State of the art: English didactics in Norway

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INTRODUCTION
This chapter is our effort to synthesise the status of knowledge within what we will call “the field of English didactics in Norway”. We have examined 30 years of doctoral work in Norway, building our synthesis on accumulated analyses of policies related to the English subject since 1885 and practices of teaching and learning English since 1988, thus capturing the major trends related to English in Norwegian school. This body of doctoral research includes analyses of teachers, student teachers, students, and documents – mostly in the Norwegian context of teaching and learning English in school and in teacher education, but also comparative analyses with users of English outside Norway.

By presenting accumulated knowledge developed from this doctoral work and discussing how this research has formed the distinctiveness of English didactics as a separate research field in Norway, we bring to light issues that traverse individual studies and that can inform English teaching practices and curriculum development. Finally, by presenting a synthesis of what we now know from the past 30 years of doctoral research related to the teaching and learning of English in the Norwegian educational context, we are also in a position to discuss what we do not know, and suggest directions for a research agenda for the coming decades of English didactics research.
DEMARCATING THE FIELD OF ENGLISH DIDACTICS IN NORWAY

English didactics has existed as a component of teacher education programmes in Norway from the 1970s (Gundem, 2008), and developed as an academic discipline in higher education institutions from the 1980s – the same decade as the first doctoral theses in the field. Since then, English didactics has developed as an autonomous field of research, with doctoral work, MA theses, and a vast number of studies conducted by researchers within the field every year. We use the term “English didactics” in the same sense as the Norwegian term “Engelsk fagdidaktikk”, i.e. referring to the field of study related to the teaching (and learning) of English, including theory and practical applications (Gundem, 2008; Simensen, 2018). English didactics is an applied discipline, and as such it is relevant for both research and practice (Gundem, 2008). The main characteristic of English didactic research in Norway is thus that it contributes knowledge that is useful for the teaching of English in Norway.

In English-speaking countries, the term “didactics” has traditionally been associated with an authoritative teaching style and moral education, and has thus been less widely used (Hamilton, 1999; Gundem, 2008). However, the negative associations to the term “didactics” seem to have receded somewhat, and irrespective of such associations, the term has long been widely used in the Nordic countries as well as in continental Europe. Although few authors in this edited volume have used the term English didactics in their discussions of their own research – perhaps due to previous negative associations or in order to associate with existing discourses – we choose to use the term here and elsewhere. We believe a common denomination will strengthen the impression of English didactics as that of an autonomous field of research. Furthermore, English didactics is already commonplace in higher education, particularly in teacher education, and defining our research as precisely that demonstrates its relevance in this context.

The theory of what is relevant for English teaching is often related to beliefs about what language is and, consequently, how languages are best learnt (Jaspers, 2010; Rindal, 2014; Simensen, 2018). Such beliefs are often developed in other academic disciplines such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology and psycholinguistics (what Simensen, 1988, refers to as parent disciplines). Since such beliefs develop over time, so does the theory and research that informs English teaching practices, which makes it interesting to see how the thematic focus and perspectives have developed over the course of 30 years of doctoral research. While this chapter attempts to synthesise the knowledge that we have gained access to throughout these 30 years in order to position the state of the art of English didactics today, the field will naturally continue to develop in the years to come.
English didactic research in Norway continues to draw on theory related to language learning, language development and language use from various academic disciplines, applying these in investigations related to English as a school subject. Several of the authors who have revisited their doctoral research in this edited volume emphasise that their study is interdisciplinary – that they combine theory and perspectives from different academic fields in order to handle their objects of inquiry. Interdisciplinarity, it seems, is a characteristic of English didactic research. Still, in 30 years of doctoral research an understanding of English didactics in Norway has developed as an academic field in its own right, which we believe becomes apparent in this edited volume.

THE SCOPE OF INQUIRY IN ENGLISH DIDACTICS RESEARCH

Providing an overview of the English didactics field in Norway, Figure 20.1 illustrates how the doctoral research in this field has grown steadily over the past 30 years. Whereas there were only three studies in the first decade (1988–1997), four were written in the second (1998–2007), and twelve in the third (2008–2017), with 2016 as the peak year.

In these 30 years, three participant groups – teachers, students, and student teachers – have each had their turn as the leading scope of inquiry within English didactics. Since the late 1990s, students have been the primary object of this research, both as the sole object of analysis (Dahl, 2014; Hellekjær, 2005; Larsen, 2009;
Rindal, 2013; Wold, 2017), in the interface between students and teachers (Brevik, 2015; Burner, 2016; Horverak, 2016; A. Lund, 2003; Stuvland, 2016), and between students and student teachers (Wiland, 2007). These doctoral studies have developed knowledge about how primary and secondary school students develop as English speakers, listeners, readers, and writers, both individually and collaboratively. Furthermore, addressing a dual object of inquiry, the latter groups of studies have produced knowledge about students’ and student teachers’ comparative experiences in English, as well as students’ and teachers’ comparative views on processes of teaching and learning in the English classroom.

A second scope of inquiry in English didactics research is, of course, the teacher, who somewhat surprisingly did not occur as an object of this research until the 2000s (A. Lund, 2003). Then, it took almost ten years until what seems to have been a more general shift within the English didactics field towards studying the teaching of English, both inside the English classroom, and in the context of English teachers’ professional development (Brevik, 2015; Burner, 2016; Bøhn, 2016; Coburn, 2016; Horverak, 2016). Together, these doctoral studies have addressed the perspectives of teachers and teaching in primary and secondary school.

A third, and less frequently chosen scope of inquiry concerns student teachers, who appeared on the English didactics scene in Norway in the late 1990s (Drew, 1997), then reappeared ten years later (Wiland, 2007), followed by Munden (2010), and most recently Røkenes (2016). Given that student teachers generally have limited experiences with teaching, it follows that researching student teachers’ learning is of relevance, both in and outside the teacher education context and teaching practices. These four doctoral studies offer insights into student teachers’ competencies relevant to the teaching and learning of English, including comparison of their learning with that of other student teachers and students of English as a first and second language.

This triad of student, teacher, and student teacher illustrates three of the primary objects of inquiry in English didactics research. Nonetheless, some researchers (R. Lund, 2007; Simensen, 1988; Skulstad, 1997) have added a fourth object of inquiry – documents (i.e. national English curricula, textbooks, and corporate reports) – that were prominent in shaping the English didactics field in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. These studies showed that it matters, for example, whether one is teaching English as prescribed in the audio-lingually inspired curriculum of 1974 (M74; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 1974) or as suggested in the communicative competence-based curriculum of 1997 (L97; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 1996), and argued the importance of developing English learners’ awareness of genre and context.
Among the revisited doctoral studies in this volume, several study more than one educational context. Most educational levels are studied equally often, although upper secondary school \((n = 8)\) slightly more often, followed by primary school \((n = 6)\), lower secondary school \((n = 5)\), and higher and teacher education \((n = 5)\). However, few of these studies \((n = 3)\) include vocational study programmes. Skulstad (2019) showed how English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses were often referred to as vocationally oriented courses, and in chapter 2 she emphasises how students may benefit from reading and producing material in English in “genres within a central professional domain related to their vocational studies” (p. 54). In line with this view, Brevik (2015) showed how vocational students emphasised the importance of personal interest in texts to develop reading comprehension. In contrast, however, Bøhn (2016) revealed that in the assessment of oral competence, teachers in vocational studies programmes put less emphasis on content in the oral exam situation than teachers in the general studies programmes did.

With the research that has been done over the past 30 years in mind, the revisited doctoral research has suggested that we need to do more research on all these objects of inquiry – students, teachers, student teachers, and documents – preferably on the interaction between these perspectives, participants or elements. Moreover, the comparatively few studies on vocational students indicate a particular need to study this level and educational context.

**RESEARCH DESIGN IN ENGLISH DIDACTICS**

Internationally, most research uses a quantitative research design. A seminal review by Alise and Teddlie (2010) documents that among 600 publications in 20 renowned international journals; the clear majority was quantitative (70%), with qualitative used second most frequently (19%), followed by mixed methods (11%). The review showed the same to be true within the field of education, with the majority of studies being quantitative (42%), followed by qualitative (34%), and mixed methods (24%). This situation is, however, not the case among the doctoral studies in English didactics covered in this volume, in which mixed methods is the dominant research design, and on which we elaborate below.

Experts have defined mixed-methods research in many different ways (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). There is agreement, however, that mixed-methods research involves an integration of qualitative and quantitative methods:
The investigator gathers both quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) data, integrates the two, and then draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data to understand research problems. (Creswell, 2015, p. 2, our emphasis)

Reviews further show that mixed-methods research is more likely to be used in applied disciplines, such as education, that value multiple perceptions (for example, from teachers, student teachers, and students), compared to more theoretically driven fields of research (Creamer, 2016). It might, therefore, not be all that surprising to find several mixed methods studies among the doctoral studies in English didactics in Norway. It is however, surprising to see the distribution, with a clear majority (74%) being labelled either as mixed-methods research (Brevik, 2015; Burner, 2016; Coburn, 2016; Horverak, 2016; Larsen, 2009; A. Lund, 2003; Rindal, 2013; Røkenes, 2016; Stuvland, 2016) or as a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Bøhn, 2016; Drew, 1997; R. Lund, 2007; Simensen, 1988; Wold, 2017). An additional few (16%) are framed as qualitative (Munden, 2010; Skulstad, 1997; Wiland, 2007), with fewest (10%) described as quantitative (Dahl, 2014; Hellekjær, 2005). The field of English didactics thus emerges as an applied field of research that mainly comprises mixed-methods research. This pattern emerges not only on the basis of the frequency of mixed-methods designs, but also on the chronological development, as all doctoral studies in English didactics since 2013 used mixed methods, except one.

Greene (2007) coined the expression “mixed methods way of thinking”, emphasising how the qualitative and quantitative components are brought together specifically to represent multiple perspectives:

A mixed methods way of thinking aspires to better understand complex social phenomenon by intentionally including multiple ways of knowing and valuing and by respectfully valuing differences. (Greene, 2007, p. 17)

The doctoral studies in this volume have reflected the multiple ways of knowing in Greene’s (2007) way of thinking. They all combined more than one type of data, data from more than one set of documents, data from more than one group of participants, or from different contexts. Indeed, the most common forms of data were self-reports, capturing the voices, opinions, and experiences of students, teachers, and student teachers through interviews, focus groups, surveys, narratives, and written responses to literature. In addition, more objective data sources were collected, such as documents, test results, and researcher field notes from in situ observations; contributing to the contextualisation of the participant voices.
We now turn from general scope and design to discuss various thematic trends in the field. By reviewing the 19 doctoral studies revisited in this volume, we have carefully examined the main themes of these contributions, as reflected in the topical sections. In addition to these main themes, each chapter has contributed with insights into other English didactic themes that run across several chapters. While we first present the main themes as presented in this volume, we then raise two of the cross-sectional themes towards the end of the chapter, based on their significance for the English school subject; specifically, assessment in English, and the status of English for students in Norwegian classrooms.

READING IN ENGLISH

Throughout the 30 years of doctoral research covered in this volume, encounters with texts in English have been highlighted across genres and contexts and with readers of all ages. One study examined the policies of graded readers in the 1980s (Simensen, 1988), another addressed students’ reading proficiency (Hellekjær, 2005), and two quite recent ones observed students and teachers in the English classroom; including their perspectives on reading comprehension instruction and strategy use (Brevik, 2015; Stuvland, 2016). Two additional studies related to culture and literature also dealt with reading to a considerable extent (Munden, 2010; Wiland, 2007). They examined students’ and student teachers’ cultural and aesthetic experiences with literature, providing valuable information about different ways of approaching texts. Together, these six studies emphasised the importance of carefully considering which texts to offer to students, and the activities and strategies inherent in textual encounters in English.

Two studies analysed reading material, with Simensen (1988) analysing criteria for publishing adapted readers, and Stuvland (2016) observing such material in use in the primary classroom. Both questioned the rationale for using adapted readers for differentiation purposes, and both found these to offer students language on their levels. In chapter 1, Simensen argues that it should be the teacher’s responsibility to choose reading material based on student needs. However, Stuvland (2016) found that teachers did not often use the differentiated texts based on students’ reading proficiency and comprehension. In chapter 11, Stuvland argues that reading materials should be selected to meet two functions: graded readers appropriate to students’ reading level can be used for practising reading skills and reading comprehension strategies, and other types of texts characterised by the communicative value of content can be used to foster a love of reading and literature.
Hellekjær (2005) and Brevik (2015) used standardised reading tests to identify English reading proficiency among students in Norwegian upper secondary school. Hellekjær (2005) used an international English reading test, and expressed concern since only a third of the students in regular English classes seemed to have the required English reading proficiency to be accepted into universities abroad. A decade later, Brevik (2015) used a national mapping test and compared students’ reading proficiency in Norwegian and English. She found that a small group of students read significantly better in English than in Norwegian, and that most students read almost equally well in English as they did in Norwegian. A final pattern arose in the two classroom observation studies (Brevik, 2015; Stuvland, 2016). Both observed the importance of offering a variety of authentic texts to students, capturing their experiences of the literature. In chapter 11, Stuvland states that primary school extensive reading, where students read for pleasure and for longer periods of time, is a strength for developing reading comprehension, while both Brevik (chapter 10) and Hellekjær (chapter 9) argue for the importance of allowing upper secondary students to choose challenging texts that they are interested in, and relating these to personal purposes for reading in English.

The studies suggest a need to distinguish clearly between reading proficiency (as measured in reading tests), reading comprehension (extracting and constructing meaning from text), and reading experience (affective involvement in texts) as different facets of reading in English. When readers fail to demonstrate reading proficiency, it is important to recognise this as one aspect of students’ reading skills only, not necessarily a lack of reading skills as such. Answering questions about a text, paraphrasing or summarizing key content, using textual information to apply to a new situation, or just enjoying the flow of a narrative, are very different reading activities. These studies showed that when readers failed to comprehend, using reading comprehension strategies might allow them to make the connections required to extract and construct meaning (Brevik, 2015; Stuvland, 2016). These are relevant issues to include in English didactics courses related to the teaching and assessment of reading English.

ENGLISH WRITING

The five doctoral studies on English writing were written almost 20 years apart, with two studies in the late 1990s (Drew, 1997; Skulstad, 1997) and three in recent years (Burner, 2016; Horverak, 2016; Wold, 2017). The studies represented aspects of rhetorical organisation (Skulstad, 1997) and analyses of written-language form (Drew, 1997; Wold, 2017). Furthermore, the studies addressed stu-
In addition to these five studies, another study related mainly to culture and literature also concerned English writing (Larsen, 2009) because the author examined the content of students’ written narratives and offered insights into the narrative preferences of lower secondary school students. Overall, the studies demonstrated the importance of giving students opportunities to write frequently, in different genres, and over several drafts.

The two earliest studies focused on characteristics of various written text genres; Skulstad (1997) analysed business reports, specifically in terms of their multimodal and textual aspects, and found these of special relevance for vocational students and ESP courses. In chapter 2, she suggests that genres be taught explicitly, particularly those relevant for vocational studies, at the same time warning against teaching genres mechanistically or instrumentally. Drew (1997) analysed student teachers’ perceived ability to teach various genres, and found that they considered themselves most competent to teach written descriptions, letters, notes and narratives. Both authors argue in this volume (chs. 2 and 3, respectively) for the importance of providing opportunities for students and student teachers of English to practise reading and writing numerous genres.

A second focus in Drew’s (1997) study concerned the analysis of student texts using a text corpus, similar to what Wold (2017) did 20 years later. Both analysed language forms in narratives, while Drew (1997) also analysed forms in literary appreciation texts. The texts were written by learners at various educational levels: primary and secondary school (Wold, 2017) as well as college and university (Drew, 1997). In chapter 6, Wold argues that students overuse the progressive –ing, and that –ing forms are used as tense forms, which she suggests should be investigated in further research.

In contrast to these studies on texts as finished products of English writing, two studies focused on the process of writing over time in the English classroom, in lower secondary (Burner, 2016) and in upper secondary school (Horverak, 2016). Both studies examined various voices and perspectives, combining student and/or teacher interviews and questionnaires with classroom observation over time. Furthermore, both studies observed how students’ texts developed on the basis of feedback from the English teacher or from peers. While Burner (2016) studied the use of portfolios as a tool for formative assessment during the writing process, Horverak (2016) placed such formative assessment within a linguistic and genre-pedagogic framing. Both conclude in this volume (chs. 5 and 6) by advocating the need for a more frequent and transpar-
ent focus on the writing process, including formative assessment procedures, in the English classroom.

Based on these studies, it seems future research could benefit from an enhanced focus on the content of writing and the link between students’ reading and writing, and particularly on how their preferences for texts and genres influence their own writing. This would be of interest not only to assess their writing competence as such, but also their development as English writers.

CULTURE AND LITERATURE

The doctoral theses that have studied culture and literature clearly reflect how culture is intertwined with language and literature, which is also why they are combined in the same section in this volume, as well as often treated together in the English compulsory school subject. Munden (2010) showed how students’ cultural backgrounds affected their reading experiences of literary texts, and Larsen (2009) demonstrated how cultural references were visible in written student narratives, and that students’ cultural formation (cf. Bildung, Norw. danning) was part of their literary competence. Furthermore, R. Lund (2007) found that cultural content in textbooks was often used to develop students’ language competence instead of offering opportunities to reflect on the actual content. On a related note, Wiland (2007) discussed the difference between reading literature in order to carry away information from it and experiencing literature as an aesthetic expression of a work of art.

The English compulsory school subject encompasses both a language component, i.e. developing pupils’ L2 proficiency, and a content component, including cultural content and literary analysis, and it is only natural that these are treated simultaneously in the classroom. However, the discussions in these studies combined suggest that it might be wise to reflect on the balance between language and content. What the following four studies have in common is that they have chosen to focus on content or meanings in texts, rather than on linguistic aspects. Wiland (2007) argued that students can become engaged in a poem even though they might not understand all the aspects related to lexis and grammar. Larsen (2009) investigated thematic content in student narratives, arguing that most research in the field prior to hers had focused on linguistic aspects of students’ writing. R. Lund (2007) found that although the English textbook series she analysed contained a lot of cultural content (e.g. information about other countries and cultural encounters with people from other cultural backgrounds), most of the follow-up tasks presented to students related to the development of their linguistic competence rather than competence to remember and reflect on cultural material.
Related to the authors’ focus on content and meanings in texts is an encouragement to take seriously not only students’ experiences of authentic texts, but also their own texts. It is valuable to allow students to encounter literature without teacher expectations or peer pressure, and practising creative writing in the English subject can contribute towards developing students’ literary competence. Interestingly, the four doctoral studies related to culture and literature were completed within the short time span of four years, and they were all analyses of written texts. One was an analysis of textbooks (and the policy documents that informed their development), while the remaining three were all analyses of student texts, either student narratives or student teachers’ written reported experiences and understanding of literature. As such, there has yet to be a doctoral study within English didactics that has investigated the teaching of culture and literature, or teachers’ and students’ perceptions related to such teaching.

**ORAL PROFICIENCY**

The four quite recent doctoral studies related to oral proficiency, also completed within the short time span of four years, seem at first glance to be very different. While Rindal (2013) explored adolescent (age 17) learners’ spoken English, Dahl (2014) studied the effect of spoken input for young (age 6) learners’ development of oral English competence, primarily listening skills. Moving from students to teachers, Coburn (2016) looked at the effect of an in-service teacher education course on English teachers’ professional competence with a specific focus on oral proficiency, while Bøhn (2016) investigated what English teachers assessed in an oral exam. However, despite their apparent differences in topic and scope, these studies nevertheless bring to the table a set of transcending English didactic issues related to oral proficiency.

There seems to be a gap between teachers and learners of English in Norway reflecting the growth and availability of the English language in Norwegian society. The teachers in Coburn (2016) experienced low confidence in their own oral proficiency and consequently in their role as oral role models to their students. Bøhn (2016), however, did not thematise teachers’ proficiency, but his participants showed considerable variation in how they assessed their students’ oral proficiency, especially related to the importance of nativeness, suggesting discrepancies in teachers’ perceptions of the status of English to Norwegian learners. Some of the learners in Rindal (2013), on the other hand, deliberately avoided targeting nativeness and showed patterned variation in their spoken English, suggesting that they have grown up in a society with more exposure and more ownership of English than their teachers’ generation.
Dahl (2014), however, argued that exposure out of school is not enough for the development of English proficiency among young learners, showing the effect of the amount of English language input offered by teachers. This finding reflects the importance of language use for language learning; the young learners in Dahl (2014) did not score better on tests after one year of English teaching in classrooms where there was little actual English language used for communication. In the same vein, Coburn (2016) revisited the teachers who had participated in an in-service teacher education course 16 months later, finding that the lack of regular opportunities to practise speaking English had led to decrease in their oral confidence over time. In Rindal (2013), too, some of the adolescent learners seemed to lack a command of their L2 behaviour in that their pronunciation was clearly influenced by American English, even among the students who targeted a British English or a neutral variety, suggesting that their oral proficiency did not match what they wanted to do with their spoken English.

The results of these studies thus thematise the difference between English subject competence and English didactic competence. It is not enough for teachers to know the theoretical linguistic components of English (e.g. pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary) or even to have the skills to practise these themselves – they need didactic competence in order to teach English pronunciation, such as knowledge about nativeness and intelligibility principles and the functions of oral role models. The research presented in these studies – the knowledge and application of the role of input in Dahl (2014), of global English and negotiation of English accents in Rindal (2013), of the consequences of construct understanding for assessment practices in Bøhn (2016), and of the effect of teacher sentiments related to their own competence in Coburn (2016) – can contribute significantly to the development of English teachers’ professional practice. These issues are thus obvious topics to include in English didactics courses.

**DIGITAL ENGLISH COMPETENCE**

Although 13 years separate the two doctoral studies dealing mainly with digital competence in English, A. Lund (2003) and Røkenes (2016) have several aspects in common. They both investigated how teachers or student teachers used information and communications technology (ICT) didactically to support students’ learning in English. They both drew on sociocultural perspectives of learning, stressing the importance of appropriation. They both used a mixed-methods design in their investigations, including quantitative surveys, classroom observa-
tions and interviews with participants, which thus seems to be a preferred methodological approach for the study of teachers’ digital competence.

Teachers’ digital competence is crucial because teachers need to critically prepare students for life and work in a globalised and digitalised world. The central role of English as lingua franca on the Internet suggests that the English school subject is particularly relevant for the development of students’ digital competence. English didactics might, therefore, be especially relevant for research on language use and language learning in digital environments. A. Lund (ch. 7) argues that digital environments provide a link between language learning and identity; the digital practices that young people engage in today (e.g. virtual reality, imagined communities, online gaming, blogs, etc.) offer not only opportunities for language learning, but also for enacting identities. This link to identity formation can provide a powerful incentive for language learning, suggesting that it can be beneficial for the students’ language learning if teachers draw on students’ digital English-language practices in their teaching.

Knowledge of this link between identity formation and language learning, and consequently connecting school and out-of-school practices, is part of teachers’ professional digital competence (PDC), a competence or construct which received considerable attention in both A. Lund (2003) and Røkenes (2016). In the latter study, student teachers mastered basic digital skills, but did not necessarily know how to use them in their teaching to develop their students’ digital competence, i.e. there were weaknesses in their PDC. PDC is didactical ICT competence that enables teachers to design learning environments and learning trajectories for their students in a specific subject. This is strongly linked to a sociocultural perspective and its fundamental assumption that learning is a social and cultural phenomenon. A central element of sociocultural perspectives, and a central element in the development of teachers’ PDC, is that of appropriation, which involves teachers making ICT competence their own, integrating technologies in their teaching practices. While A. Lund (2003) in his study showed how teachers appropriated ICTs in their English classrooms in different ways and explored their beliefs about such appropriations, Røkenes (2016) showed that student teachers were not given ample opportunity for such appropriation in their teacher education. This suggests that teachers and student teachers need support from institutions such as teacher education programmes and the school in which they teach in order to develop their PDC.

A. Lund argues in his suggestions for future research (ch. 7) that PDC is not yet an established concept or practice, and encourages more research in order to conceptualise this competence. With his focus on the development of English teacher professionalism, Røkenes (2016) might be taking a step in the direction of discus-
ing the role of PDC in teacher professional development. While both of these doctoral theses focused on teachers and student teachers, we still do not know much about students’ digital competence related to the English subject, which therefore would be a potential direction for future research.

ASSESSMENT IN ENGLISH

Assessment practices in the English subject in Norway have changed considerably over the years (Simensen, ch. 1), and assessment in English comes across as the most frequently studied topic in the 30 years of doctoral research covered in this volume. Assessment in English has been studied in nine of the doctoral studies, with several other studies indicating implications for assessment in English. The studies involved students and teachers in primary and secondary school, as well as student teachers in teacher education.

Simensen (1988) was the first one to place assessment research in English on the agenda, with only two more adding to her seminal research in the next 25 years.1 The three studies provided a solid foundation for later assessment research through analysis of oral and written national exams from 1964 to 1986 for primary and lower secondary school (Simensen, 1988), the reading module of an international admission test conducted in 2001–2002 for upper secondary and higher education students (Hellekjær, 2005), and self-assessment among student teachers concerning English writing competence (Drew, 1997). Together, these studies covered research on both formative and summative assessment (e.g. Black & Wiliam, 1998), here operationalised in a recent article by Black and Wiliam (2018), as “assessment for learning” and “assessment of learning”, respectively:

The term “assessment for learning” is then used to describe the process by which teachers use assessment evidence to inform their teaching, and “assessment of learning” refers to the use of assessment to determine the extent to which students have achieved intended learning outcomes. (Black & Wiliam, 2018, p. 3)

1. In addition, Hasselgreen (1998) studied assessment in her doctoral thesis. Hers is one of the four doctoral studies in English didactics not revisited in this volume. However, we mention her doctoral study briefly here due to its unique role within oral English assessment, being the only one to study the assessment of oral communication among student pairs. For further information we recommend reading the book published on her doctoral work (see reference in the introductory chapter in this volume).
In relation to this definition, Simensen (1988) and Hellekjær (2005) have both provided examples of research on assessment of learning (summative assessment), such as final exams and an admission test, to determine whether primary and secondary students had achieved the intended English proficiency. In contrast, Drew (1997) offered research on assessment for learning (formative assessment), such as self-assessment, to inform English teaching in teacher education, for instance “to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited” (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 7). Together, they covered the four main English language skills: writing, reading, listening and speaking.

There was a relative explosion in English assessment research in Norway in 2015 and 2016, with six doctoral studies during these two years. One study assessed upper secondary students’ reading proficiency across English and Norwegian (Brevik, 2015), one examined teachers’ assessment of the oral English exam in upper secondary school (Bøhn, 2016), and two examined assessment practices of English writing in lower and upper secondary school (Burner, 2016; Horverak, 2016). The remaining two studied self-assessment: one among student teachers concerning their professional digital competence in English (Røkenes, 2016), and another among teachers concerning their own oral skills (Coburn, 2016). Of these most recent doctoral studies on assessment in English, two can be conceptualised as research on summative assessment, i.e. a reading test and a final oral exam (Brevik, 2015; Bøhn, 2016), aiming to describe teachers’ assessment of students’ proficiency. The remaining four examined formative assessment practices in terms of adapting their teaching to the students’ needs, e.g. teacher and peer feedback and self-assessment (Burner, 2016; Coburn, 2016; Horverak, 2016; Røkenes, 2016). Exploring teacher and student perceptions and practices of formative assessment, both Burner (2016) and Horverak (2016) identified significant differences in how the teachers perceived and acted on formative assessment of writing.

The distinction between summative and formative assessment in separate studies is particularly interesting in light of Black and Wiliam’s (2018) recent emphasis on what they claim is highly relevant not to separate, specifically concerning assessment practices in the classroom:

As a result of our work with teachers, we have become convinced that any approach to the improvement of classroom practice that is focused on assessment must deal with all aspects of assessment in an integrated way. For example, while it is possible for researchers to make clear theoretical distinctions...
between formative and summative aspects of assessment, for teachers such distinctions are at best unhelpful, and may even be counterproductive. (Black & Wiliam, 2018, p. 2)

The argument here is twofold; one is that summative purposes of assessment can also be supportive of students’ learning and needs for further development, and the other is that there ought to be synergy between the two forms of assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Based on this line of argumentation, future assessment research in the English subject in Norway might study assessment in an integrated way. Such integration could simply concern the teacher’s use of summative and formative assessment for formative purposes and would hold implications not only for research designs, but also for assessment practices in the English classroom, which such studies could then observe and follow over time.

An alternative is to build on signals in the recent Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) Companion Volume with New Descriptors (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018). For example, examining the strands of communicative language competence in an assessment perspective (i.e. linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and pragmatic competence) would be most relevant, as “teacher- or self-assessments are made on the basis of a detailed picture of the learner’s language ability built up during the course concerned” Council of Europe, 2018 (p. 43). The CEFR companion emphasises that, “these aspects, or parameters of description, are always intertwined in any language use; they are not separate ‘components’ and cannot be isolated from each other” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 130).

Further, in this volume, several authors have explicitly commented on implications of their doctoral research for the future assessment in English. Of particular relevance are assessment practices not studied during the past 30 years of doctoral research in English in Norway; of which one concerns global and digital English competence and another concerns the assessment of literary experiences. Turning first to the assessment of literature, Larsen (ch. 14) argues that “there is a need for more research into the form that literary feedback might take” (p. 311), suggesting the study of criteria that might be relevant for the assessment of literary experience. In line with this view, Wold (ch. 6) states that in assessing learner narratives, teachers should also assess the role of the learner context, suggesting the integration of summative and formative assessment situations. Related to global and digital competence, A. Lund (ch. 7) suggests that the development of global and online Englishes “has consequences for what we consider ‘acceptable’ or ‘functional’ practices and how we assess such practices” (p. 152). In line with this com-
ment, Rindal (2013) has studied learner language in English that deviates in one way or other from standard norms, influenced by varieties of English. With reference to this study, Simensen (ch. 1) argues that “in order to ensure equal assessment practice nationwide, this will be one particularly important area for future research and development work” (p. 31). Building further on the status of English in Norway, several authors in this volume suggest including information about learners’ access to and use of English outside the classroom to inform their assessment of English skills and competence observed at school (Brevik, ch. 10; A. Lund, ch. 7; Rindal, ch. 16; Wold, ch. 6). Finally, Dahl (ch. 17) has studied what English competence in the early years entails, and this research points to an area in need of further research that might inform oral assessment of young learners of English.

THE STATUS OF ENGLISH FOR STUDENTS IN NORWEGIAN CLASSROOMS

Similarly to how the English didactics field is referred to with varying terms across the contributions in this volume, there is also variation in the terminology use related to the context of learning English in Norway. The majority of the authors in this volume use the term “EFL” – English as a foreign language. However, this is definitely not without exceptions. While one author uses “ESL” – English as a second language, many use the more generic term “L2”, and one author opts for simply “English”. One explanation for the majority use of “EFL” could be that authors use the same term to reference the context of their studies as they did in their doctoral theses at the time these were written. In the first doctoral thesis presented in this volume, Simensen (1988) used “EFL” about the context of her own research, but argues in her section on recent developments (ch. 1) that there have been “observations that show that English in Norway has moved from functioning as a foreign language towards gradually functioning as a second language” (p. 30). Still, there is no chronological development of terminology use throughout these 30 years of doctoral research; “EFL” is used in the first study as well as in some of the most recent studies reported in this volume. This variation in terminology use is worth some attention, because it reflects the dynamic status of English for Norwegians.

Due to globalisation processes and the concomitant development of English towards becoming a global language, the traditional labels of EFL and ESL and their definitions might no longer be fully applicable to the current users of English in the world. Many scholars, both internationally (Graddol, 1997; Phillipson,
1992; Wang, 2013) and nationally (Rindal, 2014; Simensen, 2014), have argued that English today has functions for its speakers in nations that traditionally are labelled EFL countries, including Norway, that exceed those of a foreign language. Norwegians learn English from their first year in school, developing English literacy alongside Norwegian literacy, and English is a mandatory subject for 11 years, with its own curriculum separate from the foreign languages also taught in school. There is also considerable exposure to English outside of school, and the revisiting of the doctoral theses in this volume shows that Norwegian adolescents read English, listen to English, and interact in English, especially through digital media (cf. for instance Brevik, ch. 10; A. Lund, ch. 7; Rindal, ch. 16; Røkenes, ch. 8). To some extent, English seems to be “used within the speaker’s community (country, family) and thus forms part of the speaker’s identity repertoire”, which according to Graddol (1997, p. 11) is a characteristic of ESL speakers that distinguishes them from fluent EFL speakers.

At the same time, the status of English in Norway is still different from that in postcolonial countries such as India and Nigeria, where inhabitants are labelled ESL speakers. English is not an official language in Norway, and we do not have a history of colonialism that has led to English and one or more local languages being associated with different social classes and societal functions. Consequently, English in Norway is not a second language either, at least not if we choose to use the label as it is traditionally defined in the literature. It is this hybridity of English – no longer EFL, but not qualified as ESL – that has led to Rindal’s (2019) description of the status of English in Norway as in transition, “from one place to a yet unknown other” (p. 350). Due to the inconsistency of terminology usage referring to the same context of learning English in Norway, and the suggested imprecision of the EFL-ESL dichotomy, we use the more generic label “L2 English” here and elsewhere, emphasising that this refers to English as a second or later language. This description does not specify the order in which a student learns a language, but rather reflects that language proficiency is often developed in more than one language simultaneously.

The transitional status of English in Norway seems to be reflected in some of the doctoral research represented in this volume. For instance, one of the main differences between EFL and ESL learners is that while the latter develop their own English language norms, at least in postcolonial countries, EFL learners have traditionally been presented with native-speaker varieties as models of pronunciation. Although this is not official practice in Norway today, Bøhn (2016) showed how some English teachers could not seem to rid themselves of nativeness as a criterion in the assessment of oral competence. Some of the adolescent learners in
Rindal (2013), however, reported a desire to avoid targeting native-speaker accents because these might be associated with the cultures of their origin. This discrepancy between how teachers and students relate to nativeness might cause challenges in expectations and assessment of spoken English, which in turn might have considerable consequences for students, for instance in high stakes assessment situations.

However, avoiding native accents as targets that students are expected to reach is not the same as comparing the development of L2 English proficiency among students in Norwegian school with L1 English users, as is done in some of the doctoral studies revisited in this volume. Drew (1997) compared the writing of Norwegian student teachers to that of a reference group consisting of younger students in England. He found that the writing of the L1 English users was more sophisticated in several areas of lexis and syntax compared to the Norwegian student teachers, and that their writing was generally more fluent, but that linguistic differences were less than expected. Furthermore, Dahl (2014) compared the results of tests of English receptive proficiency among Norwegian 6-year-olds with those of same-age native speakers of English attending international school in Norway. She found that scores among immersion school students were relatively close to native-speaker means, suggesting that considerable exposure to L2 at a young age can lead to rapid L2 development. Finally, on the basis of written assessment of students’ texts in the narrative genre, Wold (2017) found that the L2 learners (6th grade and 10th grade) in Norway overused the progressive -ing form considerably compared to the same-age L1 users (native speakers of American English). However, when Norwegian learners reached CEFR proficiency level B1 or higher (B2, C1, C2), their use of the progressive was similar to that of native speakers and seemed to be connected with overall good writing skills.

All of these comparisons with L1 English reference groups tell us something about the development of L2 English proficiency as compared to L1 English proficiency, related to both the speed and linguistic details of development. This is relevant because it can help us describe English proficiency among L2 English learners in Norway, and provide knowledge about whether L2 proficiency develops similarly to L1 proficiency (which these studies indicate). Such comparisons will also be interesting to conduct between Norwegian learners and other L2 speaker groups, for the same reasons. Furthermore, comparisons could be useful to conduct between L2 English proficiency and L1 Norwegian proficiency, as suggested by Brevik (ch. 10), in order to give the teacher a broader picture of the students’ language proficiency. Another relevant comparison is between L2 English
proficiency and students’ first languages other than Norwegian, a focus that could potentially increase our understanding of possible transfer between strategies and skills between languages in students’ language repertoire, and which has not been addressed in this collection of doctoral work.

Importantly, comparisons with native speaker reference groups such as those referred to above do not imply that native-speaker language use is the norm for L2 use. As Bøhn (ch. 18) argues, nativeness is of less importance for communication than intelligibility, and Rindal (ch. 16) problematises that this is used as a criterion for L2 proficiency. To communicate in a world where English is a lingua franca, the target model of English is not a native speaker, but a fluent L2 speaker. Acknowledging that English is more than a “foreign” language for most Norwegian students also reflects that English is a language that they use, also outside the classroom, and that English can have other functions than Norwegian (cf. Grad dol, 1997). Munden (ch. 15), for instance, argues that there is a difference between students of English in Norway and in Eritrea, stating that for her Eritrean participants English is “‘someone else’s words’ to a greater extent than is English for most Norwegian learners” (p. 331). Larsen (ch. 14) argues that English was given another function than Norwegian in the student narratives she analysed, in which expressions of identity moved towards “global popular culture and the personal sphere” (p. 310), reflecting English as an international, global language. The view of English as a language that is used outside of the classroom and attributed different functions for Norwegian students aligns with those expressed by several authors in this volume, especially in these authors’ reflections on recent developments related to their topic or in suggestions for future research (e.g., Brevik, ch. 10; Hellekjær, ch. 9; A. Lund, ch. 7; Rindal, ch. 16; Skulstad, ch. 2). Importantly, the teacher’s beliefs about the status of English for their students might lead to teaching practices that do or do not draw on students’ use of English outside of school.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have synthesised the research and ideas from the past 30 years of doctoral research in Norway in order to discuss the state of the art of English didactics in Norway today. Importantly, though, there is a considerable amount of English didactic research that is not conducted in doctoral projects, and most of this research is not mentioned in our volume. Furthermore, we acknowledge that the field of English didactics in Norway will undoubtedly develop in the years to come. There are a number of challenging topics that emerge from the issues dis-
discussed in this volume, as well as from international research and national demands, that require attention from English didactic research. Such topics include the English subject in the increasing number of multilingual and multicultural classrooms in Norway, English as a lingua franca (ELF) research with focus on the Norwegian context, the global and local attributes of the English language and school subject, the use of challenging multimodal texts in L2 English instruction, and the bridging of adolescents’ use of English in and outside school, to mention a few. One of the aims of this volume is that the accumulated doctoral research discussed here, and the challenging topics that emerge from this research, can serve as a baseline for future research in the field of English didactics.

In the sense of being research within the field of English didactics, all the studies revisited in this volume are important to the development of English teacher professionalism. As an applied discipline, English didactics is relevant for both research and practice, and it is key for English didactic research to be useful for the teaching of English. We believe the contributions and implications of the doctoral research discussed here deserve a place in teacher education, and in this state-of-the-art chapter we have aimed to show their role and significance for the development of teaching practices and curriculum content.

REFERENCES


