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To Teach or not to Teach?

English for Specific Purposes in a vocational
upper secondary school in Norway



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Table of contents

Abstract	i
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Limitation of project	1
1.2. Aim of the study	1
2. Background	2
2.1. Previous research	2
2.2. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).....	6
2.3. The National Curriculum of Knowledge Promotion (KP06)	9
2.4. The White Paper no. 20: On the Right Track – Quality and Diversity in the Public school	12
2.5. The New Possibilities and the FYR project	14
3. Method and materials	15
3.1. Method	15
3.2. Questionnaire	16
4. Presentation of findings	18
4.1. Results and discussion	18
5. Summary and conclusion	30
References	33
Appendix	36

Abstract

Vocational orientation of English in schools in Norway is a topic which creates many opinions among teachers and educators, as well as being one of the Ministry of Education's areas of focus. Is it something worth focusing on in the classrooms? In a small-scale case study using mixed-methodology, seven teachers were approached about how they vocationally orientate their lessons, and how they perceive their students working with vocational topics. The results, as far as one can deduce from such a small-scale study, are that most teachers find vocational English both worthwhile and challenging to work with, and that it seems to motivate students to work with topics related to their education programme and future occupations. All in all, it seems that vocational English is a topic which is viewed as worthwhile to focus on by students, teachers and the Ministry of Education, alike.

1. Introduction

Vocational English is a part of the vocational education programmes which generates many opinions among teachers and educators in Norway. Some might think that focus on the general part of the subject and exams are important, while others wish to work with vocationally-oriented topics and prepare the students for their future occupation. The aims of the amended English core subject curriculum allow for more vocationally-oriented English lessons, and national projects have been initiated to help increase vocational topics in English. The Ministry of Education is revising the education system in order to prepare the students for a more knowledge-based and international labour market. However, for the past four decades, the research in English for Specific Purpose has focused on the adult learner and further education, and there is a need for research regarding upper secondary school and vocational education programmes. It is precisely this I wish to address in this project, namely, to try to find out how English lessons are vocationally oriented and how the teacher perceives the students when working with vocational English.

1.1. Limitation of project

It is commonly known that for a survey or a project and its results to be valid, there has to be a certain number of respondents to draw data from. In this project on English for specific purposes in classrooms in Norway, I choose to focus on teachers. Initially, I invited two schools to participate, both which predominantly offer vocational education programmes to participate. However, only one school responded to the invitation, and due to the time limitations of project, the survey was consequently sent to only seven respondents.

1.2. Aim of the study

The aim of my study is to find out how vocational English is taught at one predominately vocational school. I conduct a two-part survey, asking teachers for their experiences in

teaching vocational English in their classroom. I aim to find out what materials and methods teachers use for this purpose, and to what degree they find teaching vocational English worthwhile. In the second half of the survey my aim was to find out what the teachers' opinions are on the students' perceptions of vocational English. Due to the small number of respondents and the time limitation, the survey will be too small to make specific conclusions. However, I do believe that the survey will give indications on how English for specific purposes is done in the English classrooms at this particular school. I also believe that it will be possible to infer that English teaching can take place in similar ways in other vocational schools in Norway, based on the both the Knowledge Promotion Curriculum and the national standardised teacher education.

2. Background

2.1. Previous research

English for Specific Purpose (ESP) is a field of research within Applied Linguistics which has not received the same attention as other linguistics research fields. ESP seems to have been established as a movement within Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in the 1960's, which also might explain the smaller volume of research than one might find in other linguistic fields (Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1991, p. 297, Swales, 2000, p. 59).

ESP can be defined as teaching English based on the learners' specific needs, using topics which are relevant for a particular academic discipline, occupation or some other activity, which include learning language skills. ESP does not necessarily follow a specific teaching methodology. All in all, ESP is learner-centred in its approach (Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1991, p. 298, Belcher in Belcher, 2009, p. 1-3).

From this, various sub-divisions were created which cater for the specific areas. As there are so many variations, I have chosen to focus on the main categories, which also are relevant to vocational upper secondary education. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) focuses on students' learning the genres relevant to their specific programme of academic studies; whether it is at upper secondary or higher education levels. EAP is often oriented around the ability to read and write the genres needed to complete academic courses (Cruickshank in Belcher, 2009, p. 22-40, Belcher, 2006, p. 134-135). English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) which it is referred to in the UK or English for Vocational Purposes (EVP) as it is termed in the USA, relates to English relevant to law, medicine, business and engineering etc., namely, all occupations which require further education (Johns and Dudley-Evans, p. 1991, p. 306, Belcher 2006, p. 134-135).

A common feature for these varieties of ESP is that they have been designed for "an identifiable group of adult learners" (Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1991, p. 298) in mind, for example a university student needing academic and specialist language or workers taking night-classes to learn the specific language of a trade or an occupation in which they already work. It seems that only EAP has been taught at upper secondary school levels, however, EAP might be relevant for only a very small group of students at the vocational upper secondary educational programmes. For the majority of these students learning EOP language and the genres which they will meet in their future occupation has the most important outcome for them (Cruickshank in Belcher, 2009, p. 21-36).

It seems that most of the research done during the past 40 years within ESP has been centred on the adult learner, academia and occupations needing further education. Research has focused on different aspects such as genre studies and corpus data related to EAP and EOP (Belcher, 2006, p. 141-142). Belcher (2006) argues that the research has gone from focusing mainly on ESP for native speakers, to a more global approach where ESP research

also includes results from studies where English as a Foreign Language meets ESP, as English has become the global language in academia and a large number of occupations (Belcher, 2006, p. 149-150).

This does not mean that one should disregard ESP/EOP entirely in the context of vocational upper secondary educational programmes. The general principles found in ESP could be adapted for usage in English classrooms in vocational upper secondary schools. For example, it is possible to establish the specific needs of the learner by talking to the teachers who teach the vocational classes, talking to professionals in the different occupations or through the teachers' own occupational experiences. However, this might be time consuming. Some also argue that it is not the English teachers' task to become "experts" within the occupation, but give the students the learning tools and material so that they themselves can acquire the language skills needed for them to perform their occupation. (Belcher in Belcher, 2009, p. 11-14). In Norway, English subject text books often provide some vocationally-oriented materials, however, the teachers should endeavour to use as authentic materials as possible. With the Internet available, there should be ample opportunities to find articles, audio and video clips and other resources which are presumably updated and thus relevant to the different occupations (Belcher in Belcher, 2009, p. 7-10). As ESP does not adhere to any particular teaching methodology, the teachers can choose the methods which are suitable to the group and topic they are teaching. Some learning activities and strategies utilised in general English lessons, can also be used in teaching ESP/EOP.

A more recent study by Lee and Bathmaker from 2007 called "The Use of English Textbooks for Teaching English to 'Vocational' Students in Singapore Secondary Schools: A Survey of Teachers' Beliefs" supports Belcher's claim. To some extent, the study deals with English for specific purposes for the adolescent student group not yet qualified in any trade or occupation. Even though Singapore is far away from Norway and the school systems differ,

some of the findings described in the research have transfer value to teaching vocational English in Norway.

The Singapore study describes two different perspectives of how English Language Teaching (ELT) has been regarded. The traditional perspective “regard teaching as the mastery of skills prescribed by models of educational theory” (Lee and Bathmaker, 2007, p. 351), while research into theoretical beliefs shows that teaching is a “cognitive activity” where the teachers actively constructs a personal theory which suits their teaching. This is “derived from [the teachers’] professional and practical knowledge as well as their goals, values and assumptions, and decision-making abilities” (Lee and Bathmaker, 2007, p. 351). These personal theories play a part in the classroom and are seen to be more important than the need the teachers have to follow the curriculum or a specific method, because it has to do with the teachers feeling safe in their subject and their intellectual pride (Lee and Bathmaker, 2007, p. 351). One can say that the textbooks a school uses cannot decide what role the teacher has. This is similar to trends in Norway, where teachers are encouraged not to be too bound by the textbooks and their progression. The teacher should rather look to the curriculum and plan lessons according to their interpretation of the curriculum aims.

The study also finds that in Singapore the use of old examination papers as teaching material is more common than using the textbook prescribed to the course (Lee and Bathmaker, 2007, p. 356). Thus there is an indication that teaching to the test is common in Singapore. In my opinion, this is not as common in Norway. However, the possibility is there, as the written exam is national and there is a consistency in the task types given in these exams, even though the topic might vary. The old exams are used in Norway too, for teaching purposes, preparing the students for what type of tasks they might experience in an exam situation. However, my experience from vocational school is that exam preparation is a small part of the classroom activities when the whole school year in its entirety.

2.2. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a method which integrates foreign languages in the teaching of other subjects. It is a term used to describe all lessons given in a foreign language in a non-language subject, for example, learning Norwegian history in French or Electronics in English. According to Svenhard (2010) “the purpose is primarily increased competence in the subject, and one therefore emphasizes the use of language as a tool for learning the content above explicitly learning the language structures” (my translation) (Svenhard in Svenhard, 2012, p. 3-4, Svenhard in Svenhard, 2010, p. 4-5, Dueñas, 2004, p. 74). How CLIL is taught may vary depending on the student group, language skills and the subject taught. Immersion is the method which has been used in International Baccalaureate programmes in Norway since the 1990’s. When using immersion more than half the lessons are given in the target language, a method which might not suit students in vocational upper secondary school as it might be too much for some students to balance both content and language to such an extent. Therefore, CLIL projects have been initiated in recent years both in lower secondary schools as well as upper secondary schools (Svenhard in Svenhard, 2012, p. 3-4, Svenhard in Svenhard, 2010, p. 4-5), content-based instruction has been combined with English to some extent. I will focus on the results of some of the vocational CLIL projects which are relevant to vocational education programmes.

Streitlien (2010) is a teacher at Ørskog upper secondary school who teaches in the Hospitality programme. She focuses on what motivates the students to learn languages. Her students participate in different exchange programmes which lead to them having work placement outside Norway, and thus language skills are useful to get the most out of the placement. She claims that many of her students see core subjects, including English as a necessary evil, however, the hospitality industry is an international industry, so her students will need language skills. Therefore, she emphasizes that for the students to feel safe in their

work placement and future careers, it is important that they meet the language often and in as authentic situations as possible. She describes how many of her students, after having had an international work placement realise that they should have been working more with their language skills, they realise that communication is important in the work place (Streitlien in Svenhard, 2010, p. 8).

The methods Streitlien uses to prepare her students before their work placement are firstly to have former students who have been participating in these exchange programmes come tell her students about their experiences. Secondly, she gives the students the task of creating kitchen or food-related vocabulary lists in the target language. In addition to the vocational vocabulary, she focuses on manners, such as pleasantries and how to greet someone in the target language. She states there is no point in knowing the vocational vocabulary if the general communications shuts down. Ørskog upper secondary school also has vocational teachers who speak foreign languages fluently, which lends itself to the practical lessons in the kitchen. Streitlien concludes that the students' motivation to learn languages is the feeling of knowing that "I really need this". It also includes attitude towards others, focusing on being open and showing respect for other people and different cultures, and a real wish to learn. Having this, she claims, will make the work placement a success (Streitlien in Svenhard, 2010, p. 8-9).

Ruud (2012) teaching English at Nannestad upper secondary school has CLIL experiences from different vocational programmes. She sees it as quite logical to combine language and content instruction in a manner that increases her students' motivation not only for English, but also their vocational subjects. She focuses on using the workshops and the arenas where the students have their practical lessons as a place also for English lessons. She has positive experience taking students into the workshops and conversing with them in English about relevant topics. In the workshop the students feel familiar and safe, and they

have something to talk about. The students feel that they have accomplished something in English, which they might not do in an ordinary classroom. Also Ruud states that the students need to see a reason for having to learn English; they need to see a use for the language in their future occupation (Ruud in Svenhard, 2012, p. 73-76).

What Ruud finds most interesting with using CLIL in her classrooms, is that the CLIL strategies have helped the students with very low language skills overcome their language obstacles especially when it comes to written assignments. Using CLIL in their workplace these students have found the motivation to give written assignments another chance. Several of her students who have found English challenging have shown progress and high competence when being allowed to write about something relating to their practical lessons. CLIL has given students who do not thrive in traditional English lessons the opportunity to show what they know from their vocational programme, and thus showing their language skills as well as other skills such as reflection and critical thinking (Ruud in Svenhard, 2012, p. 75-79).

With her CLIL projects motivating otherwise unmotivated students to show their true language competence, she came across problems in regards to the exam regulations. Having focused on CLIL for the autumn term, and working predominately with vocational topics and having been given dispensation to have a vocationally-oriented midterm exam showing good results, she was denied by the administration to do this for the spring term. The result of this was that the students returned to being unmotivated towards the more traditionally-oriented English lessons; many students stopped handing in written assignments and many had poorer results on their spring midterm, because the traditional exam assignments were not necessarily fully relevant to their vocational programme. Therefore, Ruud is convinced that CLIL does affect the vocational students' motivation towards English if they can relate it to their vocational programme and future occupation (Ruud in Svenhard, 2012, p. 80-81).

2.3. The National Curriculum of Knowledge Promotion (KP06)

The National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training (KP06) is the current Norwegian curriculum that was implemented in the autumn of 2006. The curriculum has been amended several times, with the most recent amendments being implemented August 2013. The Knowledge Promotion Curriculum is a reform where the core subjects follow through all school levels. In addition to the specific subject curriculum aims, the reform focuses on four basic skills, which are common for every subject covered by the reform. These basic skills¹ are; being able to express oneself in writing, being able to express oneself orally, being able to read, numeracy skills and being able to use digital tools. Even though these basic skills are common for the different subjects, they also recognise the different subjects' characteristics.

The basic skills recognise that the ability to express oneself both orally and in writing is an integral part of developing English linguistic competence, and in regards to vocational education programmes this means that the students should be able to communicate about both general and specialised topics. As part of the practical competency in English being able to read and understand written material is important. It is a way to learn about different cultures and disciplines in increasingly more demanding texts as the students are progressing through the levels. In vocational English the students should also be able to read vocational texts of different genres. It is also assumed that improving English reading skills will better the students' general reading skills. The numeracy skills do not necessarily mean that the students should be able to solve complex mathematical problems. This entails that the students should know general mathematical terms and be able to read graphs and statistics, in order to understand English texts. The last basic skill refers to the ability to utilise digital tools in

¹ <http://www.udir.no/Lareplaner/Veiledninger-til-LK06/Norsk/Veiledning-til-lareplan-i-norsk/Artikler/Grunnleggende-ferdigheter/>

English. This could be learning various digital tools as well as learning to be critical towards sources and knowing about copyright and netiquette².

The purpose of the English subject curriculum³ is for the students to acquire the necessary English communicative skills to be able to be part of the global world. The students should not only be able to enjoy English language literature, films and entertainment, but be a functional world citizen in their working life as well. To be a competent English speaker does not only refer to the practical use of the language, having a varied vocabulary and an understanding of the linguistic structures, the speaker should also have insight in the cultural and social aspects of different cultures. This means that the English speaker should have an understanding of the different values and beliefs and literary expressions found in English-speaking countries.

Language learning deals with not only how students acquire English but also their ability to reflect on their own learning. Communication focuses on the practical use of the written and oral form of English. It deals with different text types and genres as well as the ability to communicate correctly in different situations. Culture, society and literature are the last area of focus. This is where the students learn about different English-speaking cultures, about the native population and their literature. It also deals with social and cultural issues, news topics and values. For vocational students this means also that they should be able to communicate about topics specific to their future occupation, and be a functioning part of an increasingly international labour market.

In the amended English subject curriculum⁴, the purpose and aim for upper secondary school has been slightly altered and it seems that there has been a shift in focus where the need for English communicative skills in the students' future vocations has been made

² http://www.udir.no/kl06/ENG1-03/Hele/Grunnleggende_ferdigheter/

³ <http://www.udir.no/kl06/ENG1-03/Kompetansemaal/?arst=1858830315&kmsn=-915046718>

⁴ http://www.udir.no/kl06/ENG1_03/Kompetansemaal/?arst=1858830315&kmsn=-915046718

clearer. There is a change in the division of focus areas in the subject curriculum, where the focus area of communication has been divided into oral and written communication. When it comes to oral communication and English for specific purposes the students should be able to; “listen to, understand and use a broad vocabulary in general and specialist topics related to their own educational programme, listen to and understand the entirety and the details of a wide range of oral texts of varying scale on general and specialist topics, and talk about and discuss general and specialist topics” (my translation). Similar ESP/EOP aims are amended when it comes to written communication. The aims which specifically focus on ESP/EOP are; “read, understand and use a broad general vocabulary and a specialised vocabulary related to their own educational programme, read and understand the entirety and the details of a wide range of oral texts of varying scale on general and specialist topics and read and write notes to prepare oral presentations of a chosen topic within their own educational programme” (my translation). The vagueness of “their own educational programme” is probably due to the fact that the curriculum should not only include the students at the vocational programmes but also those of the general studies programme. For the vocational students this means that it allows for a wider focus on vocationally relevant topics to be studied in class, without forgetting the general aspects of English completely. With allowing for more vocational orientation, the chance of more students mastering and completing the English course might increase.

Apart from the clearer ESP/EOP aspect in the curriculum, there seems to be little change to the content of the curriculum aims from the previous subject curriculum. This means that the English lesson should include both general vocabulary needed to communicate in English in various common situations, and specialist vocabulary which might be needed to communicate in a work situation. However, it seems that the amended subject curriculum might lead to more vocationally-oriented English lessons for the vocational students.

As the English subject curriculum is common for both vocational and general education programmes, the students sit the same exam. It is not given that all students sit a written English exam; classes are randomly picked. The written exam given is a national exam, and vocational students sit the exam their second year. In recent years this exam has consisted of two tasks; one short text assignment (choice of two tasks) and an essay or composition assignment (choice of four to five tasks). To what degree the exams are adapted to the vocational curriculum aims or not vary from year to year. However, the trend seems to be that more of the tasks are in a general way related to work life and the students' future careers. The tasks are not specific to any trade or speciality. This is presumably done to include the university-bound students as well as vocational students, and the opinion amongst English teachers is that the current exam is not 100% suitable for either vocational or university-bound students.

Similarly to the written exam, a random group of 5-7 students, from a class is picked for oral exams. As opposed to the national written exam, the oral exam is a local exam prepared by the student groups' English teacher and thus opens for a more vocational approach. The regulation of the oral exam does not dictate which topics should be given in the exam, as long as they cover a representative selection of the subject aims of the curriculum. The regulations relate only to how the exam should be organised. The quality control of the oral exam topics or assignments is done in cooperation with the external examiner, who usually is an English teacher from another school.

2.4. The White Paper no. 20: On the Right Track – Quality and Diversity in the Public School

In White Paper no. 20 presented 15 March 2013, the Ministry of Education evaluates the current educational system in Norway from elementary school to upper secondary school, the

apprenticeship scheme and teacher education programmes. The Ministry of Education suggests keeping the general part of the curriculum as it shows that basic education is more than the acquisition of measurable and concrete skills and knowledge. However, it has been adapted slightly in 2009 to accommodate the fact that Norway has become more multicultural in the past decades (White Paper no. 20, 2013, p. 59-60).

Evaluation of the Knowledge Promotion Curriculum finds, among other things, that teachers have a greater scope in specifying curriculum aims, learning materials and methods. The evaluation also shows that textbooks still guide the teachers' lessons and that other teaching materials are less used. This might be worrying as textbook publishers to a varying degree actually follow up the intention of the curriculum. Contradictory to the aims of the curriculum, research shows that the teachers have become more dependent on textbooks with the Knowledge Promotion Curriculum (White Paper no.20, 2013, p. 61).

Some challenges are presented regarding upper secondary school and vocational education. For example, one third of the students do not finish or pass their courses in the five years allotted. Drop-out rates are linked to lack of basic skills from elementary school. Another challenge is that about 15% of vocational students do not complete their education all the way to vocational qualifications. This despite a great need for vocationally qualified persons in Norway and contradictory to the fact that students view completing upper secondary school as an advantage (White Paper no. 20, 2013, p. 104).

The Ministry of Education wishes to better the quality and relevance of the vocational education in cooperation with the industries and other relevant partners. This includes increasing the opportunity for vocational qualified persons to go directly to college or university without a general preparatory course. Such a programme exists for engineering,

and the Ministry of Education suggests creating similar programmes for other vocational education programmes, such as health and social care (White Paper no. 20, 2013, p. 114-115).

2.5. The New Possibilities and the FYR project

The New Possibilities⁵ is a multi-faceted nation-wide project which started in the autumn of 2009. The aim of the project is to reduce the drop-out rates from upper secondary education. One part of the project deals with students in 10th grade (15 year olds), where low-scoring ordinary students⁶ are given intensive courses in the core subjects Norwegian and Mathematics to help with bettering their basic skills and boost their score. This is meant to help their transition into upper secondary school, and thus reduce the risk of dropping out from this group of students⁷.

Once these students have started their upper secondary education they have the option to continue with the New Possibilities programme in Norwegian and Mathematics through their first year. The FYR project (Core subjects, vocational orientation and relevance) was initiated as a general follow-up of the New Possibilities programme in 2011, with Norwegian, English and Mathematics as the core subjects in focus. In late 2012 Science was added to the project. The FYR project is organised in such a way that each county has a “junction” school to lead the way and the “junction” schools have appointed a core subject coordinator for each subject involved. On a national level the project is managed by national centres within each core subject. The coordinators’ role is to lead the work of gathering and producing vocational oriented learning resources. The resources and the idea of sharing ideas and resources among teacher should be spread to other schools in the counties as well. These resources are published digitally and are free to use for everyone. They are meant to help and promote

⁵ <http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/KD/Kampanjer/NyGiv/NyGiv5.pdf>

⁶ Special needs students or students with documentation from the Educational Psychological Services are excluded from this, as they already have guaranteed admission to upper secondary school.

⁷ <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/kampanjer/nygiv/overgangsprosjektet/yrkesretting-og-relevans.html?id=667523>

English for specific purposes in core subject lessons. For the students this should mean that the lessons are more relevant, and thus, more interesting, to their future occupations.

Especially the low-scoring students should then have a better chance of passing the core subjects⁸.

As FYR coordinator I have, however, experienced that the FYR project has met some criticism from some of the core subject teachers, partly because to many teachers vocational English is a natural part of their lesson planning and partly because many teachers claim that vocational English is not relevant for the exams, and thus is a waste of time. The amended English subject curriculum seems to have taken the FYR project into account, as many of the curriculum aims have been made clearer in regards to English for specific purposes. It is to be expected that the future exams will mirror this. Upon the conclusion of the FYR project there will be an evaluation, and it will be interesting to see whether the project has reduced the drop-out rates, and increased vocational English as intended.

3. Method and materials

3.1. Method

The mixed method approach is a method that utilises features from both the quantitative and the qualitative approaches. It is an approach that has gained popularity in the recent years, especially with research involving social and human sciences. The mixed method approach is suitable for interdisciplinary studies, and is thought to shed more light to the research field it is employed in. In a sense, you combine the best of the two more traditional research approaches (Creswell, 2009, p. 205-207).

⁸ <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/kampanjer/ny-giv/overgangsprosjektet/yrkesretting-og-relevans.html?id=667523>

In my choosing to use the mixed method approach to my project, lies the fact that time was limited. Both the qualitative and quantitative research approaches can be time-consuming in themselves. However, using the mixed method approach and collecting data concurrently, is suitable for projects where collecting data has to be done within a limited time frame. Secondly, weighing the data collected is also an aspect of the mixed method approach, depending on whether you focus on the qualitative or quantitative data collected in the survey. It is also a possibility to weigh the data equally. However, in my study I will give the qualitative data a higher weighing than the quantitative, because I believe it is where my respondents will express their experiences and opinions most extensively. Thirdly, in analysing my data I think it is best to mix the two types of data to portray a better picture of how vocational English has been taught (Cresswell, 2009, p. 206-208). I have chosen to apply the approach even though my study is a small-scale case study with an extremely small data-set.

When analysing the data, I will be using the concurrent embedded strategy. The reason for this is that it is suitable for collecting data simultaneously, which I will be doing in my survey. In analysing the data I can mix the results from the qualitative and quantitative data collected, either by integrating the results and comparing the two, or I can discuss the two data sets to give two different views of how vocational English is taught and perceived (Cresswell, 2009, p. 214-215).

3.2. Questionnaire

Having limited time to conduct the survey, I have chosen to use a digital questionnaire, which ensures anonymity as well as providing different types of analysis and statistics. This makes my analysis of the results and the respondents secure in that the information they give is kept confidential. The survey was distributed by e-mail to the respondents, who in turn clicked on

a link which opened the survey. The respondents had a fortnight to respond to the survey. Another time aspect I have considered when creating this survey, was also the fact the teachers often are pressed for time during their working day. Therefore, I designed the survey to take about 10-15 minutes to complete. As mentioned before, I have chosen to have a two-part survey, one part which focuses on the teachers' experiences in the vocational English classroom, and one part which focuses on the teachers' views of the students' perceptions on vocational English.

The first part of the survey consists of seven open-ended questions, where the respondents are asked to answer as extensively as they wish. The second part consists of five statements which the respondents are asked to consider using a Likert-scale (ranging from totally agree to totally disagree) (Appendix 1). The reason I chose to use open-ended questions for the first part, is that a qualitative approach might give more extensive data, when the respondents were allowed to answer in their own words. Using pre-constructed statements and the Likert-scale is a way to collect data which is time effective. It gives the respondents the opportunity to evaluate the statements, rather than formulating responses. However, in using the Likert-scale there can be some issues, in that it forces the respondents to choose from a scale of responses which they might not have an opinion on. To try to avoid false answers to these statements, I included *no opinion* to my Likert-scale (Wray and Bloomer, 2012, p. 168, McKay, 2006, p. 38).

4. Presentation of findings

4.1. Results and discussion

I will present the results in chronological order according to how they were presented in the questionnaire (Appendix 1). The reason for this is because the questions have been designed to lead on to each other. The statements the respondents have considered will be presented accompanied with statistics.

In the first question the respondents are asked is if it is a challenge to teach English in a vocational school. Three of seven respondents state that they think it is challenging teaching English in a vocational school, because it is time-consuming both for teachers and students to prepare for the lessons, due to the specificity of the different education programmes. Some also say it is challenging because the students are not very motivated for learning, and some students fail to see the point of English. Two of seven respondents find it interesting teaching English in a vocational school. One respondent says it is a challenge sometimes, preferring vocational English to traditional English. One respondent lands in the middle, finding it challenging because the teacher has to find and create a lot of the teaching materials him/herself, though finds this more interesting than relying on the textbook, and sees vocational English as an opportunity to learn about the topics the students have in their vocational programmes. I see these responses in light of the student group who typically choose to study at a vocational education programme. Firstly, the students are aged between 16 and 19 years old, and they have had English for at least ten years. It is a subject they know well, and which perhaps is taught in similar ways in the different education levels, and thus is familiar and a routine. Many may lack the motivation to continue with the subject. Secondly, the vocational students are often practical students who wish to learn practical skills, and spend less time in the classroom and more time in the workshop. In some vocational education programmes many of the students also struggle with learning difficulties, and often

have a low grade point average. Many have also been exempt from English, and might feel the gap between their English skills and the anticipated level in vocational upper secondary school too big to cross. These factors might lead to challenges both for the students, in working with a subject they are not necessarily motivated for, and for the teacher finding materials and topics which might be both relevant and motivating for the students to work with. However, working with the challenges in teaching vocational topics in English, might give the teacher an opportunity to learn more about what the students do in their vocational lessons, and thus adapt the English lessons accordingly, so that students might see the point in learning English.

Next the respondents are asked if they find it worthwhile and rewarding teaching vocational English. To this six of seven respondents answer yes. Some expand by stating that the students are motivated in learning their future occupation and that previous knowledge and interest the teacher has in the vocational topics helps make it worthwhile. One respondent says that the students' language skills and lack of interest in a core subject such as English, despite it being relevant for their future occupation, affects whether it is worthwhile and rewarding or not. The respondent finds exceptions in moments where some students show interest and get good results and find this rewarding. The reason why so many respondents find teaching vocational English worthwhile and rewarding might be related to the practical lessons that the students have during their school week. It gives the English teachers the opportunity to link their lessons to what the students are working with in their other subjects, giving the students the language skills needed to perform their chosen profession. However, the teachers' interest or previous knowledge in the topics that the students have in their vocational lessons, might affect how these topics are taught. For example, a teacher with no interest in electronics, would probably teach this topic differently than a teacher who does have an interest in the topic, thereby affecting the outcome of the lessons. The students might

also be more motivated to learn vocational English, because they already have an interest in the topics taught in the vocational lessons, having chosen a vocational education programme. This could affect the teachers' feeling that vocational English is worthwhile.

In question three the respondents are asked if they adapt their English lessons to the students' future occupations. Here five of seven respondents say that they adapt the lessons according to the students' future occupation. One respondent says it depends on the class and education programme. One respondent states that s/he tries her/his best. One respondent is guided by the textbook stating that the 1st year textbook has more vocational resources than the 2nd year book. Another respondent uses the textbooks in addition to finding relevant material elsewhere, but finds this challenging. A third respondent answers that it depends whether the topic of the lessons allows it or not. The respondent finds it difficult to adapt general topics such as literature [fiction] study to the occupations, but the respondent tries to find parallels between the topic of the lesson and the students' occupational future. The majority of the teachers in this study seem to adapt the lessons according to the students' future occupation. It also seems that this is related to whether the textbook has vocational resources or not. The Internet gives the teacher other resources to draw from, both authentic and varied. However, as an English teacher it might be difficult to evaluate whether the source is relevant and correct for the Norwegian context. For example, if a teacher wishes to use an American resource on building a brick wall, it can be difficult to evaluate whether the information given in the resource correlates to Norwegian building standards, and if using the resource will do more harm than good. This might explain why some teachers rely on the textbook, which has been written within the Norwegian context, and therefore might be safer to use in the classroom.

Other aspects which might affect the degree of adaption to the future occupations of the students could be the student group itself. Some students might lack the basic language

skills, and therefore the lessons might be focused on these skills rather than working with vocational topics. Some vocational education programmes might also more easily lend themselves to vocational adaptations, because some education programmes have more practical work and work placements than others, which might function as stepping stones for vocational English lessons.

The fourth question deals with how the teacher teaches vocational English. Two respondents utilise the vocational material from the textbook as well as the workshops the students use in their vocational lessons. One respondent uses the same methods as with general English lessons, but uses the proximity to the workshops to find concrete examples which students can recognise from their practical lessons; another respondent focuses on the essential topics from the curriculum. One of the respondents states that they mainly use reading and writing, homework and written and oral work in the classroom, another that s/he adapts materials to the specific needs, and makes parallels to the information the students are given in their vocational subjects. One respondent found that s/he does not have enough experience to answer such a question. From the results from this small-scale study, there are tendencies which show that teachers utilise the same methodologies that they use when they teach general English. Within this, there seems to be variations from the more traditional approach using reading, writing and oral activities, focussing on the curriculum topics, to utilising the workshops, the students' vocational lessons, audio-visual material and adapting the materials to the students' needs. The results indicate that the teachers utilise a variety of approaches in teaching vocational English, depending on education programmes, topics, and knowledge and student groups among others.

In the fifth question the respondents are asked a concrete question about what teaching materials they use. Four of seven claim that they use the school's English textbooks for year 1 and 2. Some use other textbooks as well as books relevant to the different education

programmes. Three of the respondents say they use a variety of visual materials such as video, charts, diagrams and pictures. Four of the respondents specifically mention computers and the Internet, using different games, interactive activities, resources and vocabulary activities such as crosswords. One respondent mentions specifically using machines and tools, another different vocabulary sources such as word-cards, word puzzles, vocabulary bingo etc. as well as oral activities. One mentions using audio material both related to the textbook and from other sources. Again the results indicate that there is a variety in the materials the teachers use. The textbook is often used, I think because it is readily available and all students should have one. The textbook has set topics prepared by the author(s), which are thought through and include different text types and activities. Most English teachers know the textbook well, and might be comfortable using it in the classroom. Some teachers seem to use materials from other textbooks and from manuals in their lessons. There are many textbooks published in Norway for English courses that offer a variety of texts that teachers might wish to use in their classrooms, without committing to the textbook as the main textbook for the school. All upper secondary school students in Norway today should have a laptop to use at school, which makes using Internet resources easier. The Internet offers a variety of resources such as vocabulary exercises, different games and interactive activities, as well as audio-visual material. Some teachers seem to use similar activities such as vocabulary games, oral activities, audio-visual materials and puzzles outside using the computer as well.

Leading from question five, the respondents are asked what teaching material they find works best for their students. Three of the respondents state they are not sure about this or do not know. One respondent finds that visual material works best and makes connections to what the students learn in their vocational lessons. One finds that concrete material which is relevant to the students' vocational lessons works best, as s/he finds the students must be able to recognise the topic from their vocational work. Two respondents say it depends on what

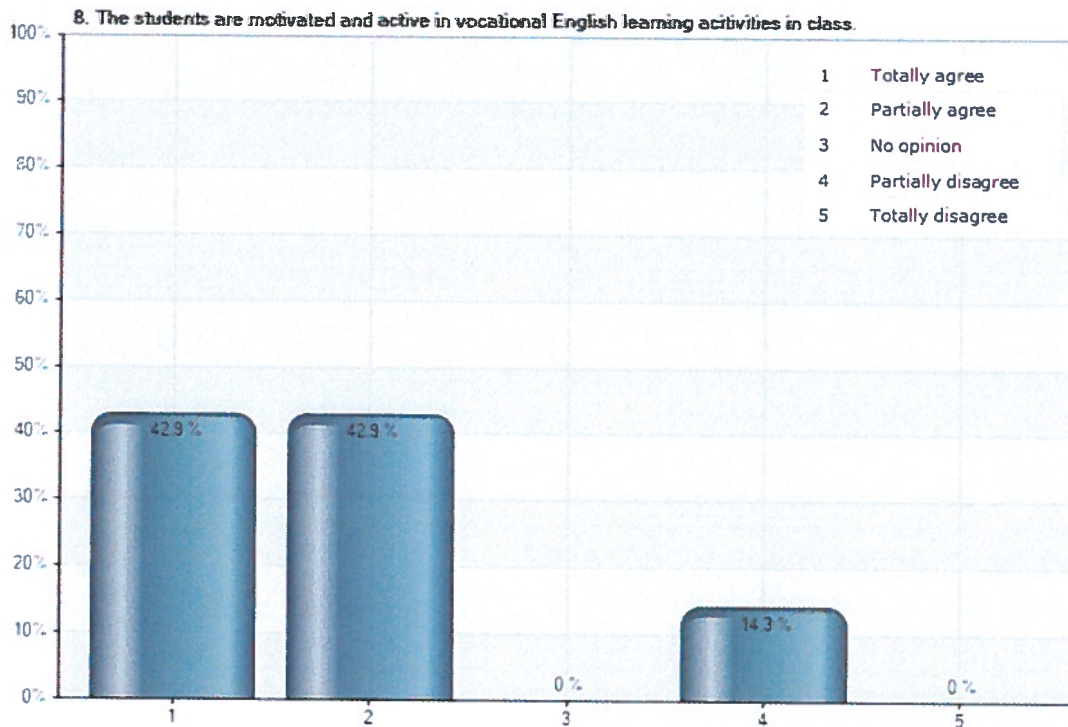
kind of students they teach, and on the individual student. One of these respondents tries to vary the activities and tries to practice “learning by doing”. The most surprising result in this question is that some teachers do not know which materials work best for the students. This might indicate that it is something one does not reflect on during a working day. It could also perhaps relate to the variety of the student group within one class. Students have different ways of acquiring knowledge and skills; they might have different learning styles. So what works for some students might not work at all with other students in the same classroom, thus making it difficult for the teacher to assess whether the materials work or not. Therefore, I think it is important to vary the lessons somewhat so as to include as many students as possible, if not all of the time, all students should at some point feel that their learning style has been catered for. It is not surprising, however, that this small-scale study indicates that many vocational students seem to prefer hands-on or vocational oriented lessons in English, which makes the topics relevant and recognisable for the students.

The last of the open-ended questions asked the respondents to suggest in which ways they can improve their vocational English teaching. One stated that s/he would use specialised dictionaries, contact people who are practicing the students’ future occupations, use visual material such as documentaries and pictures relating to the students’ chosen occupation. Another also suggests using visual materials as well as practical activities to involve the students more in their learning, thus keeping them motivated. A couple of respondents state that they need more knowledge about the vocational subjects and occupations the students are studying, including technical vocabulary, the machines and equipment, procedures and skills, suggesting closer cooperation with the teachers who teach the vocational subjects. The respondents find this difficult because the working days of the English teacher and the vocational teachers are not synchronised. One respondent states that s/he wish for a curriculum more adapted to each educational programme and its subjects.

Again, the results indicate that there is a variety in how the teachers would improve their teaching. From the results there seems to be two trends. Firstly, issues which are to some extent beyond the teachers' control, such as vocational and English teachers' working days not being synchronised which makes cooperation on vocational topics difficult. This might also lead to the English teachers' not having the time to learn about relevant topics. It might also be difficult to take relevant courses, which might entail costs that the school might not be willing to cover. Acquiring resources in addition to the textbook, such as Internet licenses, dictionaries and authentic materials, are also expenses which the school might not be willing to take. These are issues which have to be dealt with on an administrative level. Secondly, there are issues which the teachers themselves can improve. This might be finding new materials and resources, adapting them and creating practical activities, visiting workshops and professionals outside the school and talking to vocational teachers when the opportunity is there. In order for this to be less time-consuming, sharing materials resources with colleagues is both important and practical.

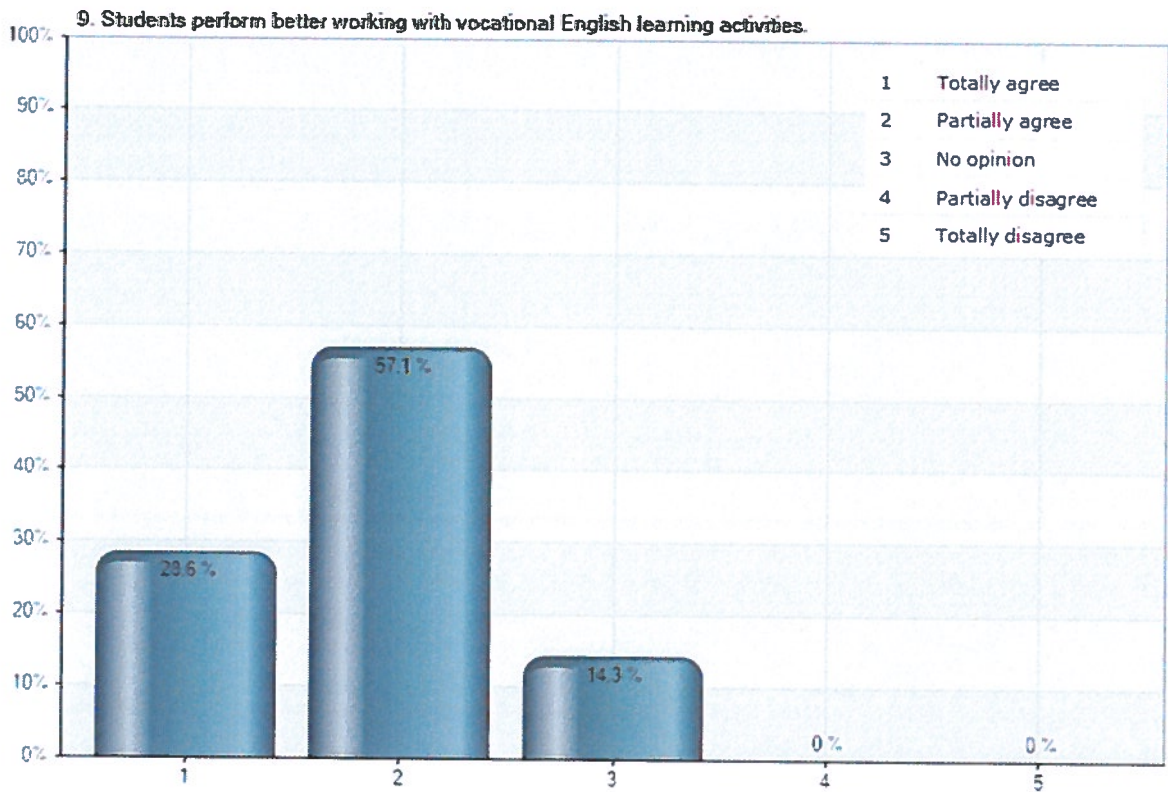
In the second half of the questionnaire, as mentioned earlier, the respondents are asked to consider five statements about their opinions on how the students perceive the vocational English learning activities. The statements and results are presented below in table form.

Table 1



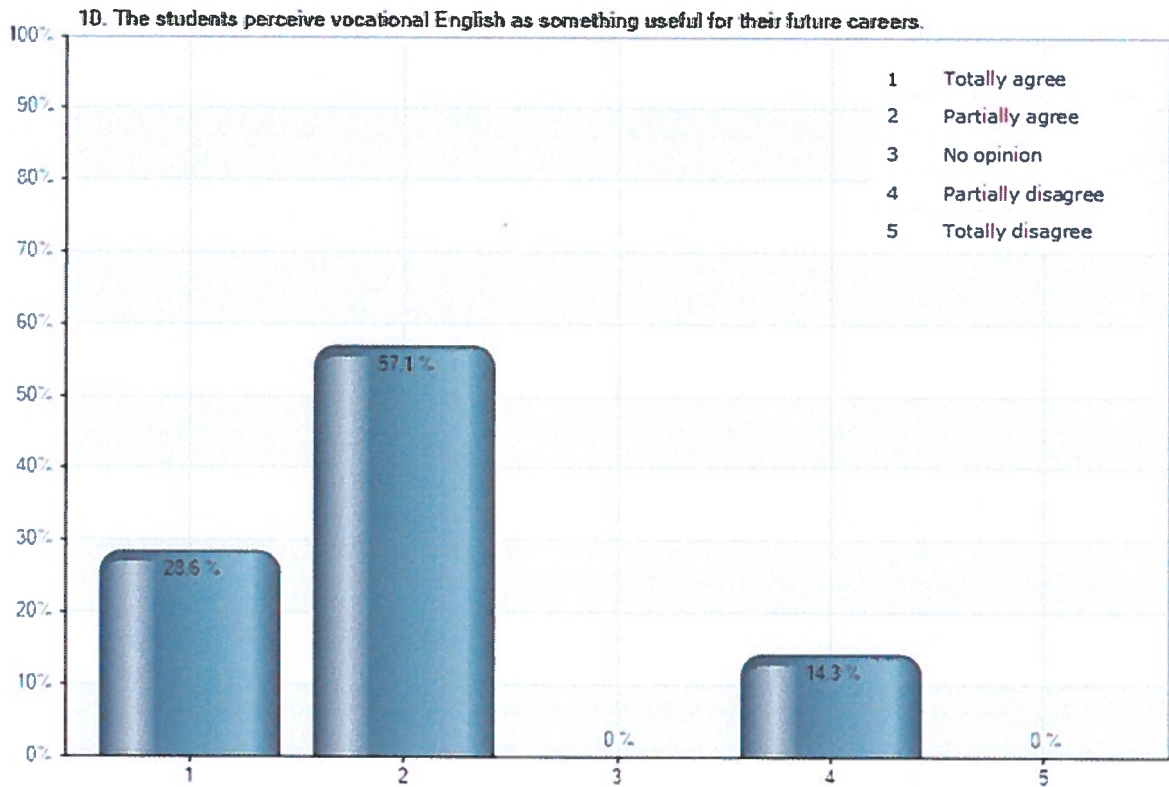
In Table 1, in answer to the statement above, 85.8% agree and 14.3% partially disagree. This seems to indicate that in this small-scale study, teachers perceive the students to be motivated for vocational topics. This might relate to the students having chosen a vocational education programme, presumably from interest in an occupation that this programme leads to, thereby finding the lessons relevant. However, as the student groups are varied both in language skills, previous experience with English and general motivation towards school, might explain why 14.3% partially disagree with the statement.

Table 2



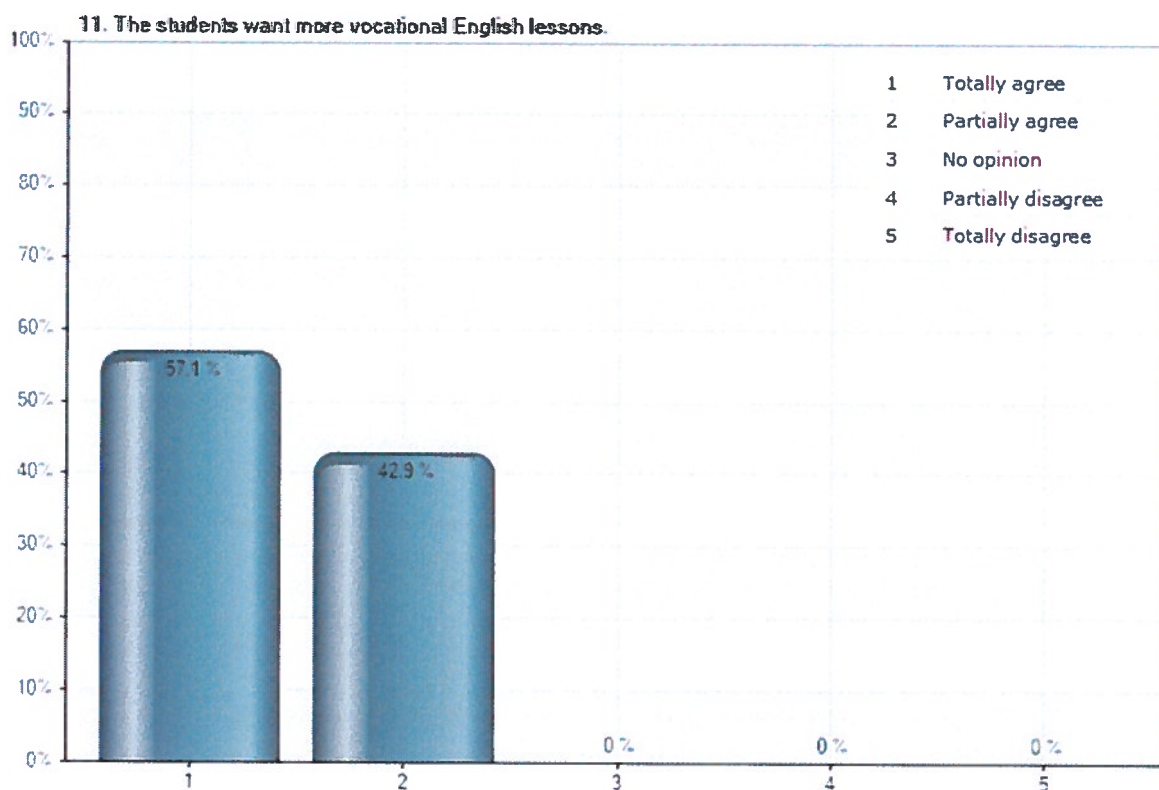
With the second statement the respondents are asked to evaluate to what degree the students' performances are bettered with working with vocational English activities. Here the results show that 85.7% agree with the statement and 14.3% have no opinion on the matter. Similarly to the results in the previous table, this might be seen in light of the students' having chosen their education programme out of interest and have previous knowledge of the vocational topics that they work with in English, and therefore work better with these learning activities, than they might do with general English learning activities.

Table 3



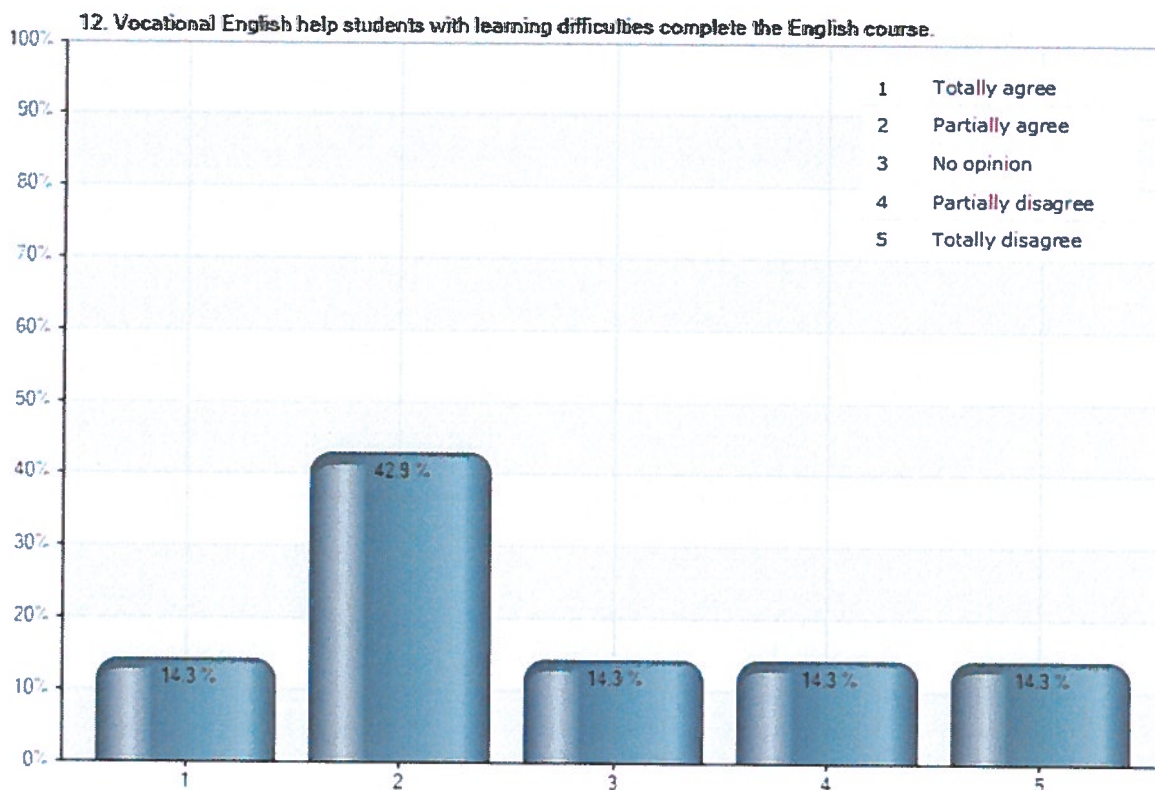
In Table 3 the respondents are asked whether their students perceive vocational English as useful for their future careers. Again the results show that 85.7% of the respondents agree with the statements and 14.3% partially disagree. This could be interpreted as the students realising that English is a part of their future working life, and in order for them to progress in the occupation they need specific language skills. It might be easier for a student to understand that they need to know the English names of the tools in the workshop and the parts of a car if they want to be a car mechanic, rather than understanding why they need to know how to analyse a short story.

Table 4



The fourth table shows that all the respondents agree with the statement that the students want more vocational English lesson. Even though this is a small-scale study, I find this result interesting. It seems to indicate that vocational students have realised the usefulness of having specialised English skills, and wish to have more of this. This might, as previously claimed, be related to the students' pre-existing interest in their future occupation, knowledge they have acquired during the practical lessons and the teachers' adaption of lessons to their education programme. All this motivates them for vocational English and thus opens up for the wish for more of these lessons. However, there are some restrictions that prevent the English course from having a purely vocational English focus; the English core subject curriculum is not only specialised in regards to occupations, but is also a social and cultural subject designed to provide general education, and content of the exam which is dictated by the curriculum.

Table 5



The last table asks the respondents to evaluate whether they agree with the statement that vocational English helps students with learning difficulties complete the English course. The results are varied with a small majority of respondents (57.2%) agreeing with the statement, 28.6% of the respondents do not agree with the statements and 14.3% have no opinion. Also these results are quite interesting, in the context of this small-scale case study. The variation of the results indicates that this is a complex issue with many factors playing a part. Some of these factors might be that some vocational education programmes are more technical than others, with a greater variety of occupations offered, and thus more vocabulary to learn. Also some education programmes have more students with learning difficulties than others. As mentioned before, many students with learning difficulties might not be motivated to work with English even if it is vocationally oriented, due to lack of basic skills, learning strategies and interest. Also, with many programmes being technical, with a wide vocabulary, they

might be challenging for students with learning difficulties. For example, a student with dyslexia studying at the technical programme might be expected to learn a wide vocabulary related to welding, machining, car mechanics, electronics etc. and the sheer mass of it might leave them demotivated. On the other hand, working with this specialised vocabulary, related to something he or she is interested in and knowledgeable about, at an adapted level might just be what it takes to give this student a sense of empowerment, and the opportunity to show his or her skills.

5. Summary and conclusion

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), including vocational English or English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) is a field that for the past 40 years has mainly focused on the genres and the corpus data relevant to the adult learner and the further education system. It has for the most part focused on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and occupations which require college or university education. However, that does not mean that principles within ESP and EOP are not relevant for the vocational upper secondary school. ESP does not focus on specific teaching methods, but on the specific needs of the students and these ideas can be, albeit with some adaption, utilised in upper secondary school as well. This shows that there is a need for research into the pedagogical applicability of ESP at the upper secondary school level.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a method which combines both language and non-language subjects, and has been used in Norwegian upper secondary schools. Some teachers of English at vocational schools have had good results among students who lack motivation toward the English subject, where the students have gained confidence and motivation with working with topics relevant to their chosen education programme.

The current education reform Knowledge Promotion focuses on the basic skills which are a part of every subject taught. These basic skills in addition to general English and vocationally oriented English are a part of the English core subject in upper secondary school. A curriculum amendment which takes effect in August 2013 increases the focus on vocational English, thus opening up for further vocational orientation of the subject for the vocational students. This and a revision of the education system in Norway initiated by the Ministry of Education, attempt to make vocational education programmes more adapted to the knowledge-based and international labour market in Norway. With these changes, along with the New Possibilities and the FYR projects that focus on helping low-scoring students complete their courses, it is thought that the drop-out rate of vocational students will decrease in the future.

Using a small-scale case study involving seven teachers, I have attempted to gain more knowledge about how teachers vocationally orientate their English lessons. The survey indicates that the teachers for the most part find vocational English worthwhile, though challenging at times. This might be due to the student group, the students' motivation and attitude towards the subject, the education programme, access to resources and the teachers' general interest in and knowledge about the vocational topics. The methods and materials used for the purpose of vocational English seems as varied as the teachers themselves, ranging from textbook-based lessons, to utilising different resources such as interactive games and vocabulary exercises found both on and outside the Internet, audio-visual material in the form of recordings, videos and various illustrations and the workshops. An interesting finding in the survey is that some of the teachers asked do not seem to have reflected on whether the material they use in their lessons works for the purpose intended. This might be related to the student group and the different students' learning styles.

In the last part of the survey, the teachers consider statements regarding their views on how the students receive and perform with the vocationally-oriented lessons. The results seem to indicate that students perform better when working with topics related to their future occupation, and that the students are more motivated to work with such topics. The teachers also perceive the students to see the usefulness of knowing vocational English in their work situation. Whether the vocationally-oriented lessons help students with learning difficulties to pass the English course or not, gave a wider spread in the results, utilising the whole scale. This might be due to the difference within the student group, as many of the students at some vocational programmes have learning difficulties, and some are to various degree lacking the basic skills in English, and thus might find vocational English an extra burden. However, one may infer from this small-scale case study that teachers view vocational English as something worthwhile, albeit challenging, and that they perceive that the students also find vocational English worthwhile doing.

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Appendix 1

SURVEY QUESTIONS – TEACHING VOCATIONAL ENGLISH

PART 1 Open-ended questions – feel free to answer as fully as possible

- 1) Is it a challenge teaching English in a vocational school?
- 2) Is it worthwhile and rewarding to teach vocational English?
- 3) Do you adapt your English lessons to the students' future occupations?
- 4) How do you teach vocational English?
- 5) What teaching materials do you use?
- 6) Which teaching materials work best for the students?
- 7) Can you suggest ways which would improve your teaching of vocational English?

PART 2 Statements about how teachers perceive the students – Likert

- 1) The students are motivated and active in the vocational English learning activities in class.

Totally agree partially agree no opinion partially disagree totally disagree

- 2) Students perform better working with vocational English learning activities.

Totally agree partially agree no opinion partially disagree totally disagree

- 3) The students perceive vocational English as something useful for their future careers.

Totally agree partially agree no opinion partially disagree totally disagree

- 4) The students want more vocational English lessons.

Totally agree partially agree no opinion partially disagree totally disagree

- 5) Vocational English help students with learning difficulties complete the English course.

Totally agree partially agree no opinion partially disagree totally disagree