understanding of what they have read. Brenda explained that a typical homework assignment would, therefore, be to read through a text, practice a bit of glossary

and answer a few questions. Brenda said she tries to utilise the technology available to her and sometimes, for example, have her pupils record their answer instead of writing it down. They also often practice glossary training through a website called Quizlet where they can play games, look at flashcards or answer quizzes.

### *Benefits of homework*

When asked if she believes homework is beneficial, Brenda underlined that she gives homework to her pupils so that they can practice their reading and writing skills, understanding and vocabulary. She believes homework can be beneficial to foster these skills. She also clarified that by having her pupils from time to time hand in recordings they practice their oral language skills in combination with learning content. She repeated her earlier statement that homework is about working through and repeating to extend and increase the learning that the pupils are exposed to in class. Brenda said she believes that homework is good practice for making the pupils responsible for their own learning and managing their own time. She explained that she thinks her pupils are old enough to take these responsibilities themselves and she also pointed out that the homework is designed so that they are able to do it on their own. When reflecting around other benefits of homework, Brenda expressed that “homework can be good practice to prepare for the future, you know, for later studies and similar. I also think homework to some extent can help pupils develop good study techniques” (my translation). However, she made it clear that she continuously reminds her pupils of these benefits of homework and she tries to help them see that homework is part of a bigger picture. Brenda also added that she often reminds her pupils that if they pay attention in class the homework will not be too much of a challenge, nevertheless, if they find the homework to be too difficult or too much, they should let her know. If they express any concerns these are taken into account.

### *Homework policy, pupil involvement, differentiation, and feedback*

Upon the question if she or her school has a homework policy, Brenda answered that there is a good environment for collaboration between the teachers at her school. She pointed out that homework is usually not the main focus of this collaboration; however, “the teachers have agreed upon a homework policy that they believe benefits our pupils” (my translation). She explained that the schools’ homework policy consists of an agreement that the pupils should not be assigned more than a maximum of 15 minutes of homework in each subject a week. The teachers have also agreed upon reducing or skipping homework if the pupils have large

assignments, tests and evaluations, to ease the workload for their pupils. Brenda further pointed out that another policy they abide by at her school is to assign responsibility for homework to one of the English teachers for a given period. After the period is finished another teacher takes on the responsibility. This means that one teacher is responsible for homework for a set time period and the other teachers adapt the homework to their class. Brenda clarified that homework is part of a weekly plan with information about what goes on in class and other relevant information. This plan is accessible to the pupils and their parents.

According to Brenda, she does not give her pupils much autonomy when it comes to their English homework. She said that “no, I must admit they are not very included when it comes to homework decisions” (my translation). Further, she explained that they are not part of making the decisions when it comes to what type of homework and when to get the assigned homework. However, she pointed out that some of the homework assignments are designed to give them choices. Brenda presented the example of vocabulary homework. She said that when she asks them to practice vocabulary, she often gives them the opportunity to choose the words themselves from the text they are working on. Brenda clarified that she does remind them of not choosing the easiest options as they will not learn much from doing so. She pointed out that with larger assignments the pupils are also given choices within the assignment. In addition, she differentiates homework for many of her pupils. Brenda explained that this means that her pupils get different homework based on their needs. She gave the example of having her pupils read the same text but being asked to answer follow-up questions that vary significantly between finding and stating facts at lower levels and to show reflection at higher levels.

After presenting her view on pupil autonomy and differentiation, Brenda was asked if she checks if her pupils do their assigned homework and if she gives them feedback. To this, she answered that she “*always* checks the homework” (my translation). She usually has her pupils write or record their answers to the homework because this makes it easier for her to check if the homework is done and if the pupils have learned what she expected them to. Brenda explained that she sometimes gives them feedback, either written or orally. She underlined that it is important for her to check her pupils’ homework because she gains valuable insight into their learning.

### *English input outside of school*

When asked about her impressions of English input outside of school in relation to homework, Brenda expressed that she believes strongly in the benefits of being exposed to



English in another setting than at school. She explained that she thinks extramural English helps her pupils in many ways. For example, she pointed out that her pupils who play a lot of video- and computer-games have a larger vocabulary than those who do not. At the same time, Brenda added that the type of English her pupils interact with when not at school causes them to use much more slang and abbreviations when they write. Therefore, she stated that “homework is important to help the pupils practice their writing skills, use appropriate structure, work on themes for the exams and so on” (my translation). According to Brenda, her pupils also need reading practice as part of their school instructions and homework because they are more exposed to listening and talking outside of school than reading and writing.

### *Stress and motivation*

Brenda was asked what her impression is of her pupils with regards to homework, stress, and motivation. She answered that the majority of her pupils seem motivated to do their homework and they know they are always expected to do it because she is consistent in checking and giving feedback on their assignments. Brenda also explained that her pupils know that there are consequences for not doing their homework. She said she tries to make them aware that they lose out on what they could have learned from the homework and sometimes she writes their names down, and they know that if this happens too many times there are consequences. Brenda also answered that if any of her pupils do not hand in their homework, she usually follows up these pupils. As an example, she said that she gets them to talk to her about the homework when she sees them in the hallway at school if they have not handed in their recorded file or similar types of homework.

When asked about if her pupils seem stressed with regards to homework, Brenda answered that her pupils will sometimes express that they feel stressed or overwhelmed by the total amount of homework; however, not about the English homework per se. She pointed out that her pupils often do not really seem stressed by homework. She clarified that they are more stressed by tests, evaluations or life in general. To this she explained that she believes that social media adds a lot of stress to her pupil’s lives. According to Brenda: “I have always assigned homework, and I assign less homework now than before, but the amount of stress has definitely increased” (my translation). Brenda has assigned homework for the 10+ years she has worked as a teacher and the amount of homework has decreased significantly, at the same time, the amount of stress has increased. Therefore, she said she does not believe homework to be a big contributor to the stress her pupils express.

### *Qualification*

To the question of whether Brenda feels qualified to assign homework or not, she answered that she does feel truly qualified. She pointed out, again, that she and her colleagues discuss homework and have created routines and policies they believe in. Brenda explained that the well-established routines they have at her school is important in making her feeling qualified to assign homework to her pupils. However, she did also acknowledge that she was not prepared to give pupils homework through her education, nevertheless, she has gained a lot of knowledge from experience and discussions with colleagues.

### 4.3 Interview C

Charlotte is in her late twenties and she has more than four years of teaching experience. She mainly teaches at 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

### *Homework assignments, considerations, and practices*

According to Charlotte her main reason for assigning homework is to give her pupils the opportunity to work more on what has been covered in class with the hope of enhancing their achievement in the English subject. She explained that by giving homework, her pupils continue to practice English outside of the classroom. Charlotte said that another reason to give homework is to let the pupils work through the material in another environment than in the classroom, which hopefully let them work at their own pace and possibly enhances their concentration. Charlotte underlined that even if her pupils are meant to work at home, she believes parents should not need to be involved. She clarified that she thinks her pupils are old enough to do their homework on their own, and if they need parental guidance the homework is too hard.

Since the main reason for giving homework is to extend the amount of work and time the pupils spend on English, Charlotte explained that most of the homework she assigns is repetition of what has been covered in class. She pointed out that she often checks for understanding and, therefore, assigns homework that involves reading, watching a short film or similar, and writing a short paragraph or answering questions. When further asked about what type of homework she usually gives, Charlotte answered that she tries to give varied assignments to help maintain the pupils' motivation. According to Charlotte, "I do not give my pupils homework just to keep them busy, there is no point in that. There has to be a red thread between the homework assignment and what goes on in class" (my translation).

Charlotte said she gives homework weekly but emphasised that she does not give too much homework to avoid overwhelming the pupils. She said that the goal is for the homework to never take more than a maximum of 30 minutes a week. In addition to giving homework that usually involves reading and writing, she explained that she sometimes assigns homework that involves vocabulary training and learning new words. She said she feels a need to focus on this from time to time since there is a surprisingly large amount of words her pupils should know by now that they do not.

### *Benefits of homework*

Charlotte was further asked if she believes homework is beneficial. She started by clarifying that she is a bit unsure where she stands when it comes to the debate surrounding homework, but she is probably somewhere in the middle. She explained that she follows the debate and continuously reflects around her own practices. After reflecting a bit around her own standpoint, she claimed that “I am a bit unsure about how beneficial homework is, to be honest, because it is probably very individual for each pupil” (my translation). She pointed out that she sees that homework can be beneficial; however, she is not convinced that it is a crucial part of learning English. Charlotte explained this further by saying she thinks her pupils would still perform well without homework, nevertheless, she gives homework as a supplement to their in-school learning to enhance their English input.

Upon the question if homework can have any other benefits beyond enhancing achievement, Charlotte answered that she hopes homework can help her pupils to think more critically and take responsibility for their own learning, but this needs to be emphasised at school to have an effect. She clarified that she does not believe that the pupils can learn these skills through homework alone. Charlotte also asserted that even if she is a bit unsure of the benefits of homework, she views homework as highly beneficial if it can help boost the pupils’ confidence and mastery of the English subject.

### *Homework policy, pupil involvement, differentiation, and feedback*

According to Charlotte the policy at the school she works at involves a weekly homework plan where every teacher is expected to contribute. She explained that this means there is usually always homework; however, the amount and type of homework varies. Charlotte also added that the teachers are occupied with not giving too much homework during the weeks where the pupils have other large assignments or tests. Practicing for the test, working on the assignment or similar would often be considered to be the homework. Charlotte pointed out

that even though the collaboration is good between her colleagues, there is rarely any discussion or collaboration when it comes to homework. Homework decisions are made individually by each teacher. Charlotte reflected a bit around this and admitted she finds it strange that homework is not debated more.

When asked if she discusses and involves the pupils in homework decisions, Charlotte answered that her pupils are not really involved in decisions regarding homework, they are; however, involved in decisions made during the class. She explained: “there is simply not enough time to always check for the pupils’ opinions” (my translation). Charlotte claimed that if they express any concerns they are listened to and she pointed out that she always works hard to do what she believes is the best for her pupils. According to her, doing what is best for her pupils also involves either giving homework that is manageable to be done by all or differentiating by dividing it into three levels: low, middle and high. When the homework is divided into the different levels the pupils decide for themselves what level they feel comfortable at working with.

Upon the question of whether Charlotte checks if homework is completed and gives feedback, she answered that she usually checks their homework in class. She explained that this means she walks around whilst they work with something else or sometimes have them raise their hand to check who has finished their homework. Charlotte pointed out that from time to time she also has her pupils handing in the homework and getting feedback from her. She admitted that she does not always check or give feedback on the homework as it takes too much time. She instead tries to make her pupils responsible themselves by pointing out what they lose out on when they do not do their homework, or what they gain by doing it. Charlotte said she points out what her pupils lose or gain to make them aware of the consequences of doing or not doing their homework. She sometimes also feels the need to write their name down, as a consequence of not doing the homework. The pupils are aware that having their name put down too many times have further consequences. For example, their parents will be notified that they do not do what is expected of them.

### *English input outside of school*

Upon the topic of English input outside of school, through gaming, reading, films, music and the positive correlation this can have to the pupil’s level of English, and her thoughts on this, Charlotte said: “Yes! I definitely see the value English input outside of school has for my pupils. Especially their oral skills” (my translation). However, she pointed out that the English they are exposed to is usually not academically oriented and they need academically oriented

English at school and as homework. Charlotte claimed that the English they are exposed to during their spare time has a negative impact on their writing skills. Their written language is highly affected by their oral language, meaning that they have a lot of spelling mistakes, use many abbreviations and write quite informally.

#### *Stress and motivation*

Charlotte was asked what her impression is of her pupils when it comes to homework, stress, and motivation. To this, she answered that most of her pupils do their homework most of the time, and they are usually quite motivated. Charlotte pointed out that her pupils are especially motivated if she gives them homework that includes watching a film, series or similar. She claimed that her pupils take their homework seriously, she does not experience, for example, that they rush through their homework right before class starts. According to Charlotte her pupils do not seem stressed when it comes to homework, at the same time, she pointed out that they sometimes seem stressed in a general way, as most pupils do.

#### *Qualification*

When asked if she feels qualified or not to assign homework, Charlotte exclaimed: “yes and no” (my translation). She explained that she feels qualified enough to give homework as an extension and to repeat what has been done at school. At the same time, she mentioned a wish for more knowledge to expand the types of homework assignments she gives, and also to be able to vary the homework to a larger extent. She said that even though she already tries to give varied homework this is a challenge after a while. Charlotte also pointed out that she has never learned anywhere or come across information on what a good homework assignment is, or how to give good homework.

### 4.4 Interview D

Daniel is in his early thirties and he has almost ten years of teaching experience. He mainly teaches at 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

#### *Homework assignments, considerations, and practices*

According to Daniel his main reason for giving homework is to extend and repeat the work the pupils have done at school to help them remember what they have covered in class and hopefully to learn more. He said he also feels that there are certain expectations about giving

the pupils homework, both from the school, parents and society in general. He pointed out that this is “just a feeling I have, it is hard to explain, you know? I mean there are no rules or similar written down or expressed anywhere regarding homework, but I still feel obliged to assign homework.” He reflected around this and expressed that it might be this way because homework is such a common part of their school and it has “always” been.

According to Daniel he usually assigns his pupils homework weekly. When asked about what type of homework he usually gives, he again underlined that he mainly focuses on repetitive homework; however, he sometimes gives homework as preparation for the next class. Daniel stated that the homework should be challenging, although not too challenging and the pupils should be able to do their homework without help from their parents. He explained that he knows that the ability and capability of parents to help with homework vary to a large extent. When he continued his explanation of what types of homework he likes to give, Daniel talked passionately about reading and the many benefits reading has. He explained that reading is great for strengthening writing skills, vocabulary and imagination. Daniel said that reading is a big part of his in-class teaching and homework. He often lets the pupils choose books in the library, or he makes different articles and short stories accessible to them online. According to Daniel, giving them the ability to choose what to read increases their motivation. He pointed out that homework often includes reading and sometimes different types of assignments go along with the reading. He gave the examples of having his pupils write a short summary, be expected to talk about it in class or record something to hand in.

Daniel continued to explain what types of homework he assigns by saying that even though his main focus is reading, and especially reading for fun, he tries to vary the homework. He sometimes gets his pupils to watch videos, listen to recordings, or find and read news. He admitted that variation can be a challenge; however, he also stated that he thinks it is really important sometimes to think through the practices you are used to and evaluate them. Daniel gave an example of a common type of homework where pupils are given reading from the textbook with reading-comprehension questions to be written down as homework. “Assigning your pupils reading-comprehension questions from the textbook is really common across subjects and levels. The pupils must be so tired of this type of homework, don’t you think?”. He said he has almost stopped giving this type of homework because he believes the pupils must be tired of it, because they have been doing it often through their whole school careers.

### *Benefits of homework*

Daniel was asked if he thinks homework is beneficial and if he thinks it is beneficial for other skills beyond learning and repeating content covered in class. To this, he answered that he hopes the positive emphasis he continuously put on reading is beneficial in the sense that it “fosters positive reading experiences and increases the pupils’ joy of reading.” Daniel explained that he is a bit unsure whether other skills such as learning to take responsibility and explore different study habits can result from homework alone. He pointed out that he tries to foster these skills at school, and he hopes his pupils are able to transfer them to new situations; however, they are not enforced as a part of how homework assignments are designed. Daniel said he believes this is highly individual, some pupils will, for example, learn to take responsibility and manage their time when they do their homework; on the other hand, other pupils will probably not learn this to any large extent from doing homework.

### *Homework policy, pupil involvement, differentiation, and feedback*

Upon the question if Daniel or his school has a homework policy, he answered that the school has a weekly homework plan with information to the pupils and their parents. This plan includes information about what is happening during the particular week, topics and goals in each subject, homework, and information about tests and assignments. Daniel pointed out that the goal of the plan is to help both pupils and parents to structure the week so that the pupils hopefully learn what they are expected to. He explained that except for this homework plan, his school does not really have a set policy in the sense that there are requirements for the amount of homework, or how much time the pupils are expected to spend on homework. He stated; however, “I think most of the teachers are particularly occupied with not overburdening their pupils with homework. Many of us ease up on the load of homework when the pupils have tests or large assignments and so on.” Daniel pointed out that in addition to easing up on the homework load, the teachers also try not to give more than two or maximum three tests or similar per week. Nevertheless, according to Daniel, these are not official policies at the school, just “general agreements”. There is good collaboration between the teachers and especially when it comes to tests and evaluations; at the same time, Daniel claimed that there are extremely few discussions about homework and most homework decisions are made individually.

After Daniel had established that homework is not a major point of discussion between the teachers at his school, he was asked whether he discusses homework with his pupils. To this he answered that he always talks to his pupils and take their considerations into account

when it comes to large parts of their school lives; however, they are usually not involved in decisions about homework assignments. Daniel explained that he often presents his pupils with a lot of choices when it comes to homework: “I often let my pupils choose themselves what to read, how much, and sometimes in what way they want to hand in their assignments, if there are any.” He pointed out that he usually requires them to read at least 10 to 15 minutes a week, but he encourages them to read more, and a lot of his pupils do. Daniel said there is not enough time or energy to involve the pupils in homework decisions, nevertheless, he tries to give them a greater deal of autonomy in class.

Daniel pointed out that “in my opinion, giving my pupils the ability to choose within many of the homework assignments is also a way to differentiate.” The choices are completely up to the pupils, but he claimed that he encourages them to choose the options they feel comfortable with and enjoy. He also challenges them and helps them make those decisions. When the focus is on reading, Daniel pointed out that he helps many of his pupils find literature suitable for their level. He also provides his pupils with several short texts that are divided into different levels. If he has pupils who struggle to read, he uses OneNote immersive reader, a programme where you can enlarge texts, have them read out loud, get grammar assistance etc. He said he loves this programme and he is all for using the technology that is available. Daniel explained that he also differentiates for individual pupils, although this varies between the different types of homework. He said it is not possible to differentiate in the sense that all pupils get individual work all of the time.

Daniel was asked if he checks and gives feedback on homework. He answered that he gives feedback in different ways depending on the homework, at the same time, he also admitted that it is a challenge to do this all the time. Daniel said, “I must admit it can be really challenging to always check if the homework is done, and especially to always give feedback, but it is so important.” Daniel argued that he usually “approves or not” the homework his pupils hand in through the online platform they use at the school. He looks quickly through what they have handed in and sometimes talks to the pupils if any concerns or similar shows up. He also often walks around in class and talks to each pupil about the homework and provides them with feedback. Daniel said that sometimes he puts his pupils in pairs or groups where they discuss their homework whilst he walks around. This way they can give feedback to each other and also receive feedback from him. Daniel again argued that he thinks some sort of feedback is important to make sure that the pupils learn and grow from the homework.



When asked about his thoughts regarding how his pupils are exposed to English input outside of school and if it is necessary to give homework, Daniel answered that his pupils are advanced orally and he believes this has a lot to do with gaming, music, films and tv-series. According to Daniel, he sees that the pupils who are gamers have especially advanced vocabulary. However, he pointed out that his pupils are struggling more when it comes to writing. The vocabulary is generally quite advanced for most of the pupils, at the same time, many of them struggle with structuring sentences properly and they use many slang-words and abbreviations. Daniel wanted to make it clear that he sees the value of all the English exposure outside of school his pupils are experiencing. He thinks it is still really important to focus on the parts of their English training that they are not as exposed to, such as reading and writing. Daniel further explained that many teachers, including himself, could probably make use of the large input of English in a more beneficial way, for example, by using gaming as homework. He claimed that this is something he wishes to explore more.

#### *Stress and motivation*

Upon the question of his impression of his pupils' motivation and stress surrounding homework, Daniel again pointed out that he has worked hard to foster a positive reading environment in his class, and many of his pupils enjoy reading and discussing what they have read. He claimed that his pupils are, therefore, usually motivated when it comes to homework that focuses on reading. They are also particularly engaged when they are assigned homework that includes videos or homework about interesting current events and news. Daniel was further asked if his pupils frequently do their homework or not, and to this, he said that there is almost always someone who does not do their homework for some reason or another. He explained that in those cases he tries to talk to them and figure out why and look into what can be done to help them.

Even though his pupils are generally highly motivated, Daniel also expressed that they seem stressed because there is a lot of pressure on them, from themselves, their parents, teachers, and society in general. He claimed that homework does not seem to be a major contributor to their stress. He added that they are of course more stressed about tests and assignments. The teachers try to help battle some of this stress by easing up on the homework assignments when there are many tests and evaluations. According to Daniel, his pupils seem to be the most stressed about what they should do for the rest of their lives in terms of education, career and money. He said "I think they are more occupied and stressed with this

than you would expect and hope a young 14-year-old person to be. This is worrying. But, to answer your question, no, they do not really seem stressed because of homework.”

### *Qualification*

Upon the question if Daniel feels qualified to assign homework or not, he stopped and took a moment before he exclaimed “yes and no”. He explained that he has researched enough about pedagogy and education to say that he does feel qualified to give homework, at the same time, he also said he has had no formal education regarding homework and he rarely discusses homework with his colleagues. Daniel mentioned that he thinks a lot of decisions that are made during a school day are made because they are common sense and “you know they work from experience.” He added that as a teacher you always try to do what is best for your pupils, even if he does not feel like he has any formal education when it comes to homework, he always has his pupils in mind. Nevertheless, Daniel claimed that it would be great with easier access to research on homework.

## 4.5 Interview E

Eric is in his early fifties and he has more than 10 years of experience as a teacher. He mainly teaches English at 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

### *Homework assignments, considerations, and practices*

According to Eric, he gives homework weekly; if his pupils have bigger assignments or evaluations, they do not get homework in addition. When asked what his main reasons are for giving homework, Eric answered that he assigns homework as a way to engage parents, because they have a big responsibility for their children’s education in Norway. Eric also pointed out that homework is a good way not only to engage parents but also to keep them informed. He wanted to clarify that he realises that the society is continuously changing and the ability for parents to help is also changing, which should possibly be looked into more. One example provided by Eric was that content is more challenging now than previously. He said, “even if some parents are unable to assist with homework, for whatever reason, this is not a good enough reason to stop giving homework” (my translation). However, he claimed that he believes homework should mostly be repetitive so that both pupils and parents are able to work on the assigned homework, although to varying degrees.

He pointed out that sometimes he also lets his pupils start doing their homework in class to clarify what they are supposed to do and, therefore, avoid misunderstandings. Eric continued to answer the question by stating that he tries not to give too much homework in order not to overburden the pupils, at the same time, he also claimed, “I honestly do not believe that most pupils or their parents spend a considerable amount of time on homework anyway” (my translation). Eric explained that he believes most of his pupils do their homework and they take it seriously, nevertheless, there is no point in giving them more than necessary. Eric also explained later, when he was asked if he wanted to add anything, that he was more pro-homework before; however, he claimed to be more moderate now. He said he believes there should not be too much homework, because it loses its value if it only adds to stress.

Upon the question of what type of homework Eric usually gives, he declared that he is a fan of giving homework that consists of reading with follow-up questions to check for understanding. He explained that most of the homework he gives is some sort of repetition of what has been covered in class. He sometimes gives grammar exercises as homework. Eric also expressed a wish to give more glossary and vocabulary training as homework, because he believes this is beneficial. He pointed out that he is especially occupied with helping his pupils learn to tie information together and use already existing knowledge and “schemes” to learn new information and skills. He said he hopes homework can help train this skill.

### *Benefits of homework*

Eric asserted that he does believe homework is beneficial with regards to learning and remembering facts, and that homework can improve achievement. However, he stated that he is unsure if there are non-instructional benefits of homework. Eric explained that he thinks it is hard to say if his pupils actually learn more at home than what they already learned at school. At the same time, he stated that the older the pupils get, the better they can learn to take responsibility and manage their time through homework to a larger extent. Eric claimed that this probably also varies greatly from pupil to pupil.

### *Homework policy, pupil involvement, differentiation, and feedback*

Upon the question of whether the school or Eric has a homework policy, he answered that the teachers at his school usually work in teams when deciding on homework. Eric explained that the main responsibility for making the homework assignment alternates between them. The teacher who is responsible for creating the homework provides it to the rest of the teachers

and then each teacher can adapt the homework assignments if needed. He pointed out that the pupils' homework is part of a two-week plan which informs both pupils and parents about what goes on at school during these two weeks. Eric explained that another policy his school has is that they do not give more than two big tests or assignments each week. The goal is not to exhaust the pupils.

Eric is further asked if he involves his pupils in homework decisions. To this, he stated firmly that “no, I do not really involve my pupils in homework decisions” (my translation). He pointed out that he does not believe they are mature enough to take these decisions seriously. However, Eric said that his pupils are sometimes given different choices within the assigned homework and they are especially given choices within larger assignments. After talking about pupil involvement, the topic of differentiation was brought up. To this, Eric explained that he differentiates the homework assignments for the pupils who have individual teaching plans; however, since most of his homework is repetition and designed to be done by the majority of his pupils, he usually gives the same homework to everyone.

When asked about if he checks and gives feedback on homework, Eric stated that this varies to a large extent. He continued by explaining that if his pupils hand in their homework through the school's online platform he provides a few sentences as feedback, or just approves it or not. Eric expressed that what he usually does is to check if the homework has been done by going through it on the board together with his pupils during the class. He also sometimes just asks who has done their homework or not. Eric claimed that doing this puts the pupils on the spot and he hopes that the pupils who have not done their homework realises how valuable it is for them to do it so that they can contribute in class, and avoid this uncomfortable “on the spot-situation”. According to Eric, it is hard to estimate how often he checks and gives feedback on his pupils' homework because it varies greatly.

### *English input outside of school*

Eric was asked what his thoughts are on English input outside of school and how this correlates to homework. To this he acknowledged that he sees his pupils getting a lot of English input from gaming, listening to music and watching films. He explained that he believes this is a major reason for many of his pupils' advanced oral skills. However, Eric pointed out that his pupils lack good writing and reading skills. He especially noted that many of his pupils struggle with learning the basics, such as the personal pronoun “I” always being written with a capital letter. Eric claimed that these skills can be improved by homework, and

homework is therefore necessary even if the pupils are exposed to a large amount of English during their spare time.

### *Stress and motivation*

According to Eric, his pupils are not stressed by homework and if they are, they do not express it. He pointed out that he thinks the fact that his pupils do not seem stressed in general has to do with the school policy of not giving them more than a maximum of two large evaluations each week. When asked about motivation, Eric said “of course I have pupils who struggle to find the motivation to do their homework, but generally, the majority of my pupils appear to be quite motivated and they usually do their assigned homework” (my translation). The number of pupils who do not do their assigned homework is so small, Eric does not really view this as a major problem; however, he underlined that he tries to figure out what he can do for these pupils to help them.

### *Qualification*

Upon the question if he feels qualified or not to assign homework, Eric answered that he feels qualified in the sense that he has gained a lot of experience as a pupil himself and also as a teacher. He pointed out that he did not acquire any formal education that taught him anything about homework when studying to be a teacher. Eric claimed that he is shaped by his workplace and what his colleagues do, he learns a lot from them, and that is extremely valuable.

## 4.6 Interview F

Fiona is in her late fifties and ~~she~~ has been teaching for about 25 years. She mainly teaches at 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

### *Homework assignments, considerations, and practices*

According to Fiona, some of the teachers at 9<sup>th</sup> grade, including herself, have agreed that they want their pupils to do more of the homework at school and less at home. This means that the pupils get a weekly work plan and if they do not finish what they are supposed to during class hours, they will get the rest as homework. Fiona claimed that this means that she still gives what she terms homework; however, she lets her pupils do much more of the homework at school than what has been common in previous years. Fiona explained: “it is more or less up

to the pupils if they want to and are able to finish it at school or do the work at home” (my translation).

When asked about her main reasons for giving homework, Fiona clearly stated that she believes homework is positive and she hopes it has positive benefits for her pupils. She pointed out that she gives homework because she thinks it is beneficial for the pupils to sit at home, silently and without disturbances, to work a bit deeper with their assigned topic. According to Fiona, there can be many disturbances at school, and she knows that this is not the best work environment for all of her pupils.

Upon the question regarding what type of homework Fiona usually assigns, she explained that she makes a point of giving varied exercises and she has her pupils working with everything from grammar, to writing, reading, and vocabulary. She also eagerly talked about arranging what she calls “small talks” every week. The content of the “small talk” can vary a bit; nevertheless, it usually involves that the pupils are asked to find an English news article or something similar that may be connected to the topic they work with during class. Fiona said the preparation for the small talk is usually given as homework; however, they sometimes work with it during class or a combination between at school and at home. She continued to explain that the pupils are expected to present their findings and their own reflections to their assigned group at the English session towards the end of the week. Fiona added that the class is divided into two groups during this English session every week, meaning that half of the class does the “small talk” with her and the other half does something different with another teacher, and then they rotate this arrangement. She explained that the decision to divide the class was made to make the pupils feel more secure and comfortable speaking English with each other. They feel more insecure when they are expected to talk in front of the whole class. Fiona said “I really enjoy giving these types of exercises as homework! The pupils get to practice looking up information, reading news, which is really important, process it and learn on their own” (my translation). She continued to explain that by giving a short summary to their fellow pupils they also gain valuable practice in speaking English and they also learn much from each other. Finally, Fiona added that she also uses the internet and technology to assign creative homework; as an example, she stated that her pupils were particularly fond of Quizlet.

### *Benefits of homework*

According to Fiona she learned a great deal from homework whilst growing up. She pointed out that she knows pupils are different with different learning styles, meaning that what they

can learn or not from homework can vary from pupil to pupil. She stated that she believes homework can be beneficial to foster certain skills such as time management, taking responsibility for one's own learning and critical thinking, at least to some degree. Since the pupils are very different, she also makes a point of continuously increasing awareness of these skills for her pupils during class hours as well. Fiona claimed that she has pupils who do "homework-like assignments" voluntarily at home and these are the pupils with the best results at school. She, therefore, concluded that having pupils work through the already covered material or extra material in their spare time can be extremely beneficial.

#### *Homework policy, pupil involvement, differentiation, and feedback*

Fiona elaborated on the new homework policy for 9<sup>th</sup> grade and explained that the decision of letting the pupils do much more of what had previously been homework during class was reached because both parents and pupils expressed that they felt burdened and stressed by too much homework. Fiona added that the new policy consists of a weekly plan that both parents and pupils can access online. This plan includes what the pupils are working on for the specific week, competence aims, specific details to remember and "what the pupils should be finished with by the end of the week" (my translation). The pupils know that if they do not finish this, they will have to do it at home. Fiona explained that this means that the pupils who work better in their home environment have the opportunity to do so, at the same time, it is also an incentive for the pupils to do what they are supposed to do and be efficient when at school so that they do not have to use their spare time on it.

Fiona was asked whether she involves her pupils in homework decisions. To this, she said: "My pupils do not really have a lot of inferences to the week plan. If they express any wishes or concerns, I try to take these into account when possible. I think the pupils enjoy that I am in control of the week plan" (my translation). Fiona clarified that this means that her pupils do not directly get to join in on decisions when it comes to homework and the work plan; however, they are always taken indirectly into account. She always aims to do what is best for her pupils.

When asked about differentiation and feedback on homework, Fiona answered that she differentiates the weekly plans for some of her pupils; however, the majority follow the same plan. She explained that most of them are at the same level and since they usually work on the plan during school hours, she is able to assist her pupils. To the question on feedback, Fiona stated that she always walks around when her pupils work in class. She guides, helps and also checks that the work is being done. She explained that she also often goes through the work

together with everyone during the class. Fiona added that she always provides feedback on the “small talks” her pupils do every week.

### *English input outside of school*

Upon the question if she can share her thoughts on how English exposure outside of school affects her pupils and her views on this connected to English homework, Fiona stated that her pupils are highly advanced orally. However, she does feel that they especially need more writing practice. She expressed that this is something she puts emphasis on at school since they are not very exposed to it outside of school. She explained that writing, grammar and sentence structure are usually big parts of the pupils’ weekly work plan.

### *Stress and motivation*

According to Fiona, after implementing the new type of plan that focuses on doing more at school and less at home, the pupils have become much more effective in class and they are working harder. Fiona explained: “the pupils are probably a lot more effective because they do not want to do more than necessary at home, but I do make sure to often remind them to work thoroughly with the plan” (my translation). She continued by asserting that she also makes sure they understand and learn from the different assignments. When asked about if she is under the impression that her pupils are stressed because of homework, Fiona answered that she gets feedback from both pupils and parents that they are less stressed now than before the new plan was implemented. She also pointed out that the plan leaves more time to revise for larger assignments and tests, and this also eases up the amount of stress her pupils experience. Fiona expressed that she feels that the majority of pupils are generally busier and more stressed nowadays than previously, without really knowing why. She said she sees that after the new plan with reduced homework load her pupils are happier and less stressed. However, she continued by explaining that she herself feels more stressed after the new work plan. She said the work plan is a challenge because she feels like she does not have enough time anymore to go properly through different themes and topics since there needs to be time for the pupils to work on the exercises that would previously have been given solely as homework. Fiona pointed out that she is working on balancing this better.

### *Qualification*

When asked if she feels qualified to assign homework, Fiona promptly stated that: “Yes, I do feel qualified to assign homework, in every subject I teach” (my translation). According to



her, she has not had any formal education about homework; however, she has many years of experience behind her. She pointed out that she has experienced both benefits and challenges with and without homework. She also added that she continuously follows the debate surrounding homework, and she can see the different sides to it. Fiona clarified that the different experiences she has, and the knowledge of the homework debate are the major reasons she feels qualified to assign homework.

## 5. Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the following research questions addressed in the thesis:

1. What are the homework practices of English teachers in different Norwegian lower secondary schools?
2. How are the homework practices of these English teachers connected to research on homework?

This chapter is structured under the same headings as the results chapter. A summary of the results that compare the answers of the interviewees is presented and discussed with research on homework. The answers to the research questions is an underlying subject throughout the whole discussion; however, the answers will be summarised in the final sub-section of the chapter and further in the conclusion.

### 5.1 Homework assignments, considerations, and practices

To establish a picture of what the common homework practices are for English teachers at lower secondary school, all of the participating teachers were asked about how often they give homework, what their main reasons for assigning homework are, and what type of homework they usually give their pupils. All of the teachers in the current study answered that they give homework weekly; however, the majority pointed out that they do not want to overburden their pupils, meaning that they ease up on the homework load in the weeks when their pupils have larger assignments and tests. Half of the participants acknowledged that they sometimes let their pupils do their assigned homework whilst at school, or at least start at school and finish at home. Andrew pointed out that he likes to do this to be able to assist them with the homework or as a reward for having worked well in class. Eric, similarly, also sometimes lets his pupils start the homework at school to help avoid misunderstandings. In Fiona's case doing more homework at school and less at home is part of the school's policy.

The biggest agreement across all of the interviewees is that homework should be repetition of what has already been covered in class. Most of the teachers pointed out that the goal is to extend and increase learning, and hopefully boost achievement in the subject. Four of the teachers, Andrew, Brenda, Charlotte, and Fiona, also reflected around assigning

homework as a way for the pupils to work through the material in a different setting than at school. They all claimed that it can be hard for some pupils to concentrate at school and that the opportunity to work at home can increase concentration and let them work at their own pace. All of the participating teachers agreed on several reasons for assigning homework; however, Brenda was, the only teacher who claimed that one of the most important reasons to assign her pupils homework is to check if her pupils learn what they are expected to and to see who follows the instructions. She explained that using homework this way makes it easier to spot and accommodate to the pupils who struggle. Another interesting comment from Eric was that he claimed to be especially occupied with helping his pupils to learn to tie information together and use existing knowledge to learn new information and skills. He said he hopes homework can help to train this particular skill. Eric is the only teacher who touched upon this topic of metacognition.

All of the participating teachers showed reflections about homework as a tool to practice and repeat past lessons that coincide with research on the field. After years of conducting different research on homework, Dr. Cooper (2015: 44-51) recommends that homework should indeed include practice of past lessons (see also p. 8). Research and interviews on English teachers done by Amiryousefi in Iran (2016: 42) and by North and Pillay (2002: 140) in Malaysia, conclude that the majority of the teachers in their studies strongly believe in assigning homework because it provides their pupils with practice and a chance to review what has been covered in class (see also pp. 13-15). According to North and Pillay (2002: 139), most of the teachers in their research also view homework as important to provide them with diagnostic information about their pupils. Brenda was the only interviewee in the current study who mentioned this as an important reason for assigning homework. However, it is clear from North and Pillay's research that this is a common purpose of homework for teachers, and homework probably serves this function for the other teachers in the present study as well.

In addition to assigning homework to practice and review material from class, most of the participants in the current study claimed that homework hopefully increases learning and achievement for their pupils. The teachers were not asked to assess if homework leads to greater achievement in the subject or not, because this can be hard for the teachers to evaluate and it is outside the scope of this thesis. However, they were asked about their main reasons for assigning homework to provide an idea of why they do so and consequently what they believe homework is useful for. Without being asked directly about achievement, the teachers' answers, nevertheless, reflect that they hope homework increases learning and

achievement. Several of the interviewees used words such as hope, possibly and hopefully. These words can be argued to show uncertainty. The teachers might be using these words because it is hard to evaluate and say for certain if homework leads to higher achievement or not, as is clearly reflected in the inconclusive research on the topic.

Research shows that homework is positively correlated to higher achievement (Cooper, 1998; Cooper et al., 2006; Cooper, 2015; Trautwein 2007; Hong et al., 2004), at the same time, there is plenty of research claiming that there is no positive link between homework and achievement (Trautwein and Köller, 2003; Kohn, 2006; Buell, 2003). However inconclusive research on homework is, it seems safe to conclude that the effects of homework differ. As shown on page 16 of this paper, there are individual differences between pupils and also different effects of homework between countries, as is demonstrated in the OECD report (Falch and Rønning, 2012). The participating teachers seemed to be aware of these differences and several of them pointed this out when they were asked if they see other benefits of homework, beyond learning and increasing achievement (See further section 5.2).

How and if to include parents when it comes to homework was deemed to be too big of a topic to elaborate on in the current study; however, most of the participating teachers touched upon the topic without being explicitly asked about it. For Eric, his main reason for assigning homework is to involve parents, because they have a large responsibility when it comes to their children's education in Norway. He pointed out, nevertheless, that homework should be repetitive and therefore manageable by the pupils without assistance from parents. The majority of the other teachers also acknowledged that homework can be a bridge between school and home, and that parental assistance can be a good thing, especially for the pupils who have resourceful parents; however, the homework is designed so that the pupils should be able to do it independently. The majority of the participating teachers believed that their pupils are old enough to take responsibility for their own homework. Fiona was the only teacher who did not mention the topic of parental involvement, this might be because she usually lets her pupils do the homework at school, which means parental assistance is probably not a big part of her homework practice.

According to the Norwegian Directorate of Education, homework can be used as a way for parents to take part in their child's education. At the same time, it is required by law, §2-3 in the Education Act (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2014b), that pupils should actively engage in their own education (see also p. 19). It is therefore not surprising that the participating teachers in the present study showed reflections around the role of parental involvement, at the same time as they underlined their pupils' own responsibility for their homework and

learning. Researchers such as North and Pillay, Hallam, and Cooper, all make the case that homework functions as a bridge between the school and home (North and Pillay, 2002: 140; Cooper, 2006: 2; Hallam, 2006: 1). Cooper (2015: 59), in addition, refers to research which shows that parental involvement on homework can have both positive effects and negative effects that interfere with learning.

As shown on page 9 of the current study, Marzano and Pickering (2007: 78-79) recommend teachers to assign homework that pupils are able to do independently and point out that parents should not be required to act as teachers or to police homework. In their research on 63 teachers and 1,299 Grade 8 pupils, Trautwein *et al.* (2009: 184-185), found that the pupils of teachers who do not see collaboration between the home and school as a major reason for assigning homework showed better development in homework achievement and effort. This was also true for the pupils of teachers who emphasised that they wanted the pupils to do their homework independently (see also p. 12). Most of the interviewees in the current study seemed to contemplate on this fact that homework can have both positive and negative impact on their pupils and their parents, and the teachers underlined that the goal is to assign homework that can be managed by the pupils on their own.

When the participants were asked about what types of English homework they commonly assign to their pupils, the majority of them again underlined that the homework is mostly repetition of what has already been covered in class. All of the interviewees answered that they usually include reading as part of the homework assignments. Andrew and Daniel both emphasised that they believe reading is a key to improving different language skills and imagination. The other teachers stressed that they are occupied with checking for understanding and, therefore, often include questions or similar to accompany the reading-homework. Daniel said he is not a fan of giving the common reading from the textbook with comprehension questions as homework because he believes the pupils must be really tired of this type of homework. This reflection was not expressed by any of the other teachers; however, most of them said that they try to give varied, and sometimes creative, homework to help maintain their pupils' motivation. In addition to reading, most of the participants explained that a typical homework assignment can consist of writing, listening, grammar, glossary, vocabulary, and looking into current events. The majority of the teachers also expressed that they use videos, recordings, and other tools that are available through the internet and technology. Brenda and Fiona both gave the example of using the vocabulary-training website Quizlet.

Even though the teachers expressed that they put different emphasis on different homework tasks and what types of homework they give vary, they all seem to cover a large amount of diverse assignments. The participating teachers' considerations correspond well with Amiryousefi's research (2016: 42-48). He concludes that both teachers and pupils express that homework is good for improving English reading, writing and vocabulary; however, homework needs to be varied, suitable, communicative and interesting to be beneficial (see also p. 13). As demonstrated on pages 14 and 15 of this thesis, North and Pillay (2002: 138-145) reach a similar conclusion in their study. They found that the most frequent materials used were worksheets, textbooks, and commercial workbooks. Traditional activities such as grammar exercises, guided writing, and reading comprehension questions were common. The teachers in their research also mainly prioritised writing as homework and largely neglected other skills. North and Pillay found that the teachers focus on these traditional activities, even though they previously said they were concerned with creativity and motivation. 60% of the teachers also said they were unsatisfied with their pupils' homework performances. These findings prompted North and Pillay to recommend re-examining routines, especially with the constantly increasing English resources to be found on the internet, and to assign homework that exploits these available resources is considered motivational and useful.

In agreement with North and Pillay, Amiryousefi (2016: 48) also concludes that the more traditional, mechanical workbook exercises were not very effective (see also p. 13). This reflection is also presented by Daniel in the current study when he claimed that he is not a fan of textbook reading with comprehension questions because the pupils must be really tired of constantly doing these types of assignments. Several of the other participating teachers mentioned that they like to assign reading with comprehension questions as homework, at the same time, they also reflected on the importance of giving their pupils varied homework, and to utilise technology and resources. In addition to recommendations offered by various researchers, the Ministry of Education and Research in Norway also requires homework to be varied (Meld. St. 22: *Motivasjon – Mestring – Muligheter*, 2011: 58; see also p. 19 of this thesis). It is, therefore, not surprising that the teachers in the current study show extensive reflections around providing their pupils with variation and technology when they assign homework.

## 5.2 Benefits of homework

The participating teachers were asked if they view homework as beneficial and if it has any other benefits beyond increasing learning and enhancing achievement. Most of the interviewees started to answer the questions by underlining that they hope homework is beneficial to learn facts, practice certain skills and positively impacts achievement. To the question of other benefits of homework, Andrew, Charlotte, Daniel, and Eric all used the word *unsure*. They answered that they were unsure if there are other benefits of homework. They further supplied their answers by claiming that the benefits of homework probably vary greatly from pupil to pupil, as they are so different and have different learning styles. Fiona also pointed this out as part of her answer. As highlighted in section 5.2, the assumption that the benefits of homework vary greatly from pupil to pupil is backed up by various research on the field. In the current study, Brenda was the only teacher who did not touch upon the topic of uncertainty and the difference between pupils in this aspect. Brenda claimed homework is good practice for later studies at higher levels. She also explained that she believes homework is good practice for helping the pupils manage their own time and take responsibility for their own learning. Even if she did not talk about how pupils' differences may affect the benefits of homework, later during the interview she showed an understanding of the fact that her pupils are different with different needs (see further section 5.3).

Although the majority of the teachers highlighted that it is hard to say if homework has non-instructional benefits, all of them claimed that homework could possibly lead to better time management, critical thinking, taking responsibility for own learning and developing study habits, at least for some of the pupils or when the pupils mature more. All of the participating teachers clearly underlined that they work on these skills continuously at school and that this is necessary for their pupils to possibly be able to practice or develop these skills through homework.

Uncertainty about the non-instructional benefits of homework is also reflected in established research on the field. In her paper, Hallam (2006: 1) lists several purposes and benefits of homework. She claims that homework can foster initiative and independence, developing skills in how to use sources, time management, good study habits, self-discipline and taking responsibility for one's own learning. It is important to notice that she calls these benefits for *perceived* benefits, reflecting some uncertainty (see also p. 9) As is further shown on page 9 of the current research, Cooper (2015: 10) agrees with Hallam's list and he adds that homework can foster positive attitudes towards school.

At the same time, Hallam and Cooper recognise that there are perceived disadvantages of homework as well. These include that homework reduces the time for other activities, causes arguments at home, and causes anxiety, stress, boredom and negative attitudes (Cooper, 2015; Hallam, 2006). Except for a survey about parental involvement, there is no research on non-instructional purposes of homework mentioned in Cooper's book *The Battle Over Homework* (2015). Kohn (2006: 52-54) also clearly underlines in his book that there is little or no research that supports the claim that homework helps pupils develop study skills, take responsibility, self-discipline or learn to manage their time better. Kohn further argues that usually the pupils' choices when it comes to homework are limited to when to do something they have been required to do. To make matters worse, this choice is typically made by their parents. Homework is really testing the parents' ability to take responsibility and manage time, not the pupils (see also p. 10).

The teachers in the current study were asked the open question of whether they believe homework is beneficial. They were not asked specifically about the disadvantages of homework; however, Andrew reflected around this. He claimed that homework is probably most beneficial for the pupils who already benefit most from school, at the same time, homework can be negative for the pupils who struggle if it prompts negative feelings or adds to stress. Even though Andrew is the only teacher to provide thoughts on the disadvantages of homework in relation to benefits, all of the teachers are asked about stress as a possible disadvantage of homework (see further section 5.5). With words such as *perceived* and the indicated hesitance towards other benefits of homework beyond achievement promoted by prominent researchers on the field, there is nothing strange about the uncertainty and hesitance shown by the participants in the current study.

### 5.3 Homework policy, pupil involvement, differentiation, and feedback

The participating teachers were asked if they or their school has a homework policy. When asked about this the majority of the teachers quickly touched upon the topic of collaboration between the colleagues at their schools. Most of them pointed out that there are good environments for collaboration; however, homework is rarely discussed. In her master's thesis, Volley (2017: 39-40) also found that there is very little collaboration with regards to homework and most decisions are made individually (see also p. 18). It is surprising that homework is not discussed more since it is such a large and integrated part of many teachers' and pupils' lives. Some of the teachers in the current study, however, pointed out that they do



share the responsibility of creating homework assignment, as a way of collaboration when it comes to on homework. When further explaining their own and the schools' homework policies, the teachers' answers showed that all of them and their schools have a weekly or a two-week work plan that includes information about homework. In addition to this, all of the teachers seemed occupied with easing up on the homework load during the weeks where the pupils have larger assignments or tests. Some of the schools also have a policy about limiting the number of evaluations to a maximum of two or three a week. The teachers' policies beyond the weekly plans and the agreement to ease up on homework during busy weeks vary greatly.

Andrew and Daniel underlined that the weekly plan is the only formal policy concerning homework at their schools. Charlotte does not specify that this is the school's only formal policy; however, she does not mention having any other formal policies. Brenda, Eric, and Fiona, on the other hand, have much more extensive homework policies. Brenda and Eric's policies are similar to one another. They both talked about assigning responsibility for the English homework to one of the teachers for a given period of time. This responsibility shifts between the teachers on a regular basis. It is up to each teacher to adapt the given homework to suit their pupils. Brenda explained that the teachers have also agreed not to assign the pupils more than 15 minutes of homework in each subject weekly. Charlotte mentioned a time-limit of a maximum of 30 minutes of homework in each subject weekly earlier in the interview when she was asked about what type of homework she usually assigns. However, she did not mention this again as part of the schools' policy.

Having a time-limit on homework is consistent with recommendations from the Ministry of Education and Research. In Meld.St.22 they advise homework not to take longer than two hours a day (Meld. St. 22 – Motivasjon – Mestring – Muligheter, 2011: 58). In his research, Cooper claims that pupils who reported doing between 13 to 20 hours per week showed the strongest relationship between time spent on homework and achievement. At the same time, spending more than 20 hours a week showed a relationship between time spent on homework and achievement nearly equal to the pupils reporting between 1 and 6 hours a week. This shows that spending too much time on homework does not necessarily lead to greater achievement. Cooper (2015: 33-34) suggests that this research might show an optimal amount of homework to be between 1,5 to 2,5 hours per day.

In their study, Kouzma and Kennedy (2002: 193-196) found that spending a high number of hours daily on homework was positively related to experiences of, amongst other things, stress, depression, anger and mood-disturbances (see also p. 10). With

recommendations from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, and different studies indicating that it is valuable with a time limit on homework, it is startling that only two teachers in the current study seemed to be occupied with a limit on the number of hours a pupil should expect to spend on homework daily. Volley's thesis shows that none of the participating teachers talked about limiting the hours their pupils spend doing homework (Volley, 2017). The teachers in Volley's research and in the current study might not have touched upon this topic for different reasons; it makes sense, however, to assume that they would have mentioned time-limitations if it was a big part of their own or the schools' homework policy.

In the present study, Fiona does not mention anything about time limitations on homework, she has; however, as already mentioned, a comprehensive homework policy. Fiona explained that she and several of her colleagues at 9<sup>th</sup> grade have agreed upon a new policy where they provide the pupils with a weekly work plan that includes "what the pupils should be finished with by the end of the week" (my translation). This means that the pupils work with this during school hours; however, if they do not finish it at school, they will have to do this as homework. The pupils have a good understanding of this arrangement. Fiona explained that this decision was reached because both parents and pupils expressed that they felt stressed and burdened by the large amount of homework. As pointed out earlier, when asked about their reasons for assigning homework, both Andrew and Eric also admitted that they sometimes let their pupils do the homework at school instead of home. Fiona is, nevertheless, the only teacher who talks about doing this as a formal school policy.

Research on homework tends not to focus explicitly on formal policies and how these are implemented. Cooper (2015: 96), nevertheless, claims that teachers *need* to adopt a policy that governs homework in their classes. He says this is an important device for ensuring that the expectations regarding homework are clear. He further suggests that a homework policy should make references to the frequency with which homework will be assigned, how long it should take, its purpose and the expectations of parents. Even with little focus on the topic of homework policy found in established research, it is, however, particularly interesting to have a closer look at it in a Norwegian context, as there are very few and no explicit national guidelines concerning homework in Norway. Guidelines, tips, and policies about homework are present in other countries. In the United States, for example, although not an official policy, The U.S. Department of Education maintains a Website for parents meant to assist them in helping their children succeed in school. Even if this page is designed for parents it contains goals and prescriptions for homework assignments that are highly useful for teachers

and schools as well (Cooper, 2015: 79). It is also clear from Cooper's book that it is common for schools and districts to have extensive homework policies (2015: 83-90). In Norway, it is not cited by law or in the national core curriculum that pupils are required to do homework. All decisions concerning homework will be up to each school and the teachers respectively. As is shown in the current study, a consequence of having all homework decisions be up to each school and the teachers, is that the policies will vary greatly.

After answering questions about policies on homework, the participating teachers were asked about their practices of pupil involvement. All of the teachers, except for Andrew, clarified that they do not involve their pupils to a large extent when it comes to homework decisions. However, most of them underlined that they often provide choices within the assignments and they always do what they believe is best for their pupils. The majority of the teachers also expressed that they take input and concerns from their pupils seriously. They also focus much more on autonomy for their pupils whilst in class. Andrew, on the other hand, eagerly said: "I often talk to my pupils about homework and try to include them in the decisions as much as possible" (my translation). He pointed out that many of his pupils express a wish for no homework at all when he includes them in decisions; nevertheless, they also give him constructive criticism and "proper" answers, and he thinks these conversations are immensely valuable.

Several researchers recommend giving pupils autonomy when it comes to homework decisions. As shown on pages 11 and 12 of the current study, Kohn (2006: 57) strongly argues to let pupils have a say in homework decisions. He states that homework is largely unmotivating because the pupils often do not have much autonomy regarding homework. He claims that the benefits of experiencing autonomy range from better physical health to greater academic self-confidence. Cooper (2015: 46-47) similarly argues for giving pupils choices as this can improve their interest, motivation, and achievement. Trautwein *et al.* (2009: 176) found that pupils who had teachers who supported pupil homework autonomy showed more positive homework effort and emotions than the pupils who were provided with more controlling homework assignments (see also p. 12). Research clearly states that giving pupil autonomy regarding their homework assignments can have several positive benefits. The teachers in the current study explained their lack of pupil autonomy by claiming it is extremely time consuming, the pupils are not mature enough to make these decisions, or the pupils even expressed that they prefer the teacher to be in control. Nevertheless, the participating teachers seemed to be particularly occupied with giving their pupils choices

within the different homework assignments, and, therefore, provide them with a sort of autonomy.

After discussing pupil involvement, the teachers were asked if they differentiate the homework assignments. According to the teachers in the current study, they all differentiate the homework assignments for their pupils, although to highly varying degrees. The teachers differentiate by providing more challenging homework for more advanced learners or more support for weaker learners. Several of the participants explained that they divide their homework into different levels. Andrew expressed that he does not individualise as much as he probably should; however, he said he works on improving this. Charlotte, Eric, and Fiona all explained that most of their pupils receive the same homework assignments, meaning that they do not differentiate to any large degree.

Cooper (2015: 47) claims that individualising and giving pupils homework based on their learning-style can help improve pupils' achievement, attitudes, and conduct. At the same time, he points out that his review of four studies that look at the effect of individualising homework for pupils at different levels shows no consistent improvement in achievement when comparing classes with individualised homework with classes in which all the pupils do the same assignments. However, he also states that the studies show that pupils who were struggling in school required more time to complete homework that was not differentiated for their level. Even if the research on individualisation is inconclusive, it seems safe to conclude that giving pupils homework that is appropriate for their level is important to maintain motivation and achievement. The differentiation practices of the teachers in the current study vary; nevertheless, they all individualise homework to some degree.

The teachers were further asked if they check that homework is completed and offer feedback to their pupils. All of the teachers answered that they do this; however, this also varies to a large extent. Andrew, Charlotte and Eric admitted that they only check and provide feedback sometimes. On the other hand, they argued that they instead try to make the pupils aware of what they will gain by doing their homework, and what they will lose out on if they do not do it. The consensus seems to be that this is a way of using homework to help the pupils take responsibility for their own learning.

Brenda, on the other hand, claimed that she always checks if the homework is finished, and she often provides her pupils with feedback, either spoken or written. Later during the interview, she pointed out that she also tries to make her pupils aware of the value of doing homework and what they lose if they do not. However, she does this in addition to checking and giving feedback, not instead of doing it. Daniel and Fiona also seem to be

always checking the homework completion, and often providing feedback to their pupils' homework effort. Daniel pointed out that he believes some sort of control or feedback on homework is necessary to be certain that the pupils learn and grow from the homework. He also admitted that it can be a challenge to always check or give feedback on homework. The teachers check and give feedback to their pupils' homework in various ways; however, it seems to be common to go through the homework together with the whole class or to walk around and check on the pupils during class. Sometimes the pupils hand in their homework for feedback. Both spoken and written feedback is provided.

After looking at several studies on feedback and homework, Cooper (2015: 51) concludes that the results are inconclusive; nevertheless, they seem to indicate that it is important to provide some feedback on homework (see also page. 8). As shown on page 13 of this study, Trautwein *et al.* (2009: 185-186) also found that informational and positive feedback may have favourable effects on the pupils' morale and achievement. North and Pillay (2002: 140-142) found that the teachers in their study, favoured giving overall comments to the class, written comments and oral comments (see also p. 14). Once again, North and Pillay's findings match the findings from the current study. Hallam (2006: 4) claims that there is a general consensus that homework must be monitored and marked if pupils are to take it seriously. Evidence suggests that providing multiple feedback, evaluative comments and explanations as to how things can be corrected is best. She also points out that going through the homework and explaining solutions with the whole class has also proved to be effective. Based on the research, it seems safe to argue that the ways the teachers in the current study provide their pupils with feedback are probably effective.

There is a substantial amount of research that advocates for giving feedback on homework. According to Baker and LeTendre, cited in Bennet and Kalish's book *The Case Against Homework*, evaluating homework is key. Teachers who provide feedback to their pupils about how to build up their skills are using homework in the most effective way (Bennett and Kalish, 2006: 53). According to Rosário *et al.*, several studies show a positive relationship between homework feedback and academic achievement. They have also studied EFL teachers' feedback practices and found that the pupils of teachers who offered individual and specific information to help progress, showed higher school performance. The researchers claim that this finding warrants further research; however, the finding indicates that the time and effort teachers spend on assessing, presenting and discussing homework with their pupils are worth the effort. Rosário *et al.* also pointed out that the teachers participating in their research claimed not to find the necessary time to provide feedback (2015: 9). This is

consistent with the current research, where many of the teachers indicated that finding enough time to provide feedback is a problem.

Even if finding enough time to provide feedback may be a problem, the research is seemingly clear on the benefits of receiving proper feedback for the pupils. In Norway, The Ministry of Education and Research stresses the importance of teacher feedback on pupils' homework (Meld. St. 22 – Motivasjon – Mestring – Muligheter, 2011: 58). As shown on page 17 of this study, Grønmo and Onstad (2009: 134-135, 201) claim that Norwegian teachers are below the international average when it comes to checking for homework completion and giving feedback to their pupils. They have found this to be true for both mathematics and science. The authors admit that they do not know why this is the case. However, the number of teachers who check their pupils' homework has gone up, which might be due to a larger focus on research that speaks of the benefits of following up the pupils' homework. Grønmo and Onstad's analysis focuses on mathematics and science subjects; nonetheless, the findings from the current study suggests that teachers of English are also not consistently checking and providing feedback to their pupils' homework assignments. Based on the recommendations from prominent researchers about feedback and the findings of Norwegian teachers' feedback practices, it seems safe to conclude that there is a need for improving teachers' practices with checking for homework completion and providing feedback to their pupils. However, more research is warranted to give a larger and more accurate picture of the current situation.

#### 5.4 English input outside of school

Research suggests that pupils who are exposed to English voluntarily outside of school, meaning that it is not initiated by teachers, show high levels of achievement in the English subject at school. English is dominant in many media, and research by Berns, cited in Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016: 115), points out that children who are exposed to English with subtitles rather than dubbing become acquainted with a considerable amount of English before they start school. Studies on adults who watch TV with subtitles show significant effects on vocabulary acquisition. Research done by Sylvén on vocabulary tests of 15 to 18 year-olds in Sweden, where some of the pupils encountered English as the medium of instruction in several subjects in school and some only studied English as a separate subject, showed that regardless of the group, it was the pupils with the largest amounts of English input outside of school who showed the best scores on the vocabulary tests (Sundqvist and Sylvén, 2016: 117).

Norwegian pupils' English skills are considered high. Norway is ranked as number four out of 88 countries in the Education First English Proficiency Index (Education First, 2018). English is a big part of the media in Norway, and Norwegian pupils are widely exposed to the English language; it is, therefore, interesting to examine English teachers' impressions of their pupils' exposure to English outside of school. The teachers in the current study were in agreement with their answers. All of them acknowledged that English input outside of school has a positive and valuable effect on their pupils. The teachers pointed out that the pupils' oral skills are advanced, and they believe their continuous exposure to English through video or computer games, films and music, is an important factor contributing to this. Nevertheless, the teachers made it clear that the English their pupils are exposed to does also have some negative consequences.

All of the teachers especially focused on the fact that their pupils are not as engaged with English writing and reading, as they are with watching and listening to films and music. This means that the pupils' writing skills are less advanced, and several teachers pointed out that the English they are exposed to usually results in struggles when it comes to writing; these include using slang, abbreviations, informal language, spelling mistakes and poor sentence structure. The teachers emphasised that they focus on these skills at school and as homework because they know their pupils will not be as exposed to them outside of school. Andrew underlined that he values the English input his pupils experience in their spare time, and he encourages them to read and play different games in English. Daniel made the observation that many teachers, including himself, could probably be even better at utilising the English their pupils are continuously exposed to. He said he wishes to work on this and, for example, include more gaming as homework.

Jakobsson wrote a thesis in 2018 where he examined Norwegian pupils' English input outside of school. He found that the time spent on English activities during their spare time had an effect on their English development. Gaming was found to be the most effective. The pupils themselves felt that watching English TV and gaming contributed a great deal to attaining higher skills in English. Jakobsson also found that many of the pupils did not generally like to read books during their free time. He concluded his thesis by recommending more teachers to use movies, music, and gaming as part of their classroom instruction (Jakobsson, 2018: 62-67).

Several of the teachers in the present study pointed out that their pupils who often play games have quite advanced vocabulary. These pupils are probably more exposed to English than the pupils who do not play video games, and the teachers' observations, therefore, match

the findings of Sylvén's research (Sundqvist and Sylvén, 2016: 117). The impression they have of their pupils also coincide with what Jakobsson has found in his study. The teachers all pointed out that their pupils are not as exposed to reading as they are to watching and listening, just like the pupils in Jakobsson research. The teachers in the current study claimed that English outside of school is valuable for their pupils' English skills, and as Daniel mentioned, more teachers should try to take advantage of this in the classroom and as homework.

## 5.5 Stress and motivation

The participating teachers were asked about their impression of their pupils' experiences of stress and motivation with regard to homework. The general agreement seems to be that the teachers do not believe their pupils are noticeably stressed because of homework, at least not homework in the English subject. They are; however, much more stressed when it comes to tests and evaluations, or life in general. Some of the teachers pointed out how social media and the pressure pupils put on themselves are probably large contributors to their experiences of stress. Brenda even claimed that she has gradually reduced the homework load during her career; however, the stress the pupils experience has increased. Fiona is the only teacher who explicitly pointed out that her pupils and their parents expressed feeling overwhelmed and stressed because of homework. After the new policy of more homework at school rather than at home, the pupils and teachers claimed that the stress they felt had reduced significantly.

According to Kouzma and Kennedy (2002: 197) pupils at different upper secondary schools in Australia spent between 10 and 65 hours on homework per week, and this number was positively related to scores for stress, depression, tension-anxiety, fatigue, confusion, anger, and mood-disturbances. The researchers point out that the hours spent on doing homework could be exaggerated due to dramatization or procrastination, and claim further research is needed to check if their results are robust. The findings, nevertheless, suggest that homework is directly or indirectly negatively connected with the pupils' psychological well-being (see also pp.10-11). As shown on page 11 of the current study, Bennet and Kalish (2006: 32) point to a research showing that more than 42 percent of the 1300 pupils who participated in a study at a public upper secondary in Massachusetts, reported that homework is a cause of "a lot of stress" and nearly 16 percent claimed homework caused "extreme stress". Bennet and Kalish claim that parents, as well as pupils, also perceive homework as a major source of stress.



Based on research showing how stressful homework can be, it is surprising that the teachers in the current study expressed that their pupils did not seem stressed with regard to homework. Fiona was the only teacher who explicitly claimed that her pupils had felt stressed because of homework. There seems to be a general agreement among all the participating teachers on reducing the homework load in busy periods, and some of them have policies restricting the amount of time that should be spent on homework. These factors may be large contributors that reduce homework related stress. On the other hand, as the pupils' point of view is outside of the scope of this study, their opinions have not been taken into account, and conclusions should therefore not be drawn.

Upon the question if their pupils seem motivated to do their homework, all of the teachers claimed that the majority of their pupils are motivated and complete their assigned homework. Most of the teachers pointed out that they have pupils who are not very motivated or do not do their homework assignments; however, this did not seem to be a problem for any of the teachers. Several of the teachers claimed that the pupils are especially motivated when the homework includes watching videos, reading or looking up current events. This suggests that the type of assignment and variation is key to maintaining the pupils' motivation. The teachers seemed satisfied with their pupils' homework performances.

Kohn (2006: 57) argues that homework causes stress and negatively affects motivation. His main argument is that homework is not motivating because the pupils often do not have much autonomy when it comes to their homework (see also p. 11). As previously stated, the teachers in the current study do not offer their pupils a large degree of autonomy either. Their impression of their pupils, however, show that they are highly motivated when it comes to homework. Again, this might be connected to the fact that most of the participating teachers seem to give varied and engaging homework assignments. This conclusion seems safe to draw based on the research done on other EFL teachers as well. Amiryousefi (2016: 42-48) found that homework can be beneficial if it is varied, communicative and interesting, and both teachers and pupils agree with this (see also p. 13). North and Pillay (2002: 141-144) also argue for giving communicative and varied homework after they found that 60% of the teachers in their study said they were not satisfied with their pupils' homework performances. North and Pillay imply that this may be connected to the fact that many of the teachers focused on traditional activities rather than communicative, varied and creative homework (see also pp. 14-15).

## 5.6 Qualification

As there are no specific guidelines on homework from UDIR, and since the topic of homework does not seem to be covered during teacher education and training in Norway, the participating teachers were asked if they felt qualified to assign homework to try to establish if and how the lack of guidelines and education affects them. According to Andrew, he does not feel qualified to assign homework at all. He pointed out that he has had no formal instructions regarding homework as part of his teacher training or at his workplace. He also claimed that there is little discussion regarding homework at his workplace. He underlined that he does assign homework and he bases his decisions on his intuition and the experience he has gained as both a pupil and a teacher. Brenda, Eric, and Fiona all firmly stated that they feel qualified to assign homework. They acknowledged that they have not had any formal education about homework; however, many years of experience, good collaboration and discussions about homework at their workplace, and paying attention to the homework debate, were given as reasons for their feelings of qualification.

Charlotte and Daniel both uttered the phrase “yes and no” to the question if they feel qualified. Charlotte explained that she feels qualified in the sense that she extends the learning that goes on at school, at the same time, she has not learned anything about what good homework is or how to give good homework assignments. She also expressed a wish for more knowledge to expand the variation of the assignments she gives. Daniel said he has researched enough about pedagogy and education to make qualified decisions about homework; nevertheless, he has not had any formal education on homework and he rarely discusses homework with his colleagues.

Research on teachers’ experience of qualification when it comes to homework is limited. Farkas, Johnson and Duffet, cited in Cooper *et al.* (2006: 3), assessed the views of 1000 school teachers and found that teachers complain about a lack of training in how to construct good assignments. Bennet and Kalish (2006: 38) claim that there is no official training for teachers with regards to homework. When investigating the phenomena, they talked to Cooper who claimed that “most teachers are winging it.” Bennet and Kalish continue their argument by saying that they do not blame the teachers; however, the teachers are being short-changed during their training. Bennet and Kalish (2006: 39-42) point to several studies that claim there is no training or attention paid to homework. Their own research of more than three hundred teachers across the United States showed that only one teacher claimed to have taken a course specifically on homework during training. In their

conversation with Cooper, he also expressed surprise over how unaware teachers are of the research literature about homework. Bennet and Kalish conclude their argument by asserting that teachers are not well trained in how to assign homework and this needs to be improved Volley (2017: 51) also reaches this conclusion in her thesis. She argues for the school and teachers to ground much more of their homework decisions on research. She suggests that the Ministry of Education and Research should enable teachers' access to research databases to give them the opportunity to expand their knowledge and keep developing their practices (see also p. 18).

The current study reflects that there is no formal education on homework as part of teacher training in Norway, just as is shown in studies done in the United States. However, even without this, the majority of the teachers in the present research expressed that they felt qualified to assign homework based on their experiences. Many of them did, nevertheless, also express a wish for access to research and more discussions around homework at their workplace. Research on the field, including Volley's thesis and the current study, indicates that a larger focus on homework in teacher training, or at least easier access to research for teachers, should be considered.

## 5.7 Research Questions

The research questions have been underlying through the whole discussion in this chapter. It will also be further summarised in the conclusion. To briefly sum up the research questions,

1. What are the homework practices of English teachers in different Norwegian lower secondary schools?
2. How are the homework practices of these English teachers connected to research on homework?

this study has found that the participating teachers make numerous considerations when it comes to homework decisions. There is agreement on many topics between the participants; at the same time, there is also disagreement and various practices. All the considerations made can be linked to research findings. The teachers mention considerations and practices that are discussed in studies and research; at the same time, none of the participants refer to any of these studies. This implies that there are common understandings of homework principles and practices; however, the teachers seem unaware of the link to research.



## 6. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to find out what the homework practices are for English teachers in different lower secondary schools, and to examine how this is connected to national and international research on the field. The study focused on six English teachers from six different lower secondary schools in Norway. The research method consisted of a qualitative case study, and the data was obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted individually with the participants. No information was known about the teachers and their schools beforehand to avoid bias. The research questions answered in the current study were thus:

1. What are the homework practices of English teachers in different Norwegian lower secondary schools?
2. How are the homework practices of these English teachers connected to research on homework?

The review of established research on homework and the data collected for the current study have found that research demonstrates that the effects of homework are variable and inconclusive. The uncertainty reflected by research on the field is also shown by the participating teachers in the current study. The teachers agree with each other that homework should be repetition of what has already been covered in class, and the goal of homework is to extend and hopefully increase learning and achievement. The interviewees show reflection around parental involvement and the pupils' responsibility for their own learning which is consistent with research on the topic. The teachers put different emphasis on different homework tasks and the type of tasks they assign vary; however, they all seem to cover different types of assignments and they are occupied with variation as key to motivation and learning. Many of the considerations made by the teachers are in line with recommendations by prominent researchers.

When it comes to homework policies the current study revealed that the interviewees' practices vary to a large extent. This might be due to the fact that there is no law or national curriculum in Norway with requirements on homework. All homework decisions are made by schools and teachers independently. However, there are strong recommendations from research that extensive and well-established homework policies can be incredibly beneficial. Regarding pupils' involvement in homework decisions, this study found that, despite research

showing the benefits of letting pupils have a say in homework decisions, most of the teachers in the current study admitted that they do not include their pupils to a large degree.

Nevertheless, the participating teachers seemed particularly occupied with providing their pupils with choices within the given assignments. The teachers also seemed not to individualise the homework as much as research would suggest beneficial; however, they all differentiate homework to some degree. Based on the recommendations from prominent researchers about feedback and the findings of teachers' feedback practices in Norway, it seems safe to conclude that there is a need for improving teachers' practices in this area. The current study also revealed that the teachers show thoughtful reflection on how valuable English outside of school is for the pupils' English skills. The value that comes from English in different settings than in the classroom is, however, not utilised to a large degree and more teachers should try to take advantage of this in the classroom and as homework.

A surprising finding from the current research is that, despite the amount of research that claims homework produces a large degree of stress, the teachers in the present study indicated that their pupils do not seem stressed because of homework. Factors such as reducing homework load in busy periods and policies restricting the amount of time that should be spent on homework could be possible explanations for this finding. The majority of the pupils also seem highly motivated when it comes to homework, despite little pupil autonomy and calls from researchers claiming that homework kills motivation.

The last thing this study examined was if teachers felt qualified to assign homework. Research shows that there is little or no training on the topic of homework and many teachers wish for this to change. This is also true for the teachers in the present study. Even without official training, the majority of the teachers in the current research felt qualified to assign homework based on their experiences. Many of them did, nevertheless, express a wish for more discussions around homework at work and access to research on the topic. Research on the field, including Volley's thesis (2017) and the current study, indicates that a larger focus on homework in teacher training, or at least easier access to research for teachers, should be given consideration. This research has also found that all the considerations the teachers make are possible to link to research; however, the teachers do not seem to be aware of this connection. Making research accessible to more teachers could help them become aware of this and continue to question and develop their homework practices. More discussions and collaboration about homework, both at higher levels, but especially within each school, should also be considered. As is apparent from this study, with homework being such a big

part of pupils' and teachers' lives, there is surprisingly little collaboration and few discussions on homework between teachers, and between teachers and their pupils.

This thesis will contribute to these discussions and hopefully prompt many more of these conversations to take place. By concentrating on teachers, the aim is to give insight into the important work teachers do for their pupils, and help the participating teachers and others to keep developing their practices. Since there are no national guidelines on homework in Norway, and all decisions are up to each school and the teachers respectively, this thesis hopes to contribute to a broader understanding of the homework considerations, attitudes and practices of lower secondary English teachers. The homework debate is still going strong, both internationally and nationally, and there are no conclusions in sight. This paper will contribute to add further inquiry into the field and contribute with valuable research to the ongoing debate.

### 6.1 Limitations and suggestions for further research

The study is limited in several ways. Firstly, the small selection of participants means that the findings cannot be generalised. Therefore, only tentative conclusions and impressions about English teachers in Norwegian lower secondary schools can be drawn. In addition to the small sample of participants, since no pupils participated in the research, the indications presented about them cannot be used to generalise either, and since it is only the teachers' impressions of them that have been examined it is hard to evaluate if the same results would be presented by the pupils themselves. Further, the study obtained data through a single research tool: interviews. Other research tools, such as observation or questionnaires, might have given valuable additional information. Using a larger participant sample, including pupils and more research tools was not possible in this research due to time constraints and the scope of the thesis.

The participating teachers were chosen without any prior knowledge of them or their schools to avoid bias. They were picked from different schools in a large area in the western part of Norway to cover as wide an area and representation as possible within the scope of the thesis. They were not given the interview questions beforehand with the hope of them answering as truthfully as possible. All of these measures were taken to increase the quality of the thesis, and despite the limitations listed above, it is believed that the teacher interviews provided sufficient data to justify the tendencies pointed out in the discussion.

Further research on teachers' homework practices across the country is needed to be able to draw generalisations. Research that takes the pupils' opinions into account would also be incredibly valuable as the homework decisions are just as large a part of their lives as of their teachers' lives. As homework is a large field that is heavily debated, more research is valuable. Further research on teachers' homework practices and pupils' experiences of homework would be beneficial for educators and teachers to continue to develop their knowledge and practices.



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## Appendix 1 – The interview guide

Interview guide for teachers who assign homework:

- 1. What are your main reasons for giving homework?**
- 2. What type of homework do you usually give?**
- 3. How often do you give homework?**
- 4. Do you believe homework is beneficial?**
  - For example, in terms of learning outcome and achievement
  - What about other benefits, such as learning to take responsibility, developing study habits, critical thinking etc.?
- 5. Does your school or you have a homework policy?**
  - for example, what is expected with regard to homework, purpose, frequency, length etc.
  - Is there a weekly homework plan that every teacher needs to contribute to?
- 6. Do you involve the pupils when assigning homework?**
  - If you do, how and how often? And why?
  - If you do not involve the pupils, why not?
- 7. Do you differentiate when assigning homework?**
  - If you do, how?
  - If you do not differentiate, why not?
- 8. Do you give feedback on homework?**
  - What type of feedback and how often?
  - Do you believe giving feedback is beneficial?
- 9. Research suggests that English input outside of school, for example through gaming, reading, films, and music have a positive correlation to pupils' level of English. Is it then necessary to give homework? What are your thoughts on this?**
- 10. What is your impression of your pupils with regard to homework?**
  - Do they usually do their homework?
  - Are they motivated?
  - Do they do their homework well or is your impression that they just rush through it before class?
  - Do they express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with homework?
  - Research suggests that homework can be related to stress, mood disturbances, and anxiety. What are your thoughts on this? Do you think this is true for your pupils?
- 11. Do you feel qualified to assign homework?**
  - Have your education or experience helped you when making considerations about homework or do you wish you had more education and knowledge about homework?

## Norwegian translation of the interview guide

Intervjuguide for lærere som gir hjemmelekser

- 1. Hvilke begrunnelser har du for å gi lekser?**
- 2. Hva slags type lekser gir du?**
- 3. Hvor ofte gir du lekser?**
- 4. Syntes du lekser er nyttig?**
  - For eksempel i forhold til økt læringsutbytte og prestasjon i faget?
  - Hva med andre fordeler? For eksempel å lære å ta ansvar, lære studieteknikker, kritisk tenkning og lignende?
- 5. Har skolen du jobber på eller du en egne retningslinjer når det kommer til lekser?**
  - For eksempel, er det noe tidskrav til hvor lenge elevene bør jobbe med lekser, formål, mengde, lengde og informasjon om forventninger til elevene?
  - Finnes det en lekseplan?
- 6. Involverer du elevene når det kommer til avgjørelser om lekser?**
  - Hvis du gjør det, hvordan og hvor ofte? Og hvorfor?
  - Hvis du ikke gjør det, hvorfor ikke?
- 7. Differensierer du når det kommer til lekser?**
  - Hvis du gjør det, hvordan og hvor ofte?
  - Hvis du ikke gjør det, hvorfor ikke?
- 8. Gir du eleven tilbakemelding på leksene?**
  - Hva slags type tilbakemeldinger gir du? Og hvor ofte?
  - Uavhengig av om du gir tilbakemeldinger eller ikke, tror du tilbakemelding er nyttig for elevene?
- 9. Det er en del forskning som viser til at Engelsk utenfor skolen, for eksempel, i form av gaming, lesing, se på filmer og høre musikk har en positiv link til elevers nivå av engelsk kunnskaper. Hva tenker du om dette? Ser du det hos dine elever? Er det nødvendig å gi lekser når det er så mye engelsk utenfor skolen?**
- 10. Hvilket inntrykk har du av elevene dine i forhold til lekser?**
  - Gjør de leksene sine?
  - Er de motiverte?
  - Gjør de leksene skikkelig eller gjør de dem raskt rett før timen begynner?
  - Uttrykker de at leksene er greie eller er de missfornøyde?
  - Forskning viser at elever kan bli veldig stresset av lekser. Hva tenker du om dette? Merker du det på dine elever?
- 11. Føler du deg kvalifisert til å gi lekser?**
  - Har du fått trening i å gi lekser som del av din utdanning? Hva med erfaring? Ønsker du mer trening eller erfaring?



## Appendix 2 – Interview summaries

### **Interview A: Andrew**

#### **What are your main reasons for giving homework?**

Andrew often gives his pupils the opportunity to do their homework at school if they work well and finish what they are supposed to whilst in class. In these cases, he uses homework as an incentive for his pupils to work harder at school. He lets them do their homework in class as a reward – instead of having to do the homework at home. On the other hand, he explains that one reason for giving homework is so that his pupils get the opportunity to work through the material in another setting than in the classroom. He thinks this is especially important for the pupils who work better when at home than at school.

Andrew talks about an environment at his school where the teachers collaborate, and he feels that everyone is under the impression that homework should not be a burden and often offer the pupils to do them at school where they can receive help and guidance. He argues that some pupils do not have parents who can help them at home, and these are usually the pupils who struggle the most to start doing their homework and also to get their homework done. This is also an important reason for Andrew to sometimes let his pupils do their homework when at school. On the other hand, he points out that if you have resourceful parents who want to be engaged in their children's education, homework is a good way to do this. He expresses that many parents of his pupils want their children to be assigned homework as a way for them to be informed about what their children do at school and to be able to actively participate in their education.

Other reasons for giving homework is because it functions as repetition of what they have covered in school and it can, therefore, hopefully help the pupils with retaining knowledge. Andrew sometimes gives homework as preparation for the next class to challenge his pupils in a different way, but homework usually consists of repetition.

#### **What type of homework do you usually give?**

Andrew is particularly concerned with reading as a key to improving every aspect of language training. He also loves to give creative and fun homework. He gives the example of writing down homework on a napkin instead of a piece of paper. The pupils enjoy these types of exercises and remember them better as they are unusual and stands out from their normal homework assignments. Although his focus is mainly on reading, he also sometimes gives writing and listening exercises as homework. He seldom gives grammar tasks as homework;

however, his pupils are sometimes asked to correct their own grammar mistakes for texts they have previously written, handed in and gotten feedback on, as homework. He also likes to encourage his pupils to find their own “homework”. If someone comes to class and tell him about an interesting film they saw, article they read etc. Andrew says he is incredibly happy. He thinks this is positive, even if they did not do their assigned homework.

### **How often do you give homework?**

Andrew usually gives homework weekly and tries to follow the schools weekly homework plan. This plan has a clear structure to help both parents and pupils to follow what goes on at school and what homework assignments are expected to be done for each week. The parents express that they like to have insight into what goes on at school through this plan.

### **Do you believe homework is beneficial?**

Andrew points out that the pupils who benefit most from homework also benefit most from school, and they would probably benefit without homework too. He also claims that homework could be negative for the pupils who struggle because it could add to stress or negative feelings if they are unable to do their homework. Andrew says it is a tough question to answer, but he believes all or most of his pupils learn something from their homework.

He does not believe that homework can contribute entirely to learning study techniques and critical thinking because the pupils are not mature enough or skilled enough to manage this on their own. Skills like these need to be pointed out and practiced at school. Andrew points out that pupils that are advanced learners might learn these skills from homework, but most of the pupils need help learning these skills at school.

### **Does your school or you have a homework policy?**

According to Andrew, the school he works at does not have a certain policy when it comes to homework, except for the weekly homework plan. With regards to how much, when and what types of homework to assign, this is up to each teacher individually. Andrew expresses that he loves this type of freedom. He points out that there is good collaboration at his workplace, both in pairs and in groups, and they sometimes discuss homework with each other, but this is seldom.

### **Do you involve the pupils when assigning homework?**

When asked if he involves the pupils in homework decisions, Andrew exclaims: “yes!”. He explains that he discusses homework together with his pupils in class and he is always open for feedback. He usually asks if they find the homework to be alright, understandable, and manageable. The pupils; however, usually answer that they do not want homework at all; however, some give constructive criticism, and this is taken into account. Andrew points out that he finds this particularly valuable.

### **Do you differentiate when assigning homework?**

Andrew tries to accommodate to individual needs as much as possible. This usually means giving more challenging homework for advanced learners and more support for weaker learners. The majority of the pupils are; however, given the same homework. He estimates that he differentiates for about 5% of the pupils and expresses a wish for his differentiation to be more structured and he works on improving this.

### **Do you give feedback on homework?**

Andrew admits that he is not good at giving feedback on his pupils’ homework. Providing pupils with feedback can be extremely time consuming. He believes that homework is a part of the pupils’ “job”, but he also realises that when he usually does not check the homework this affects his pupils’ motivation. Some of the pupils will not do their homework if they know it will not be checked. He often uses the homework as a basis for discussion in class, but as homework is not always done by all of the pupils, he makes a point of having the pupils being able to participate in class without having done their homework too. This way the pupils who have not done their homework do not fall behind; however, for the pupils who have done their homework, the class is better and more valuable. Sometimes he checks the homework to show that he has expectations of his pupils and by going through the assigned homework together with his class he can make pupils who have not done them realise they are falling behind, prompting them to do their homework.

### **Research suggests that English input outside of school, for example through gaming, reading, films, and music have a positive correlation to pupils’ level of English. Is it then necessary to give homework? What are your thoughts on this?**

Andrew says he definitely sees that English outside of school affects the pupils in a positive way. His pupils are quite advanced orally, especially the pupils who play video and computer games. On the other hand, Andrews’ pupils are weaker when it comes to writing because they



usually do not practice this in their spare time. He also points out that the pupils usually do not read, so this is important to assign as homework. Andrew claims that his pupils who read for fun show higher performance, especially when it comes to grammar, vocabulary, writing etc. Even though he wishes more of his pupils would read he also thinks it is important to acknowledge the value of gaming and similar. He tries to show this to his pupil and encourage them to play games in English.

### **What is your impression of your pupils with regards to homework?**

Some of the pupils seem stressed, but it is not possible to say that homework is the sole contributor to this. Andrew argues that his pupils are stressed in a “normal” way, he does not believe that any of them is really struggling because of homework assignments. They do; however seem more stressed by tests and evaluations. Andrew said he found the question of whether his pupils seem stressed or not with regards to homework hard to answer; however, he suggests that removing homework could possibly help reduce some of the stress, at the same time, he also points out that the pupils who need homework and benefit from it, could be stressed without homework. As pupils are so different it can be hard sometimes to find a balance, but he always takes his pupils concerns seriously.

The majority of the pupils do their homework. In Andrews’ class, there is an environment that acknowledges that doing homework is positive. The majority of the pupils do their homework because it is “cool”. It is “uncool” not to do the homework, and this has a waterfall effect on the class as a whole.

### **Do you feel qualified to assign homework?**

Andrew answers that he does not feel qualified at all to give homework. He knows what usually works for his pupils based on his intuition and experience as a pupil himself and as a teacher. There is; however, no formal instructions as part of teacher training or the environment at his workplace. Andrew points out that since homework is based on very individual decisions and practices, and the teachers have quite different styles, and different ways to structure homework and learning, it does not seem natural to discuss homework to a large extent. He again claimed that he loves this freedom; however, more discussions about homework could be valuable.

### **Do you want to add anything?**

Andrew explains that he was much more engaged in the homework debate and reflected around how he wanted to be with regards to homework before he started teaching. He was initially against homework. After he started to teach, he realised that homework can be valuable, and a good way for many pupils to learn. He thinks the old definition of homework is on its way out – it is no longer as separate from school as it used to be. He really likes the fact that his pupils can do their homework at school, or at least start at school and finish at home – this is much easier than starting on their own at home. When the teacher is the best to help them, why send them home with it?

When discussing how his views of homework have changed, he also mentions one of experienced his colleagues, who gives a large amount of homework and always check who has done it and points out that his class in Norwegian are highly advanced. He does not believe homework is the sole reason for this, but it could be a contributing factor.

## **Interview B: Brenda**

### **What are your main reasons for giving homework?**

Brenda underlines that she believes homework is important for the pupils to work through, process and repeat what they have worked with in class. This means that the homework she assigns is mainly repetitive.

Brenda points out that some of her pupils express that they would like to do work at home because they struggle to concentrate at school. Homework is also a good way to check if the pupils learn what they are expected to and to see who pays attention and are able to follow the instructions. If they do not, they need to be accompanied to and homework is a good indicator to see who these pupils are, and this also makes it easier to offer them help and assistance. Homework can also be useful to prompt discussions and collaboration with parents. However, Brenda designs her homework in a way that parental assistance should not be necessary – the pupils are old enough to take responsibility for their own homework. The parents do not express any dissatisfaction with homework.

### **What type of homework do you usually give?**

Most of the homework is repetition from what has been covered in class. Much of the homework is designed for the pupils to practice reading and understanding what they have read. A typical homework assignment is reading through a text, practice a bit of glossary and possibly answer a few questions. Brenda says her pupils also commonly practice glossary

through Quizlet. She points out that it is important to utilise available technology. They also sometimes hand in recordings where they speak instead of writing their answers.

### **How often do you give homework?**

Homework is usually given weekly, but homework is skipped if the pupils have assignments, tests, evaluations etc.

### **Do you believe homework is beneficial?**

Brenda thinks homework can be beneficial for the pupils to practice their reading and writing skills, understanding, and vocabulary. She also clarifies that by having her pupils from time to time hand in recordings or similar they practice their oral language skills in combination with learning content. She repeats and underlines that homework is to extend and increase the learning that goes on at school. She believes that homework is good for making her pupils responsible for their own learning and managing their own time. She states that the pupils are old enough to be able to do this and the homework is not designed so that they would need help from their parents.

Brenda also believes homework is good practice for later studies and developing study techniques. She continuously reminds the pupils of this and tries to help them see that homework is also part of a bigger picture. She also often reminds them that if they pay attention in class the homework should not be too much of a challenge, and if they feel that the homework is too difficult or too much, they are asked to let her know. If they express this their concerns are accompanied to.

### **Does your school or you have a homework policy?**

Brenda states that there is a good environment for collaboration between the colleagues at her school. Homework is usually not the main focus of this collaboration; however, Brenda's school has agreed upon a homework policy that they believe benefits their pupils. There is an agreement that each subject should not consist of more than a maximum of 15 minutes of homework each week. If they have assignments and tests, homework is usually dropped for that week to ease the workload for the pupils. The teachers also sometimes drop homework in other subjects where there is no assignment or test for that week to ease the workload further.

Brenda explains that they also assign responsibility for homework to one of the English teachers for a period, then another teacher takes responsibility and so on. This means that one teacher is responsible for homework for a set of time and the other teachers adapt the

homework and plan to their own class and pupils. The school has a weekly plan with information about what goes on in class, homework etc. that is accessible to the pupils and parents.

### **Do you involve the pupils when assigning homework?**

The pupils are not given much autonomy when it comes to their English homework. They are for example not a part of the decisions on what type of homework and when to get the assignments. Some homework assignments are designed to give them choices. If they are, for example, asked to practice vocabulary they can choose the words from a particular text themselves. Brenda does; however, remind them of not choosing the easiest options as they will not learn from doing so. When the pupils are given larger assignments these also include some sort of choices for the pupils.

### **Do you differentiate when assigning homework?**

The homework is differentiated for many of her pupils. Questions etc. are made more challenging or easier based on their needs. They might, for example, be asked to read the same text, but the follow-up questions vary significantly between, for example, finding and stating facts and to reflect around questions.

### **Do you give feedback on homework?**

Brenda says she always checks if the homework is done. She assigns homework that usually results in written or oral answers so that it is easier for her to check if the homework is done and if the pupils have learned what she expected them to. They are also given feedback written or orally some of the time. It is important for Brenda to check her pupils' homework as a way to gain valuable insight into their learning.

### **Research suggests that English input outside of school, for example through gaming, reading, films, and music have a positive correlation to pupils' level of English. Is it then necessary to give homework? What are your thoughts on this?**

Brenda expresses that she believes strongly in the benefits of being exposed to English outside of school, and she sees that this helps her pupils in many ways. At the same time, she believes it causes them to use a substantial amount of slang and abbreviations when they write. She, therefore, believes homework is important to help them practice their writing skills, writing structure, working on themes for exams etc. She also strongly believes the

pupils need to read, as they are more exposed to listening and talking through extramural English. She notes that the pupils in her class who often play videogames have a larger vocabulary than those who do not.

### **What is your impression of your pupils with regard to homework?**

The majority of the pupils do their homework and seem quite motivated. Brenda is good at checking the homework and giving feedback, and her pupils know they are expected to do their homework. If they do not finish their homework they get consequences, sometimes she writes their name down (and they know that if this happens to many times there are consequences) and Brenda tries to make them aware that they lose out on the learning outcome from the homework. She tries to follow up the pupils who do not hand in their homework as well as she can. If they, for example, are supposed to hand in a recorded file and they do not hand it in she will ask them to do it for her when she sees them at school.

The pupils express that they sometimes feel stressed or overwhelmed by the total amount of homework, but not in English per se. Brenda notes that her pupils do not really seem stressed by homework, but more about tests or assignments and life in general. She points out that social media adds a lot of stress for the pupils. She has assigned homework for the 10+ years she has worked as a teacher and the amount of homework has decreased significantly, but the amount of stress has definitely increased. She, therefore, does not believe homework to be a large contributor to this.

### **Do you feel qualified to assign homework?**

Brenda feels very qualified to assign her pupils homework. She points out again that she and her colleagues discuss homework and have created routines they believe in. Brenda points out that the well-established routines they have at her workplace help her feeling qualified to assign homework to her pupils. She also acknowledges that she was not prepared to give homework through her education to become a teacher, but she has gained knowledge through experience and discussions with colleagues.

### **Do you want to add anything?**

Brenda felt like she had said everything she wanted to and had nothing to add towards the end of the interview.

## **Interview C: Charlotte**

**What are your main reasons for giving homework?**

Charlotte's main reason for giving homework is to have her pupils work a bit more on what has been covered in class with the hope of enhancing achievement in the subject. She believes homework is important to help them practice English continuously. She also claims that homework is incredible valuable because it gives pupils an opportunity to work in another environment than in class. This hopefully gives them the opportunity to work at their own pace and enhance their concentration.

**What type of homework do you usually give?**

Charlotte mostly assigns repetitive homework, meaning that it is a repetition of what has already been covered in class. There is usually a large focus on having the pupils understanding texts they read. This means that most of the homework in some way involves reading, watching a short film or similar and writing a short paragraph or answer questions.

Charlotte says she tries to give varied homework assignments to help maintain the pupils' motivation. She does not give homework just to keep them busy. There has to be a read thread between the homework and what goes on in class. She also states that the goal is for the homework to never take more than a maximum of 30 minutes a week. She emphasizes that she does not give a large amount of homework, it should not be overwhelming for the pupils. Charlotte says she sometimes gives them homework that involves vocabulary training and focuses on them learning new words. She explains that she from time to time need to focus on this because she feels there is a surprisingly large amount of words they should know by their age that they do not. She does not focus on grammar when giving homework.

Charlotte touches upon the topic of parental involvement and states that she believes parents should not need to be involved. She believes the pupils are old enough to do their homework on their own and that they should be able to. If her pupils need help with their homework, the homework is too hard.

**How often do you give homework?**

Charlotte assigns her pupils homework on a weekly basis.

**Do you believe homework is beneficial?**

Charlotte says she is a bit unsure where she stands in terms of the homework debate, and she is probably somewhere in the middle. She follows the debate and continuously reflects over

her own practices. She is unsure about how beneficial homework is because it is very individual for each pupil. Charlotte states that she sees that homework can possibly be beneficial, but she is not convinced that it is a crucial part of learning English. She believes the pupils would still perform well without homework, but she gives homework as a supplement to their in-school learning to enhance their English input.

Charlotte says she also hopes that homework can help her pupils to think more critically and take responsibility for their own learning, but this needs to be emphasised at school to have an effect, it cannot be done through homework alone. She also points out that she believes homework is beneficial if it can help boost the pupils' confidence and mastery of the subject.

### **Does your school or you have a homework policy?**

Charlotte explains that her school has a homework plan where every teacher is expected to contribute. This means there is usually always homework, but the amount and type of homework vary. The teachers are occupied with not giving too much homework if there are other large assignments or tests the pupils have to focus on. Usually to practice for the test, doing the assignment etc. are given as homework instead.

There is good collaboration at the school; however, the teachers rarely discuss or collaborate about homework. Homework decisions are made individually by each teacher. She reflects a bit around this and finds it strange that it is not up for more discussions since it is such a large and integrated part of the school and the pupils' lives.

### **Do you involve the pupils when assigning homework?**

Charlotte says the pupils are not involved in decisions regarding homework, but they are involved in class decisions. She states there is not enough time to always take their opinions into account, nevertheless, if they express concerns they are listened to. Charlotte also points out that she always works hard to do what she believes is best for her pupils.

### **Do you differentiate when assigning homework?**

Charlotte says the homework should be able to be done by everybody or divided into three levels: low, middle and high. The pupils decide for themselves what level they feel comfortable at working with.

### **Do you give feedback on homework?**

Charlotte usually checks if the pupils have done their homework in class. She walks around whilst they work with something else or have them raise their hand to check who has done their homework. Sometimes they also hand in their homework and get feedback. Charlotte admits she does not always check their homework or give them feedback, she instead tries to make her pupils responsible themselves by pointing out what they lose out on when they do not do their homework, or what they gain by doing it. By pointing out what they lose or gain they are made aware of the consequences of doing or not doing their homework. She sometimes; however, write their name down, as a consequence of not doing the homework. The pupils are aware that having their name put down too many times have consequences, for example; the parents will be notified.

**Research suggests that English input outside of school, for example through gaming, reading, films, and music have a positive correlation to pupils' level of English. Is it then necessary to give homework? What are your thoughts on this?**

Charlotte sees the value English input outside of school has for the pupils' oral skills. She points out that the English they are exposed to is not very academically oriented. Meaning that they benefit greatly from a more academically oriented English at school and as homework. She also points out that the type of English input the pupils are exposed to has a negative impact on their writing skills. Their written language is affected by their oral language, meaning they have many spelling mistakes, use many abbreviations and write quite informally.

**What is your impression of your pupils with regard to homework?**

Charlotte claims that most of her pupils do the homework most of the time and they are usually quite motivated. She has found that giving them homework that includes watching a film, series or similar enhances their motivation. She does not experience that her pupils rush through their homework or finish it right before the class starts, they take their homework seriously. She notes that her pupils sometimes seem stressed, but in a general way as most pupils do; however, not in relation to homework.

**Do you feel qualified to assign homework?**

When asked if Charlotte feels qualified or not to assign homework she exclaims: "yes and no!" She feels qualified enough to give homework as an extension to what has been done at school and as repetition, which is also her main focus. However, she wishes she had more



knowledge to expand the types of homework she gives and vary the homework to a larger extent. Even if she tries to give varied homework this is a challenge after a while. She points out that she has never learned anywhere or come across information on what good homework consists of or how to give good homework.

### **Do you want to add anything?**

Charlotte points out an interesting observation: She presents a wish for the English subject to get more space in the Norwegian curriculum because the English subject includes so much: listening, reading, writing, grammar, historical and cultural content etc. There is much to cover with too little time to do it properly. Charlotte also points out that even with the limited number of hours of English a week the pupils are almost expected to have the same amount of knowledge in English as they do in Norwegian (which is the native language of the majority). She believes this is wrong, for her English is a foreign language, and should not be treated as a native language.

## **Interview D: Daniel**

### **What are your main reasons for giving homework?**

Daniel states that his main reason for giving homework is to extend the work the pupils do at school. Homework is used as a way to repeat what they have covered in class, with the hope that the pupils will to a larger extent remember what they have just gone through or learn a bit more from it. Daniel also points out that he feels like there are certain expectations from the school and parents about giving the pupils homework. He says it is not written anywhere explicitly or expressed often, it is just a feeling he has that is hard to explain. It probably stems somewhat from homework being such a common part of teachers and pupils' school lives and it has "always" been there.

### **What type of homework do you usually give?**

Daniel again underlines that he usually focuses on repetitive homework, but the homework can sometimes be in preparation for the next class. If he does this he says the homework should not be too challenging. He does not assign homework that requires help from parents, because he realise that the ability and capability of parents to assist with homework vary to a large extent.

Daniel claims he is a strong believer of reading and the many benefits reading has. He

points out that reading is great for strengthening writing skills, vocabulary, imagination etc. He often let the pupils choose books in the library or articles and short stories that he makes accessible to them online. He believes giving them choice increases their motivation. Reading is a big part of both in class-teaching and their homework. They are often asked to read as homework, sometimes with different types of expectations or assignments that go along with the reading. These assignments can, for example, consist of writing a short summary, expectations of talking about it in class, record the answer and so on.

Homework can also be about watching a video, listen to a recording or read or find news and current events. It all depends on the topic they are working on in class, but Daniel points out that even though he focuses on reading, and reading for fun, not only to retain information, he also tries to vary the homework as much as possible. He admits this can be challenging, but he thinks it is important to sometimes think through the practices you are used to and evaluate them. He says he is not, for example, a fan of giving reading from the textbook with reading comprehension questions. This is a common type of homework across subjects and levels, and he believes the pupils must be tired of this type of homework because they have been doing it quite often their whole school careers.

### **How often do you give homework?**

Daniel usually assigns homework on a weekly basis.

### **Do you believe homework is beneficial?**

Daniel hopes that the positive emphasis he continuously put on reading and also giving the pupils freedom in the sense as of how much and what to read, can foster positive reading experiences and increase his pupils' joy of reading.

He is a bit unsure whether other skills such as learning to take responsibility, explore different study habits etc. can emerge from homework alone, but he tries to foster those skills at school and hope his pupils are able to transfer them to new situations; however, they are not enforced as a part of homework. Daniel says he believes the benefits of homework is very individual, some pupils learn to take responsibility and manage their time when they do their homework; however, some pupils probably do not learn this to a large extent from homework.

### **Does your school or you have a homework policy?**

Daniel says his school does not really have a set policy in the sense that they have requirements for the amount of homework and how much time the pupils are expected to

spend on homework. However, he is under the impression that most teachers work consciously on not overburdening their pupils and there is also a general agreement to ease the homework load when the pupils have large assignments or tests. They also try to limit these assignments as well, the goal is not to have more than two, maximum three tests or similar per week. This is discussed a fair bit between the colleagues at the school, but Daniel points out there is particularly little discussions about homework and most homework decisions are made individually.

According to Daniel, the school has a policy in the form of a weekly plan with information to the pupils and their parents. This includes information about topics and goals in each subject, homework and tests/assignments. The plan also includes additional information if there is anything happening in the particular week. The goal of the plan is to help to help both pupils and parents to structure their week to make sure the pupils hopefully learn what they are expected to.

### **Do you involve the pupils when assigning homework?**

Daniel explains that he always talks to his pupils and take their considerations into account when it comes to large parts of their school lives, but they are usually not involved in the homework assignment decisions. Daniel underlines that they are; however, often given choice. He explains that he often lets them choose what to read, how much to read and how to sometimes hand in the given assignment. He says he usually require them to read at least 10 to 15 minutes a week, but he encourages them to read more, and many of his pupils do. Daniel points out that there is not enough time or energy to involve the pupils in a large amount when assigning homework. He tries to give them autonomy in class.

### **Do you differentiate when assigning homework?**

Daniel differentiates in the sense that he gives his pupils choices within the homework assignment and encourage them to choose the options they feel comfortable with and enjoy. He also tries to challenge them and sometimes help with suggestions for pupils who struggle with making their own decisions or for some other reason need assistance to make the homework more manageable, more challenging and so on. Daniel explains it is not possible to differentiate in the sense that all of the pupils get individual homework all of the time.

Daniel continues to say that since he is such a big fan of reading the pupils levels are of course taken into account. He helps many of them to find literature that is suitable for them. He also provides short texts that are divided into different levels. He encourages the pupils who struggle to read, to read whilst listening to a recording of the text. He explains that

he uses OneNote immersive reader, a programme where you can enlarge texts, get it read out loud, help with grammar and so on, which really helps many of his pupils. He loves this programme and he is all for using the technology that is accessible to him.

### **Do you give feedback on homework?**

Daniel says he gives feedback, but he also admits that it is a challenge to do so all the time. He gives feedback in different ways depending on the homework. He explains it is usually like this: if they are asked to hand in something written Daniel usually approve or not approve the hand in through the online programme they hand it in through. He looks quickly through what they have handed in and points out that he talks to pupils if he has any concerns or gives them a bit of extra appraisal or similar. Daniel also particularly often go around in class and talk to each of the pupils and have a look at what they have done and provide them with feedback this way. Sometimes the pupils are put in pairs or groups to discuss what they have read or similar whilst he walks around. This way they can give feedback to each other and Daniel can also provide feedback. Daniel points out that he thinks feedback is important because without feedback the pupils will not grow and learn as much as possible and then homework loses its value.

### **Research suggests that English input outside of school, for example through gaming, reading, films, and music have a positive correlation to pupils' level of English. Is it then necessary to give homework? What are your thoughts on this?**

Daniel makes it clear that his pupils are quite advanced orally. He believes this has much to do with gaming, music, watching series and films. His pupils do; however, struggle a bit more when it comes to writing, especially with sentence structure and they use too much slang and abbreviations. Their vocabularies are generally quite advanced.

Daniel acknowledges the value the English input outside of school has for Norwegian pupils; however, he believes it is necessary to focus on other parts of their English training too, such as reading, writing, grammar rules and so on, which they are not as exposed to on their spare time. This needs to be a focus both at school and through homework. Daniel reflects around his belief that many teachers, including himself, could have used this exposure to English in a more beneficial way, for example, use gaming as homework or similar. This is something he wishes to explore more.

### **What is your impression of your pupils with regard to homework?**

Daniel again points out that he has worked very hard on fostering a positive reading environment in his class and many of his pupils are motivated and enjoy homework that includes reading, and discussions around what they have read. He also claims they are highly motivated and engaged when they get to watch videos or talk about interesting current events and news. Daniel says there are always some pupils who do not do their homework for some reason or another and in those cases, he tries to talk to his pupils and figure out why, if anything can and needs to be changed in order to help them.

Daniel claims his pupils seem stressed in a general sense because there is pressure on them, both from themselves, their parents, teachers, and society in general. They are for example much more stressed and occupied with what they should do for the rest of their lives in terms of education, career, money and similar than you would hope and expect a young 14-year-old person to be. The homework; however, does not seem to Daniel to be a major contributor to their stress. He points out that they are of course more stressed about tests and assignments, and in those cases the teachers ease up the homework load significantly or make the test or assignment part of the homework in an attempt to help battle some of this stress.

### **Do you feel qualified to assign homework?**

To this question, Daniel takes a moment to think before he exclaims: “yes and no”. He says he has researched enough about pedagogy and education to say that he does feel qualified to give homework in that sense, but he also points out that he has had no formal education or rarely any discussions with other teachers about what constitutes a good homework and so on. Daniel explains that he thinks many of the decisions in the school day are made because they are common sense and you know they work from experience and as a teacher you always try to do what is best for your pupils. Nevertheless, Daniel claimed that it would be great with easier access to research on homework.

### **Do you want to add anything?**

Daniel felt like he had said everything he wanted to and did not want to add anything towards the end of the interview.

## **Interview E: Eric**

### **What are your main reasons for giving homework?**

Eric explains that his main reason for giving homework is because home and parents have a big responsibility for their children's education in Norway. He sees homework as a good way to engage parents, but also to keep them informed. He says he realises that the society is continuously changing and the ability for parents to help is changing, and this should possibly be looked more into. He explains that the content might be harder for parents to help with nowadays. He claimed that even if some parents are not able to assist their children, this is not a good enough reason to stop giving homework. Eric says; however, that homework should mainly consist of repetition and both the pupils and parents should be able to do the assigned homework, but to varying degrees. Eric says he sometimes let his pupils start doing their homework in class to help with clarifying what they are supposed to do and therefore also avoid misunderstandings that could have appeared at home.

Eric explains that he tries not to give too much homework with the goal of not loading too much on the pupils and their parents. He also believes most pupils and their parents do not use too much energy and time on the homework anyway. Eric says that he was really pro-homework before, now he is more moderate in his views. There should not be too much homework because homework loses its value if it only adds to stress.

### **What type of homework do you usually give?**

Eric is a fan of giving homework that consists of reading with follow-up questions to check for understanding. Most of the homework is repetition of what they have worked on in class. He sometimes gives grammar exercises as homework; however, these would again be considered as repetition. He expresses a wish to give more glossary and vocabulary training because he believes this is beneficial. Eric also greatly believes in helping his pupils to learn to tie information together and use already existing knowledge and "schemes" to work on and learn new information and skills.

### **How often do you give homework?**

The pupils are usually given homework weekly, but if they have bigger assignments, tests or evaluations they do not get homework in addition.

### **Do you believe homework is beneficial?**

Eric believes homework is incredibly beneficial to learn and remember facts and that it can improve achievement. He is unsure if there are non-instructional benefits of homework. He thinks it is hard to say if his pupils actually learn more at home than what they already learned

at school. He believes that the older the pupils get they can learn to take responsibility, time management, and other non-instructional benefits by homework to a larger extent. Eric points out that this probably varies greatly from pupil to pupil.

### **Does your school or you have a homework policy?**

Eric explains that the teachers usually work in teams when deciding on homework, meaning that the main responsibility for the homework assignments shifts between them. The teacher who is responsible for assigning the homework provides this to the other teachers and then they can be adapted individually by each teacher if needed. The homework is part of a two-week plan that informs both pupils and parents about what goes on at school during these two weeks. Eric says the teachers also try not to give more than two big tests or assignments each week. The goal is not to overburden the pupils.

### **Do you involve the pupils when assigning homework?**

Eric states that he does not involve his pupils in any decisions about homework. He does not believe they are mature enough for this yet. They are; however, sometimes given different choices within the assigned homework. Choices are especially given within larger assignments and evaluations.

### **Do you differentiate when assigning homework?**

Eric differentiates for the pupils who have been assigned an “individual teaching plan”. Besides those pupils, Eric says that since most of his homework is repetition and designed to be done by the majority of his pupils, he usually gives the same homework to everyone.

### **Do you give feedback on homework?**

To the question of providing feedback and checking if the homework is completed, Eric answers whether he checks and/ or gives feedback to the homework varies. He says that if his pupils hand in their homework through the school’s online platform he usually provides a few sentences as feedback. Sometimes he just approves it or disapproves the hand-in. Eric explains that he often checks the homework by going through it on the board together with his pupils in class. He sometimes just asks if there is anyone who has not done their homework. He explains that this puts the pupils on the spot, and he hopes that the pupils who have not done their homework realises how valuable it is for them to do it, and also so that they can

contribute in class and avoid this uncomfortable “on the spot- situation”. He says it is hard to say how often he checks and give feedback to the homework because it varies greatly.

**Research suggests that English input outside of school, for example through gaming, reading, films, and music have a positive correlation to pupils’ level of English. Is it then necessary to give homework? What are your thoughts on this?**

Eric acknowledges that his pupils are exposed to English input outside of school, and because of gaming, listening to music and watching films the pupils are often quite advanced orally. However, they lack good writing and reading skills. He points out that many of the pupils struggle with learning the basics, such as the pronoun “I” always needs to be written with a capital I. He believes that these skills can be improved by homework. Eric concludes that homework is necessary even if his pupils are exposed to a lot of English outside of the school hours.

**What is your impression of your pupils with regard to homework?**

Eric claims that his pupils are not stressed by homework and even if they are this is not clearly expressed by them. He believes that his pupils do not express being stressed because they usually do not have more than two tests and larger assignments each week. Eric states that he has pupils who struggle with motivation to do their homework, but his pupils are generally motivated and usually do their homework. The number of pupils who does not do their assigned homework is so small, Eric does not really view this as a major problem; however, he underlined that he tries to figure out what he can do for these pupils to help them.

**Do you feel qualified to assign homework?**

Eric feels qualified to assign homework in the sense that he has gained a large amount of experience as a pupil himself and as a teacher. He notes that he has not learned anything about homework through his education. He also points out that he is shaped by his workplace and what his colleagues do. According to Eric, they learn from each other, which he thinks is extremely valuable.

**Do you want to add anything?**

Eric felt like he had said everything he wanted to and did not want to add anything towards the end of the interview.



## **Interview F: Fiona**

### **What are your main reasons for giving homework?**

Fiona clearly states that she believes homework is positive. She thinks it is beneficial for the pupils to sit at home, silently, without disturbances, to work a bit deeper with the topic. There can be many disturbances at school and this is not the best work environment for all of her pupils.

### **What type of homework do you usually give?**

Fiona makes a point of giving varied exercises and her pupils work with everything from grammar, to writing, reading, vocabulary and so on. She also arranges what she calls a “small talk” every week. This “small talk” is included as a part of their weekly workplan at school, but many of the pupils usually do this as homework as well. The assignment varies, but it usually involves that the pupils are asked to find an English news article or something similar connected to the topic they work on in class, with the expectation of having them present what they found, and their own reflections, in their assigned group by the end of the week. The class is divided into two groups in one of the English sessions every week. Meaning that half of the class does the “Small talk” with Fiona and the other half does something different with someone else, and then they rotate on this arrangement. The decision to divide the class was made to make sure the pupils felt more secure and comfortable speaking English because they are more insecure and afraid when they have to do it in front of the whole class.

When they work on the “Small talk”, Fiona divides the class into two groups where the pupils present their news and talk to each other. They have two sessions of these “talks”. In the first session the pupils are allowed to use their notes, and in the second session they are expected to talk about what they found without notes. This type of homework gives them practice in looking up information at home, reading news, process it and learn on their own. By giving a short summary to their fellow pupils they also gain valuable practice in speaking English. They also learn much from each other.

Fiona also explains that there is many creative ways to learn using the internet and technology and she points out that her pupils are especially fond of using Quizlet.

### **How often do you give homework?**

The pupils have a weekly workplan.

**Do you believe homework is beneficial?**

Fiona believes homework can be beneficial to foster certain skills such as time management, taking responsibility and critical thinking to some degree. She says she remembers learning a lot from her own homework whilst growing up. She makes a point of being aware that pupils are different with different learning styles, meaning that what they can learn or not from homework varies greatly. She, therefore, makes a point of continuously making her pupils aware of time management and other important skills in class. She also focuses on helping them learn to take responsibility for their own learning. She explains that this is; however, a process with hard work. She also points out that she has pupils who do “homework” voluntarily at home. These are the pupils with the best results. Fiona, therefore, concludes that having pupils work through the material in their spare time can be particularly beneficial.

**Does your school or you have a homework policy?**

Fiona talks about a new policy that some of the teachers, including herself, have agreed upon. This semester some of the teachers in several subjects in 9<sup>th</sup> grade have agreed to collaborate on a new project where they work with what would previously have been homework at school instead of at home. This decision was made because of feedback from both parents and pupils that they felt burdened by too much homework.

The new policy consists of a weekly plan with information to parents and pupils that they can access online. This plan includes what they’re working on, competence aims, specific details to remember and “what the pupils should be finished with by the end of the week”. If the pupils do not finish what is on the plan whilst they have the opportunity to do so in class, they will have to do it at home. This means that the pupils who work better in their home environment have the opportunity to do so. The new plan is also an incentive for pupils to actually do what they are supposed to at school, so they do not have to use their spare time on it.

**Do you involve the pupils when assigning homework?**

Fiona says that her pupils do not really have many inferences to the week plan, but if they do express wishes or concerns, she listens to them and take them into account if possible. She is under the impression that the pupils enjoy having the work plan and the fact that the teacher is in control. This means that they do not directly get to join in on the decisions when it comes to homework; however, they are indirectly taken into account. Fiona explains that her aim is always to do what she believes is best for her pupils.

**Do you differentiate when assigning homework?**

The weekly plans are differentiated, but the majority of the pupils follow the same plan. The majority of the pupils are at the same level and since they usually get to work on the plan during school hours she is able to assist her pupils, and this limits the need for much individual differentiation.

**Do you give feedback on homework?**

When her pupils work in class, Fiona walks around and offer help and guidance, in addition to checking that the work is being done. She usually also goes through the work with everyone together in class. She says she always gives comments and give feedback on the “small talk” they do every week.

**Research suggests that English input outside of school, for example through gaming, reading, films, and music have a positive correlation to pupils’ level of English. Is it then necessary to give homework? What are your thoughts on this?**

Fiona’s pupils are quite good at speaking English, but she feels they especially need more writing. This is not something they are exposed to outside of school and she, therefore, needs to put emphasis on this at school. Writing, grammar and sentence structure are a big part of the weekly work plan.

**What is your impression of your pupils with regards to homework?**

Fiona states that after the new type of plan that focuses on doing more at school and less at home, the pupils have become much more effective in class and working harder. One reason for this is because they do not want to do it at home. Fiona points out they are often reminded that they need to work thoroughly, and she talks with them to make sure they understand and learn from the different assignments.

The feedback from both pupils and parents are that they are less stressed now than before the new week plan was implemented, and this weekly plan leaves more time to revise for different assignments and tests. Fiona says she believes that pupils are busier and stressed today, without really knowing why. She has noted that they are less stressed and happier with the reduced homework load, which has been a consequence of the new workplan.

Fiona points out that the plan is a challenge for her because she feels like she does not have enough time to

go properly through different themes and topics because there needs to be time for the pupils to work on the exercises that would previously have been given as homework. She says she is working on balancing this better.

**Do you feel qualified to assign homework?**

Fiona answers promptly that she feels qualified to assign homework. She has not had any formal education about homework, she has; however, many years of experience behind her. She points out that she closely follows the debate surrounding homework. She sees the different sides of the debate, especially since she has experienced the benefits and challenges with and without homework. Fiona points out that the different experiences she has and the knowledge of the homework debate is the major reasons she feels qualified to assign homework.

**Do you want to add anything?**

Fiona says she does not feel the need to add anything. She; however, once again adds that she follows the debate surrounding homework and she says she finds it very interesting.

## Appendix 3 – Quotes from the interviews

Original quote and translation.

Written down in order of occurrence.

### **Andrew**

#### *Quote 1 Benefits of Homework*

“Det der er et vanskelig spørsmål å svare på. Jeg er usikker på hvor nyttig lekser er, det varierer jo så veldig fra elev til elev.”

“That is a really hard question to answer, I am unsure of how beneficial it is, because it probably varies so much from pupil to pupil” (my translation).

#### *Quote 2 Differentiation*

“Jeg differensierer sikkert bare for rundt 5% av elevene mine.”

“I probably only differentiate for about 5% of my pupils” (my translation).

#### *Quote 3 Pupil's motivation*

“Det er “kult” å gjøre lekser og det er derfor også “ukult” å ikke gjøre leksene.”

“It is “cool” to do the homework assignments and it is, therefore, “uncool” not to do the homework” (my translation).

#### *Quote 4 Qualification to assign homework*

“Nei, jeg føler meg faktisk ikke kvalifisert i det hele tatt.”

“No, I do not feel qualified at all” (my translation).

### **Brenda**

#### *Quote 1 Homework assignments*

“Elevene mine er gamle nok til å ta ansvar for leksene selv.”

“My pupils are old enough to take responsibility for their own homework” (my translation).

*Quote 2 Benefits of homework*

“Jeg tenker at lekser kan være god øving til fremtiden, ikke sant? For senere studier og lignende. Jeg tror også at lekser til en viss grad kan hjelpe elever å utvikle gode studie teknikker.”

“Homework can be good practice to prepare for the future, you know, for later studies and similar. I also think homework to some extent can help pupils develop good study techniques” (my translation).

*Quote 3 Homework policies*

“Lærerne er enige om om retningslinjer rundt lekser som vi alle tror er nyttige for elevene våre.”

“The teachers have agreed upon a homework policy that they believe benefits our pupils” (my translation).

*Quote 4 Pupil involvement*

“Nei, jeg må inrømme at elevene er veldig lite inkludert når det gjelder avgjørelser rundt lekser.”

“No, I must admit they are not very included when it comes to homework decisions” (my translation).

*Quote 5 Feedback*

“Jeg sjekker alltid om leksene er gjort”

“I *always* check the homework” (my translation).

*Quote 6 English input outside of school*

“Lekser er viktig, fordi leker kan hjelpe elevene å øve på å skrive, struktur, jobbe med temaer for eksamen og lignende.”

“Homework is important to help the pupils practice their writing skills, use appropriate structure, work on themes for the exams and so on” (my translation).

#### *Quote 7 Stress*

“Jeg har alltid gitt elevene mine lekser, og jeg gir mye mindre lekser nå enn jeg gjorde før, men stresset elever opplever har helt klart økt.”

“I have always assigned homework, and I assign less homework now than before, but the amount of stress has definitely increased” (my translation).

### **Charlotte**

#### *Quote 1 Homework assignments*

“Jeg gir ikke lekser bare for å holde elevene mine opptatt, det er jo ikke noe vits i det. Det må være en rød tråd gjennom leksene og hva som foregår i timene.”

“I do not give my pupils homework just to keep them busy, there is no point in that. There has to be a red thread between the homework assignment and what goes on in class” (my translation).

#### *Quote 2 Benefits of homework*

“Jeg er litt usikker på hvor nyttig lekser faktisk er, for å være helt ærlig. Fordi det er nok veldig individuelt for hver enkelt elev.”

“I am a bit unsure about how beneficial homework is, to be honest, because it is probably very individual for each pupil” (my translation).

#### *Quote 3 Pupil involvement*

“Det er rett og slett ikke nok tid til å alltid ta hensyn til elevenes meninger.”

“There is simply not enough time to always check for the pupils’ opinions” (my translation).

*Quote 4 English input outside of school*

“Ja! Jeg ser helt klart verdien Engelsk utenfor skolen har for elevene mine. Spesielt for det muntlige språket deres.”

“Yes! I definitely see the value English input outside of school has for my pupils. Especially their oral skills” (my translation).

*Quote 5 Qualification*

“Ja og nei (...)”

“Yes and no” (my translation).

**Daniel**

*Conducted the interview in English*

*Quote 1 Homework assignments*

“Just a feeling I have, it is hard to explain, you know? I mean there are no rules or similar written down or expressed anywhere regarding homework, but I still feel obliged to assign homework.”

*Quote 2 Type of homework assignments*

“Assigning your pupils reading-comprehension questions from the textbook is really common across subjects and levels. The pupils must be so tired of this type of homework, don’t you think?”

*Quote 3 Benefits of Homework*

“I think homework is beneficial in the sense that it fosters positive reading experiences and increases the pupils’ joy of reading.”

*Quote 4 Homework policies*



“I think most of the teachers are particularly occupied with not overburdening their pupils with homework. Many of us ease up on the load of homework when the pupils have tests or large assignments and so on.”

*Quote 5 Pupil involvement*

“I often let my pupils choose themselves what to read, how much, and sometimes in what way they want to hand in their assignments, if there are any.”

*Quote 6 Differentiation*

“In my opinion, giving my pupils the ability to choose within many of the homework assignments is also a way to differentiate.”

*Quote 6 Feedback*

“I must admit it can be really challenging to always check if the homework is done, and especially to always give feedback, but it is so important.”

*Quote 7 feedback*

“I usually “approves or not” the homework my pupils hand in through the online platform we use.”

*Quote 8 Stress*

“My pupils are very occupied with their future. They often worry about money, career, education and similar. I think they are more occupied and stressed with this than you would expect and hope a young 14-year-old person to be. This is worrying. But, to answer your question, no, they do not really seem stressed because of homework.”

*Quote 9 Qualification*

“Yes and no,”

*Quote 10 Qualification*

“Many decisions made during a school day are made because they are common sense, you know they work from experience”

## **Eric**

### *Quote 1 Homework assignments*

“Hvis noen foreldre ikke har mulighet til å hjelpe med lekser, uansett grunn, så syntes jeg ikke dette er god nok grunn til å slutte å gi lekser.”

“Even if some parents are unable to assist with homework, for whatever reason, this is not a good enough reason to stop giving homework” (my translation).

### *Quote 2 Homework assignments*

“Jeg tror ikke så mange av elevene eller deres foreldre bruker utrolig mye tid på lekser uansett.”

“I honestly do not believe that most pupils or their parents spend a considerable amount of time on homework anyway” (my translation).

### *Quote 3 Pupil involvement*

“Nei, jeg involverer ikke elevene mine i avgjørelser om lekser.”

“No, I do not really involve my pupils in homework decisions” (my translation).

### *Quote 4 Motivation*

“Selvfølgelig har jeg elever som sliter med å finne motivasjon til å gjøre leksene, men stort sett så gjør flertallet leksene sine og de virker ganske motiverte.”

“Of course I have pupils who struggle to find the motivation to do their homework, but generally, the majority of my pupils appear to be quite motivated and they usually do their assigned homework” (my translation).

## **Fiona**

### Quote 1 Homework assignments

“Det er mer eller mindre opp til elevene selv om de vil og kan gjøre leksene ferdig på skolen eller om de må gjøre dem hjemme.”

“It is more or less up to the pupils if they want to and are able to finish it at school or do the work at home” (my translation).

#### *Quote 2 Types of homework*

“Jeg liker veldig godt å gi denne typen lekse. Elevene får øvd seg på å finne informasjon, lese nyheter – som er kjempe viktig! Også må de bearbeide informasjonen og lære på egen hand.”

“I really enjoy giving these types of exercises as homework! The pupils get to practice looking up information, reading news, which is really important, process it and learn on their own” (my translation).

#### *Quote 3 Homework policies*

“(…) planen sier rett og slett hva elevene skal være ferdig med i slutten av uken.”

“(…) what the pupils should be finished with by the end of the week” (my translation).

#### *Quote 4 Pupil involvement*

“Elevene mine har ikke så mye å si om ukeplanen. Hvis de kommer med ønsker eller bekymringer så tar jeg høyde for disse. Men jeg tror elevene trives med at jeg har kontroll på ukeplanen.”

“My pupils do not really have a lot of inferences to the week plan. If they express any wishes or concerns, I try to take these into account when possible. I think the pupils enjoy that I am in control of the week plan” (my translation).

#### *Quote 5 Motivation*

“Elevene er nok mye mer effective på skolen nå, siden de ikke har lyst å gjøre mer enn nødvendig hjemme, men jeg gjør et nummer ut av å ofte minne dem på at de må jobbe nøye med ukeplanen.”

“The pupils are probably a lot more effective because they do not want to do more than necessary at home, but I do make sure to often remind them to work thoroughly with the plan” (my translation).

*Quote 6 Qualification*

“Ja, jeg føler meg veldig kvalifisert til å gi lekser! I alle fag jeg underviser i.”

“Yes, I do feel qualified to assign homework, in every subject I teach” (my translation).

## Appendix 4 – Consent form

### **Research project “*English teachers homework practices in Norwegian lower secondary schools*”**

The aims of this research are to shed light on English teachers’ practices, attitudes, and considerations when it comes to homework in Norwegian lower secondary schools. In this paper, you will find information about the aims of the project and what your participation will entail.

#### **Aim**

This research project is a master thesis which aims to examine English teachers’ practices, attitudes, and considerations when assigning homework in Norwegian lower secondary schools. The research method consists of interviews with different English teachers and the data collected will be analysed and connected to current research in the field.

#### **Responsibility for the project**

This Master’s thesis will be written by student Iren Karlsson, for the University of Stavanger, department of culture and language. The supervisor of this project is Kjetil Vikhamar Thengs.

#### **What does participation entail?**

The method of this research is a semi-structured interview with about 10 questions. The interview is estimated to last about 30 minutes. All the questions will be related to homework practices, your thoughts, ideas and attitudes towards homework in English. The interview will be recorded and stored electronically. It is up to you if you would like the interview to be in Norwegian or English.

#### **Participation is voluntary**

It is voluntary to participate in the project and you can withdraw your consent at any time, without any specific reason. All the information collected will be anonymized. There will not be any negative consequences if you decide not to participate or want to withdraw at a later point in time.

## **Privacy**

The information collected about you will only be used as described in this paper. All the information will be used confidentially and in regulation with “personvernregverket”. The information collected will be anonymized from the very start and be stored at a password-locked computer that only the researcher has access too. The data will be deleted at the end of the project, in May 2019. It will not be possible to trace the information back to you in the thesis paper.

## **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

## **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent. Based on an agreement with *The University of Stavanger*, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

## **Where can I find out more?**

If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor

Iren Karlsson

91666039

i.karlsson@stud.uis.no

Kjetil Vikhamar Thengs

51831137

Kjetil.v.thengs@uis.no

If you have questions about the project or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email:  
([personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

I have received and understood the information about the project «English teachers homework practices in Norwegian lower secondary schools».

I agree to participate in an interview.

I agree to my information being used in the project until it ends in May 2019.

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(Signed by participant, date)

## Appendix 5 – NSD approval

Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger



### **NSD sin vurdering**

#### **Prosjekttittel**

English teachers homework practices in Norwegian lower secondary schools

#### **Referansenummer**

682717

#### **Registrert**

24.09.2018 av Iren Karlsson - I.Karlsson@stud.uis.no

#### **Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon**

Universitetet i Stavanger / Fakultet for utdanningsvitenskap og humaniora / Institutt for kultur- og språkvitenskap

#### **Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)**

Kjetil Vikhamar Thengs, kjetil.v.thengs@uis.no, tlf: 51831137

#### **Type prosjekt**

Studentprosjekt, masterstudium

#### **Kontaktinformasjon, student**

Iren Karlsson, iren.93@hotmail.com, tlf: 91666039

#### **Prosjektperiode**

01.10.2018 - 03.05.2019

#### **Status**

18.11.2018 - Vurdert

#### **Vurdering (1)**



## **18.11.2018 - Vurdert**

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg 18.11.2018. Behandlingen kan starte.

### **MELD ENDRINGER**

Dersom behandlingen av personopplysninger endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. På våre nettsider informerer vi om hvilke endringer som må meldes. Vent på svar før endringer gjennomføres.

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### **TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET**

Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 3.5.2019.

### **LOVLIG GRUNNLAG**

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte og deres foreldre til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake. Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a.

### **PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER**

NSD finner at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke behandles til nye, uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

### **DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER**

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

### **FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER**

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

#### OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare status på behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Lasse Raa

Tlf. personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

<https://meldeskjema.nsd.no/vurdering/5ba09b28-34b9-43e2-8b6f-934c55a2aa8d> 2/2