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PhD revisited: How teachers teach and readers read

Developing reading comprehension in English in Norwegian upper secondary school¹

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ABSTRACT This chapter reports a doctoral study (Brevik, 2015) that investigated the practices involved in developing reading comprehension in English as a second language in upper secondary school; focusing specifically on reading strategy instruction and use. The chapter describes how strategies were taught and used markedly differently in general and vocational study programmes, and addresses recent developments related to reading comprehension instruction across contexts in Norway, with suggestions for further research.

KEYWORDS English as a second language (L2) | reading comprehension | strategy instruction and use | reading proficiency

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1. The chapter presents the overall results of a doctoral study (Brevik, 2015) from the University of Oslo. This is an article-based thesis, with three published articles (Brevik, 2014, 2017; Brevik, Olsen, & Hellekjær, 2016). The thesis in its entirety can be found here: <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-48331>

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INTRODUCTION

At the heart of this doctoral thesis is scaffolding of reading comprehension – its nature, instruction, and student proficiency. It is an article-based thesis comprising three articles. At the initiation of this doctoral study, in 2011, little was known about how English teachers in upper secondary schools in Norway worked with reading skills in their instruction, or how students developed as readers of English. What we did know was that Norwegian students were among the best readers of English as a second language (L2) in Europe in 2000 (Ibsen, 2004), but that their reading skills were not good enough to enable acceptance into universities abroad (Hellekjær, 2005). We also knew that based on the current educational reform (*Knowledge Promotion*), teachers reported working with reading skills on a regular basis across subjects (Aasen, Møller, Rye, Ottesen, Prøitz, & Hertzberg, 2012). However, we had little knowledge of whether this was true for the English subject, and if so, whether the development of reading skills in English was scaffolded by reading comprehension strategy instruction and use, or supported by the use of other basic skills. This lack of research on English reading comprehension and strategy instruction in Norway at the time, compared to international reading comprehension strategy research, indicated a need for such research in upper secondary schools in Norway.

With this as a backdrop, I aimed to investigate practices involved in developing reading comprehension in English in Norwegian upper secondary school. I sought to identify what a sample of teachers did in their reading instruction, whether they included reading strategies, and how they perceived their instructional practices. I further aimed to investigate reading comprehension among these teachers' upper secondary students (16–17 years old), focusing on their use of reading comprehension strategies in the classroom and their perceived purposes for using the strategies, along with their levels of reading proficiency. Thus, the overarching aim was *to investigate the practices involved in developing reading comprehension in English as the L2 in Norwegian upper secondary school*.

REVIEW

Research has confirmed that strategy instruction improves reading comprehension (e.g. Bernhardt, 2011; Block & Duffy, 2008; Duke et al., 2011; Grabe, 2009; National Reading Panel, 2000). However, research has also suggested that reading comprehension strategy instruction is not carried out in the majority of classrooms (Duke et al., 2011). Through guided strategy instruction, teachers can help stu-

dents to overcome reading comprehension problems by using a small repertoire of reading strategies flexibly (e.g. Block & Duffy, 2008; Duke et al., 2011; Fisher & Frey, 2008), and to develop as independent L2 readers also without the direct guidance of a teacher (Bernhardt, 2011).

One question is which strategies to teach and use, and Grabe's (2009) summary of research on reading strategies over the past two decades revealed that the same strategies are to a large extent used in the L2 as in the L1. He further found that all readers use many strategies, and while good and poor readers seem to use the same types of strategies, good readers use these more effectively than do the poor readers (see also Bernhardt, 2011; Bunch et al., 2014). The argument is that all readers experience comprehension problems at some point, and that knowledge about strategies is not enough, they need to learn how to use strategies effectively to monitor and repair their developing L2 comprehension. For L2 reading, Bernhardt (2011) has also emphasised the relationship between reading in L1 and L2, arguing that L1 reading and L2 language knowledge together explain 50% of L2 reading comprehension, with an unexplained variance accounting for the remaining 50%. Based on this prior research, I identified a need to observe whether English L2 instruction in Norway included reading comprehension strategy instruction, and to what extent the L2 students used such strategies. Furthermore, I included a dual-language perspective on the students' reading comprehension within and across Norwegian L1 and English L2.

THEORY

Reading comprehension, according to the L1-focused RAND Reading Study Group (2002) model, is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (p. 11). The construction of meaning requires interaction between the *reader* who is doing the comprehending, the *text* that is to be comprehended, and the *activity* in which comprehension is a part, occurring within a *sociocultural environment* (RAND, 2002). One goal of reading instruction is to help readers understand the immediate text at hand, while another is to help the students develop into independent and active readers who use a small repertoire of reading comprehension strategies (RAND, 2002). In this doctoral thesis, I integrated reading comprehension theories with a Vygotskian framing: considering reading comprehension as a process that moves from the internalisation of reading strategies as tools to understand written texts, to the externalisation of how reading comprehension of such texts

manifests itself for the L2 readers, comprising a process where they ideally develop strategic reading.

Thus, the general theoretical and conceptual framing of this thesis is that reading instruction and reading comprehension in Norwegian upper secondary school take place within a sociocultural environment where students actively participate in their own learning and development. The thesis draws primarily on Vygotskian thinking on the importance of the active learner and the teacher who supports such learners, the internalisation and use of reading comprehension strategies as tools for learning, and reading proficiency as an externalisation of reading comprehension. This approach is influenced by the legacy of Vygotsky (e.g. Vygotsky, 1981, 1986), and later interpreters such as Claxton (2007), Daniels (2008), and Edwards (2015).

In brief, the theoretical concepts of my thesis that relate to a Vygotskian legacy are thus: (a) the adolescent L2 reader as a Vygotskian learner, (b) the L2 teacher in the Vygotskian classroom, (c) reading strategies as tools for developing reading comprehension, and (d) internalisation and externalisation of reading comprehension. Vygotsky's learner is active, ideally propelling herself forward in a process of learning and development (Edwards, 2015). These learners are not passive receivers of information, but actively engage with the task, trying to make sense personally and culturally. Participating actively in the learning environment enables Vygotsky's learner to relate meaning-making in the classroom to his or her individual consciousness, and to make personal connections between the task at hand and other topics within and beyond the classroom, consequently repositioning herself in these practices. Thus, in the Vygotskian sense, teachers and students might learn to teach or use reading strategies as tools that are culturally valued within education, for example how to summarise important information in a text or how to integrate new textual information with prior knowledge (e.g., Block & Duffy, 2008; Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011; Fisher & Frey, 2008; Grabe, 2009). In this sense, learning about a tool, such as a reading comprehension strategy, is not enough; it also needs to be used.

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, this doctoral thesis used a mixed methods approach to study the qualitative *and* quantitative aspects of practices involved in developing reading comprehension in English (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2013). The study moved from investigating the teacher perspective on strategy instruction, with observations of such instruction in the classroom, to the student perspective, in order to obtain a better understanding of their personal purposes for strategy use.

RESEARCH DESIGN

I designed my mixed-methods approach in three phases, as shown in Figure 10.1, commonly recognised as a multiphase design (Creswell, 2013).

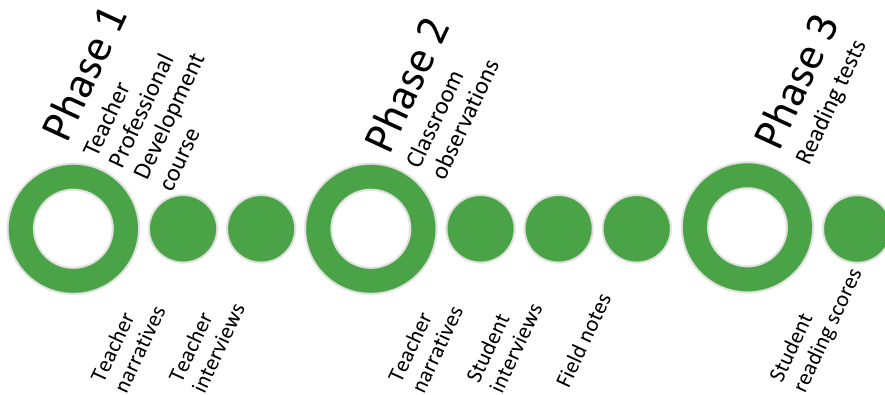


FIGURE 10.1. The research design.

I combined qualitative (teacher and student interviews, teacher narratives, classroom observations), and quantitative (reading test results) data sources. In Phase 1, I studied teachers' reported reading instruction during a teacher professional development (TPD) course, which I facilitated. First, I used teacher interviews and narratives. In Phase 2, I combined classroom observations with student focus groups and teacher narratives to determine how the teachers taught English reading comprehension one year after the TPD course, how their students used the strategies offered to them, and how they reflected on the strategy instruction and use. Phase 3 was a large-scale quantitative study in which I used two national reading tests (Norwegian and English) and analysed the students' results across both languages.

SAMPLE

The participants in Phase 1 were 21 teachers at 11 different upper secondary schools. In Phase 2, I asked all 21 if they would like to invite me to observe their reading instruction. Twenty of these were positive, and five were randomly chosen for participation. I followed these five English teachers and their 64 students one year after Phase 1; see Table 10.1 for an overview.

TABLE 10.1. Overview of the participants in Phase 2.

Schools	Teachers (pseudonyms)	Study pro- grammes	Students in each class
School A	Magne	General	9
School B	Petter	Vocational	9
School C	Linda	Vocational	20
School D	Ruth	General	19
School D	Andreas	Vocational	7
Total			64 students

In Phase 3, I used a national sample of all students in upper secondary school (vg1) who participated in both the English L2 reading test and the Norwegian L1 test ($N=10,331$), including students in general and vocational study programmes.

DATA

The data used in this doctoral thesis was collected from 2011–2012 (see Table 10.2).

TABLE 10.2. Overview of the phases, including methods, sample, data, analytical concepts.

	Phase 1 TPD course	Phase 2 Classroom observations	Phase 3 Reading tests
Methods	Qualitative	Qualitative	Quantitative
Sample	Sample 1 (County): 21 upper secondary teachers	Sample 2 (County): Five of the English teachers from Phase 1. Sample 3 (County): 64 students	Sample 4 (National): 10,331 upper secondary students (including students in Phase 2)
Data	Teacher narratives and teacher interviews	Teacher narratives, student interviews, and field notes	Student reading scores in the L1 and the L2
Analytical concepts	Reading instruction Reading strategies Metacognitive awareness	Reading instruction Reading strategies Metacognitive awareness	Reading proficiency

Phase 1 combined two teacher interviews with their written narratives. The TPD course took place over two separate days, with a four-week interval in between. The pre-interview was conducted at the beginning of the first day, with the narratives and the post-interview conducted during the last course day. In Phase 2, I conducted classroom observations that included field notes, a new set of teacher narratives, and student interviews. As a participant observer, I developed knowledge of reading instruction and reading strategy use in each English lesson, which helped enhance my semi-structured interviews with the students and my use of classroom observation as validation of the teacher and student data. The reading tests introduced a shift from Phase 2, which combined different types of qualitative data from a county-based sample, to Phase 3, which built solely on quantitative reading test data from a national sample of 10,331 students. The test scores were collected from a print-based test in L1 and a digital test in L2. I collected the L1 data directly from each upper secondary school, while the L2 data were provided from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Research.

DATA ANALYSIS

To increase the methodological transparency of my research, I present some examples of how the data analyses were carried out for the various data sources.

Teacher interviews: In analysing the teacher interviews, I analysed my notes to see whether they revealed metacognitive awareness concerning their instruction in terms of how the teachers reflected on their strategy instruction in the classroom. *Teacher narratives:* I analysed the written narratives to identify how the teachers described their reading instruction, which reading strategies they reported teaching, and when, how, and why they taught them. To identify reading strategies, I searched for the specific names of the strategies, as well as descriptions of these strategies using other words. To identify reading instruction, I searched for descriptions of how the teachers had introduced the strategies, provided tasks, and assessed strategy use in each lesson. I also compared the narratives with my field notes in Phase 2. *Field notes:* I validated the findings in the Phase 2 narratives with information from my field notes. There was a general consistency across these data sources, suggesting overlapping perspectives from the teachers and myself as researcher, and across Phases 1 and 2, which provided corroborating findings of the strategies that were instructed and used.

Student interviews: I transcribed and analysed the audiotaped student interviews to identify metacognitive awareness in terms of how the students reflected on their strategy use in and out of school. *Student reading tests:* I analysed the reading test

scores using the quantitative software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The two reading tests were merged by using Student ID as a variable to create one data file for both tests, with each students' L1 and L2 test results linked together. This procedure was used to enable identification of the students' reading proficiency across L1 and L2, using frequency, reliability, and regression analyses. The reading tests are standardised, with closed items only, in terms of all questions having more than one fixed answer to choose between, with no open-ended rubrics.

RESEARCH CREDIBILITY AND ETHICS

I took a number of steps to minimise the credibility threats to my research through *multiple validities* (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). The use of a mixed-methods approach contributes to validity in and of itself by each phase influencing the design of the next (*sequential validity*) and by comparing multiple data sources throughout the phases (*triangulation*). Figure 10.2 illustrates this relationship, with the two validity procedures placed in the centre of the figure, where the three phases overlap. In addition, I have used *sample integration validity*, *emic-etic validity*, *peer-debriefing*, and *external audit* in all three phases. I addressed additional validity procedures in the separate phases; *member-checking* in Phases 1 and 2, *reactivity* in Phase 2, and *internal validity* and *construct validity* in Phase 3 (see Figure 10.2).

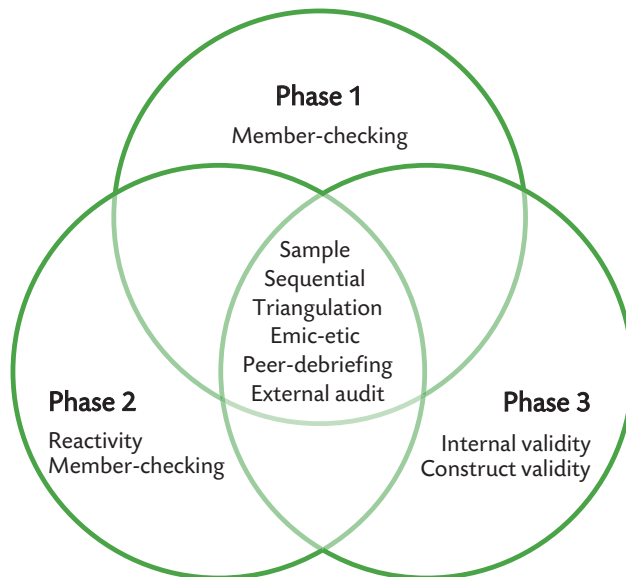


FIGURE 10.2. Multiple validities addressed in each of the three phases, and integrated across.

Furthermore, I employed three measures of reliability: *reliability of results* (as seen in replication over time showing similar results), *intra- and inter-rater reliability* (as in consistent coding over time), and *measurement reliability* as a psychometric property (e.g., test-retest reliability). When analysing the narratives and interviews, I coded and reanalysed the data three times in each phase, after two, six, and 18 months, and comparisons of the coding into categories indicated satisfactory overlap (intra-rater reliability). For the reading tests, all analyses were conducted several times by myself and one of the co-authors (inter-rater reliability). Finally, all participants gave their voluntary consent to participate after being informed that they could withdraw at any time (e.g., Busher & James, 2012), in line with the ethical guidelines compiled by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), who assessed and approved the data collection situations that needed approval.

FINDINGS

A main finding of this doctoral thesis was that reading comprehension strategy instruction and use actually took place in English lessons in upper secondary school. In Phase 1, I found that the teachers' description of their reading comprehension instruction changed over time, and the findings suggested a more active teaching of reading comprehension strategies than what the teachers themselves initially articulated. Most of the English teachers first reported that they did not teach reading comprehension strategies, but that their students "just read". Based on their descriptions, I developed the Mode of reading continuum (Figure 10.3).

The main idea in the *Mode of reading continuum* is to see strategies as powerful tools to enhance comprehension when needed, in order to bridge gaps in comprehension. In the "Nike mode of reading", students read as suggested by the Nike slogan "Just do it!" without analysing the task or considering how to read, making it difficult to know whether they understand what is read or whether they "just read" to finish the task. The Sherlock Holmes mode of reading has a broader vision of a deliberate puzzle resolution, where students use strategies in order to read like a detective by analysing the task, searching for clues not explicitly stated in the text, and monitoring their comprehension before, during, and after reading in order to understand, and to initiate other strategies to repair comprehension when needed.

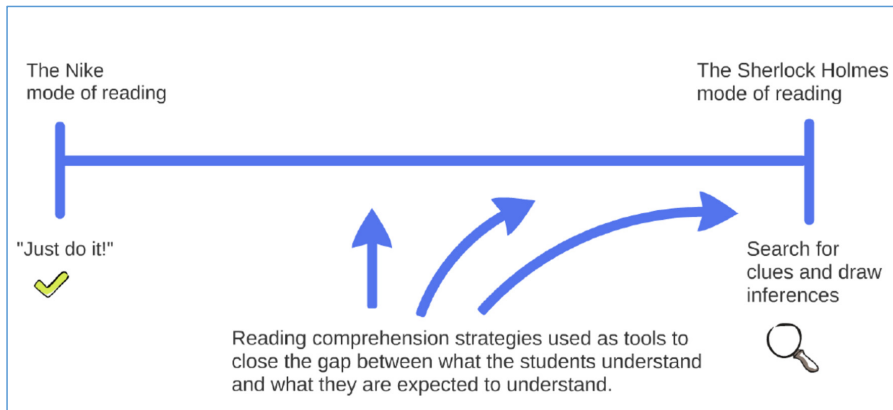


FIGURE 10.3. Mode of reading continuum²

After participating in the TPD course, the teachers' descriptions changed, and they made their implicit practices of reading comprehension strategy instruction explicit, along with explanations of how and why they included strategies in their reading instructions. Based on their descriptions, I identified a small repertoire of strategies (Figure 10.3) that they seemed to use in their English lessons. To a large extent, they used the same reading comprehension strategies in English L2 as in Norwegian L1. In Phase 2, one year after the TPD course, I found evidence in the five observed classrooms that reading strategies were considered valuable learning tools that helped the students develop reading comprehension in English. I also found that these five English teachers to a large extent prompted the use of the same strategies in 2012 as they had reported using in 2011 (Phase 1). Figure 10.4 provides an overview of the reading comprehension strategies used in both years.

The main difference between the interactions in the teacher and student interviews was the explicitness and the way in which participants talked about the strategies. While the teachers provided little information in the first interview and explicit information in the second (Phase 1), the students richly revealed why, when, and how they used reading comprehension strategies, both in the environment of the English lessons and individually (Phase 2). The classroom observations offered further details of *how* these strategies were instructed and used. Of note was that the teachers' reading comprehension strategy instruction was very

2. The *Mode of reading continuum* was created by the author, based on the "Nike mode of reading" and the "Sherlock Holmes mode of reading" provided by Professor P. David Pearson in a private conversation in 2013 at the University of California, Berkeley (see Pearson, 2012).

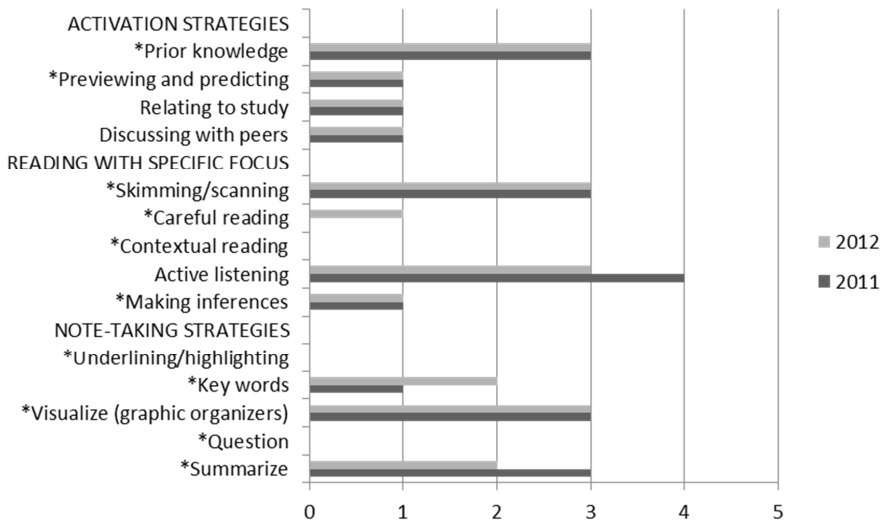


FIGURE 10.4. Overview of reading comprehension strategies reported by the five English teachers in 2011 and observed in the English lessons in 2012.

Note. * = strategies taught in the TPD course.

different in general and vocational programmes. While the teachers in vocational programmes demonstrated a gradual release of responsibility for the strategy use to their students, for example by offering students time to practise strategy use, the teachers in general programmes did not. These differences were also reflected in the students' own explanations. The vocational students found that using reading strategies made them better readers and that they used strategies even when the teachers did not ask them to (see Excerpt 1, translated from Norwegian). In contrast, the students in general programmes revealed that they used the strategies to meet task and teacher demands only (see Excerpt 2, translated from Norwegian).

Excerpt 1. Vocational studies

Researcher: Do you use strategies when the teacher does not ask you to?

Student 1: Yes.

Student 2: Yes. It depends on which task I am going to do, and then I choose reading strategies myself. If we get a task where I need to find a year, then I search until I find it.

Researcher: And you do this without the teacher asking you to do so?

Student 2: Yes. Then I don't have to read five pages.

Student 3: I make questions. And then have others ask me questions. I read until I find something that I think is important in a text. Then I stop and then I ask another one a question about it. And see if they remember it. And then the opposite; they ask me about what they find important.

Excerpt 2. General studies

Researcher: Okay, so you usually open the book and read the heading. But you said if you had to read it, so if you're sort of instructed, [that] this is something you should read, then you read the heading? And then start reading?

Student 1: [nods]

Researcher: Okay. What if you read at home and no one has told you to do it?

Student 1: Then I just read.

Thus, while the vocational students saw a personal relevance of using reading comprehension strategies to help them understand texts, the students in general programmes mainly used the strategies to meet their teacher's demand or to be assessed on their strategy use.

The second main finding concerned the large-scale quantitative analysis of data from the two national standardised reading tests (one in Norwegian L1 and one in English L2) among 10,331 students. The regression analysis indicated that the observed differences between the students in general and vocational classrooms seemed to vary with their English reading proficiency based on their test results. In short, the reading test results showed that the students in general programmes, who used strategies because the teacher asked them to, achieved better reading results than the vocational students, who used strategies because it helped them understand. This difference indicates that vocational students chose to use strategies in the classroom because they were poorer readers, and experienced that strategy use helped them understand better.

The test results also demonstrated that although girls achieved higher results than boys did when reading in Norwegian, the boys achieved almost as good results when reading in English as the girls did, and that the majority of the poor readers were boys in vocational study programmes. The findings further showed that their reading proficiency in English was statistically related to their reading proficiency in Norwegian, as well as to their study programme – with up to 49% of the variance in students' reading proficiency in English being explained by their reading proficiency in Norwegian, in addition to their study programme.

However, the relationship between the two languages was not linear for all students. An unexpected finding was that although three-quarters of the students read almost equally well (or poorly) in English as in Norwegian, a small group of students were among the poorest readers in Norwegian (20% score or less) and simultaneously among the best readers in English (60% score or more). Most of these students were boys in vocational studies, and based on this unexpected profile, this group of students was labelled “Outliers”.

DISCUSSION: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ENGLISH DIDACTICS FIELD

In my doctoral work, I had the opportunity to study teacher and student learning in the area of English reading comprehension. The main contribution of this doctoral thesis is knowledge about how teachers teach and readers read when developing reading comprehension in English in Norwegian upper secondary school.

EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The main empirical contributions of this doctoral thesis are the acknowledgement among teachers and students that reading strategies are considered valuable learning tools that help readers develop their English comprehension, that the teachers do indeed teach such strategies, and the confirmation that reading proficiency in English is closely related both to reading proficiency in Norwegian and to the students’ study programme.

First, I found evidence that teachers in fact *do* teach reading strategies in the classroom to help their students develop reading comprehension in English, contrary to what we had learnt from prior research (e.g. Pressley, 2008). The English teachers prompted their students to use a repertoire of reading strategies flexibly, typically including a combination of the following strategies: setting purposes, activating prior knowledge, previewing and predicting, skimming and scanning, active listening, careful (close) reading, making inferences, noting key words, visualising, summarising, relating to study, and discussing with peers. Most of these reading comprehension strategies have been identified as effective strategies in international studies (Block & Duffy, 2008; Duke et al., 2011; Fisher & Frey, 2008; Grabe, 2009). The teachers’ written reflections concerning their own English instruction indicated that they found these strategies to be effective tools for developing their students’ as strategic L2 readers.

Second, this thesis portrays how the design and instruction of English reading comprehension strategies is quite different in general and vocational programmes.

All five teachers introduced the strategies, by naming and describing them, or modelling them in action, and the strategies were then used independently or collaboratively by the students, with guided teacher practice, in tightly structured tasks. However, after these introductory reading activities, a marked difference emerged; in general programmes, the teacher either continued to suggest the use of strategies or asked the students to work with a new set of tightly structured tasks, while in vocational programmes, the teacher offered more open tasks, prompting the students to apply strategies to texts when needed, releasing the responsibility to the students, and providing opportunities to practise strategy use and develop comprehension. This finding showed how vocational teachers are aware that their students might struggle as L2 readers, and that they might need to see personal relevance of strategies by experiencing that strategy use actually helps them understand. In contrast, the general studies teachers seemed to be aware that their students were good readers, and focused on reading more texts instead of more complex texts that would demand the use of strategies to understand.

A third contribution is knowledge that upper secondary students' reading proficiency in English L2 is, for most students, closely related to their reading proficiency in Norwegian L1. The only available data for upper secondary school students up until this doctoral thesis in 2015, were overall achievement and examination grades in the English school subject at the end of Vg1, which means that this doctoral thesis provided new information about upper secondary students as *readers* of English. An important contribution here was that although girls read better than boys in Norwegian, boys read almost as well as girls in English, which challenges the view on languages and gender among adolescents in Norway (Kjærnsli & Jensen, 2016). Also, while the test results in this thesis showed that most students achieved almost similar results on both tests, a small group of students – mainly boys in vocational programmes – was identified as markedly better readers in English than in Norwegian, and therefore labelled “Outliers”. This was an unexpected finding among a group of students that is at risk of dropping out of school, both in Norway and internationally, which might contribute to a more positive view on vocational boys as good readers of English – contrary to popular opinion.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The first theoretical contribution of this thesis is the *Mode of reading continuum*, which I developed based on the teachers' reported strategy instruction in Phase I (see Figure 10.3).

Another theoretical contribution is the use of a Vygotskian framing to reading research. In my thesis, this framing has contributed to expanding our knowledge about readers being active in their own reading development, how they use strategies as tools, and how teachers can support this process (Claxton, 2007; Daniels, 2008; Edwards, 2015; Vygotsky, 1981). The need to focus on how the reader engages with tools is what the Vygotskian approach adds theoretically to the L2 reading research. This contribution is particularly important if we want to develop the view on strategies from mainly a cognitive tool to seeing reading in a socio-cultural framing, as a school activity and as a lifelong endeavour – where students engage in strategic reading in English on their own initiative, without being explicitly asked to do so, whether in higher education, in future work, or in the private sphere.

A third theoretical contribution of this thesis is the confirmation of the cross-linguistic aspect of Bernhardt's (2011) *Compensatory model of second-language reading*, where L1 is said to account for up to 20% of L2 literacy. My analysis not only confirmed the model, but did so with large-scale data from 10,331 readers; it also applied Norwegian L1 and English L2 to the model for the first time, and showed that L1 explained up to 49% of the overall reading proficiency in English L2.

METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The main methodological contribution of this thesis arises from my mixed-methods approach, obtaining the teachers' *and* the students' perspectives on the development of English reading comprehension and integrating this knowledge with information about the students' reading proficiency. Another methodological contribution is a template I developed for data collection (Figure 10.5). The template functioned as an essential methodological tool in all data collection situations in Phases 1 and 2; as interview guide, narrative structure, and observation protocol. Using the same template enabled comparison of data across time, situations, and perspectives, which minimised the threat to reliability. A final methodological contribution is the merging of large-scale student reading scores from the tests in different languages by using the same student ID across the two datasets. The use of this approach argues that national assessments could profit from using the same student ID on different tests, thereby enabling comparisons across not only reading in two languages, but also with results for numeracy, which students at various levels participate in annually in Norway (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2009).

Subject and year
Comprehension strategies:
School:
Teacher:
Topic:
Duration:
Learning aim
Preparations
Instruction
Before reading:
During reading:
After reading:
Didactic reflection

FIGURE 10.5. Template for data collection: interview guide, teacher narrative, observation protocol.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Since 2011, when the data collection for this thesis began, I have been constantly reminded of the lack of reading research in Norwegian upper secondary schools *in general* – and particularly in English L2. My doctoral thesis was the second one in Norway to address this situation. Since my thesis was finalised in 2015, one more doctoral thesis in English reading has been published; namely Charboneau (2016). While in his thesis Hellekjær (2005) studied reading comprehension in higher education and upper secondary school (see Chapter 8), and my thesis studied upper secondary school, Charboneau (2016) studied reading instruction in primary school (see Chapter 11).

Together, these doctoral studies have left a research gap concerning English reading instruction in lower secondary school, a gap I have addressed in a recent study (Brevik, 2019b) investigating what was being done in the name of reading comprehension across two school years (9th and 10th grade) in 60 video-recorded English lessons in seven classrooms. Key findings showed that across these lessons, students worked with text more than half the time (56%), using a variety of print, digital, and online texts. Most texts were authentic narratives (56%) or informational texts (44%), with few non-authentic ones (8%). Teachers who prioritised reading comprehension instructed their students in close reading of texts, offering guided strategy practice based on student needs, and encouraged daily use of known strategies instead of explicitly teaching new ones. This article builds on and extends the classroom research in my doctoral work, and findings also indicate that in lower secondary classrooms, reading comprehension strategies are instructed and used to a greater extent than indicated by prior research.

Based on my doctoral thesis, I have also looked into the potential existence of an Outlier profile of students who are markedly better readers in English L2 than in Norwegian L1. Thus, in order to find out *why* the Outliers were such good readers of English, I designed the project *Vocational and General Students' Use of English* (VOGUE) in 2015. Findings from VOGUE research has confirmed that the Outlier profile indeed exists both in national and local samples (Brevik, 2016, 2019; Brevik & Hellekjær, 2018), and that while most are vocational boys, there are also some girls in vocational programmes and a few students in general programmes. Findings show that it is important to the Outliers to be good readers of English, and that they considered their English use outside school, particularly in online gaming, surfing on the internet, and using social media, to be the main reason they were markedly better readers in English than in Norwegian (Brevik, 2019a).

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH

Not only my doctoral thesis, but also classroom practice and international research demonstrate that the use of reading comprehension strategies improves reading comprehension. The importance of strategy *use* cannot be overemphasised. It is not enough for teachers to teach strategies, or for students to use strategies “just” because they are instructed to do so by the teacher. Students need to consciously choose to use a reading strategy, they need to do so to repair a comprehension problem, and they need to experience that the strategy use helps them understand aspects of a text that they did not understand without using the strategy. In short, learning *about* a reading comprehension strategy will not easily propel the active learner forward as such, while *using* it in the dialectic process of internalisation and externalisation to expand learning capacity might promote and repair reading comprehension.

This thesis highlights the notion that while using reading strategies will not transform a poor reader into a good reader, helping students to see the potential of using reading strategies as tools might develop their reading comprehension, thus contributing to their development as active and strategic English readers. This requires that teachers offer students the time to practise strategy use, to actively engage with text demands, to both acquire and use the strategies as tools, to make mistakes, get stuck and make an attempt at meaning. This means to create what Claxton (2007) called “potentiating environments”, where “there are plenty of hard, interesting things to do, and it is accepted as normal that everyone regularly gets confused, frustrated and stuck” (p. 125). In other words, more importantly for

teachers than explicitly teaching new reading comprehension strategies is to give the students opportunities to practise using the strategy, whether it is a new strategy or a known one.

Another implication of strategy use is to establish the need for a strategy. In short, if students are asked to read a text that they understand without much effort, there is no need for strategies. As shown above in the *Mode of reading continuum* (Figure 10.3), to “just” read a text – or a text the students easily understand – does not require strategies. What students need is to experience authentic reading situations, where they are asked to read a text that offers some challenges, and to acknowledge that this is normal for everyone, in any reading situation, as long as the text is not known to them already. In fact, even known texts might be challenging depending on the situation and the reading task. These are the situations the students should be prepared for. Such situations should make students consciously choose a reading strategy – because they have experienced that strategies help them understand.

A final implication is the need to highlight for the students that independent and flexible use of reading strategies depends greatly on them seeing personal reasons for doing so. In my doctoral study, the vocational students saw strategic reading as useful to them personally, while the students in general studies primarily used strategies to respond to teacher and task demands. The latter group of students will not become strategic readers if this is the only reason and situation in which they use strategies. If strategies are to be a means to an end, their potential as tools for learning must be realised. This argument suggests that English teachers should not expect proficient readers to uncritically embrace strategies as tools for learning. The indications here are that students might not be able, by themselves, to see how strategy use is useful to them. However, by explicitly pointing to students’ personal purposes for using strategies as tools, the teacher can create what Vygotsky (1981) called *active learners*, where the tools help the students propel themselves forward as learners (Edwards, 2015).

On the basis of my thesis, I would like to emphasise the importance of taking the cross-linguistic aspect of reading comprehension into consideration in English reading instruction. Teachers could for example compare their students’ results from reading tests in Norwegian and English, instead of keeping them separate between Norwegian and English teachers in their discussions with the students. Doing so will offer insight into whether a student is a good (or poor) reader in both languages, or whether the students is a more (or less) proficient reader in English, as this might give a broader picture of the student as a reader.

Thus, these are the situations I suggest teachers should prepare their students for; (1) offering students authentic texts that are challenging, (2) prompting students to use known reading strategies to help them close the gap between what they are expected to understand and what they understand on their own, (3) offering students the time to try, and fail, and try again, possibly using another strategy that might be more helpful to them in the situation, (4) helping the students become conscious of the strategies they know, and when, how, and why to use them, and (5) when necessary, explicitly teach new strategies that might be useful for the students. By carefully designing reading instruction in such a manner as to make strategic reading relevant for the students, the teacher can frame reading strategy use in motivating ways, regardless of whether the purpose is related to the students' own interests or the formal English curriculum.

My doctoral work has made me value actions over words, and I would like to encourage English teachers to emphasise students' activities as readers and their agency over their static understanding of texts. I propose that teachers, too, should be agents with choice and voice in enacting quality reading comprehension instruction. My doctoral work bridges research, theory, and practice in the area of English reading comprehension, hopefully benefiting students, teachers, and schools.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To build on and develop the work in my doctoral thesis, researchers could study curricularisation work at the local school level concerning research-based reading comprehension strategy instruction in English. This could be done by studying (i.e., by observation, interviews, or surveys) how English teachers plan their reading comprehension and strategy instruction, with an eye toward whether these practices reflect research findings. Researchers could study how teachers develop their ideas into curriculum plans and materials, with the goal of making research-based reading strategy instruction a regular part of their English lessons.

My doctoral study was the first one to systematically analyse reading proficiency across Norwegian L1 and English L2, and to the best of my knowledge, this has not been repeated later. There is a need to follow up on the knowledge about students' reading proficiency across languages in secondary school, and I suggest future research in this area on three levels, both as separate studies and as longitudinal research. First, using the national reading tests in Norwegian and English, research could compare reading proficiency across the two languages in 5th grade and/or 8th grade. Second, results in English reading from 5th to 8th grade could be

compared over three years among the same readers. Third, in upper secondary school, the English mapping tests I used have now been replaced by new standardised tests (Norwegian: *læringsstøttende prøver*) in English reading, listening, and productive use of English, and comparing results across these three skills for the same readers would be of utmost interest to the understanding of students' strengths in English reading compared to their proficiency in the two other English areas.

English reading comprehension is challenging but critical on many levels. It is challenging for teachers to teach comprehension strategies, and for students to use such strategies; it is also challenging for researchers to collect and analyse evidence of comprehension strategy instruction and use. However, it is vital for students of all ages, regardless of their English reading proficiency, to develop as comprehenders of texts and their world. Thus, it is vital to continue research in this field.

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