

## The use of languages in English lessons in lower secondary classrooms

### What this research was about and why it is important

There has been little research on which languages are used in target language classrooms. Specifically, there is lack of knowledge about how much the target language is used, how much and why the main language of schooling is used, and whether other languages are used (or not used) in the classroom. It is important to have such knowledge in order to guide teachers in planning their language instruction. This study examined such language use in lower secondary classrooms in Norway. The study video recorded 60 English lessons across seven classrooms over two school years (grades 9 and 10, age 14-16). The study also collected 179 students' experiences of their teachers' language use. The study found that there was considerable variation in the language use both within and across these classrooms, primarily depending on the teachers' professional judgement. Second, there was hardly any use of languages other than the language of schooling (Norwegian) and the target language (English). Third, the student questionnaires showed that the students found their teachers' use of Norwegian helpful, regardless of how much Norwegian was used.

### What the researchers did

- The researchers video-recorded English instruction in seven different classrooms at seven schools over a period of two school years for grade 9-10 students (14-16 years old).
- In each classroom, the researchers recorded 4-6 consecutive English lessons each school year, totalling 60 lessons.
- At the end of grade 9 the researchers also collected questionnaires from the students, where they expressed their views on the teachers' language use in their English lessons.
- The researchers measured language use in seconds, to understand how much the different languages were used in each classroom each year.
- The researchers then examined for what purpose other languages than English were used in these English lessons, for instance to scaffold students' comprehension, to talk about grammar, terms, or topics in other school subjects, to give task instructions, practical information, or to show empathy or solidarity.

### What the researchers found

- English was used the most in all classrooms both school years.
- Norwegian was used markedly more in three of the classrooms compared to the remaining four classrooms.
- Other languages than Norwegian and English was used to a very limited degree.
- The students found the teachers' use of Norwegian helpful regardless of the amount of Norwegian use.
- The teachers used long stretches of Norwegian to talk about grammar, to give task instructions, to help students understand, to give practical information, to manage the classroom, and to show empathy.
- The teachers used brief instances of Norwegian to explain English terms, to refer to topics in other school subjects, and to offer additional information.

### Things to consider

- Teachers should be mindful that students might prefer to use other languages in target language instruction.
- It seems essential that teachers have an attitude of flexibility concerning their own and students' language use in the classroom, and that they are responsive to student needs as emerging or proficient target language users.
- This study also raises questions of why teachers choose to use the language of schooling rather than prompting students to use the target language.
- This study also raises questions of whether students' use of other languages develops their target language proficiency over time.

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