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Teacher cognition and the teaching of EFL reading in Norwegian upper primary classrooms

Abstract

This article is about a qualitative study of teacher cognition and the teaching of EFL reading in Norwegian upper primary classrooms. Teacher cognition, defined by Borg (2003, p. 81) as ‘what teachers think, know, and believe and the relationships of these mental constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classroom’, is a relatively new field of research. There are with few studies focussing on its link to the teaching of EFL reading skills in state schools or in young language learner classrooms. The study therefore aims to explore upper primary EFL teachers’ reading-related materials and practices, what knowledge, attitudes and beliefs formed the basis of their choices, and the role of teacher education in this context. The method used was semi-structured interviews with eight 6th grade EFL-teachers. The study showed that the teachers primarily based their teaching of EFL reading on textbooks, using them in similar ways, but also used additional reading materials to varying extents. The teachers thus appeared to be heavily guided by their textbooks, in addition to intuition and routines. The impact of formal teacher education varied from teacher to teacher. Nevertheless, it was argued that pre-service and in-service teacher education will play an important role in helping future EFL teachers make and understand the choices they make about reading materials and practices, so that they can meet the demands of increasingly diverse classrooms due to differences in linguistic, social and national backgrounds between pupils.

Introduction and aims

This article is based on a qualitative study of teacher cognition and the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading at the upper level of primary school in Norway. Teacher cognition refers to ‘what teachers think, know, and believe and the relationships of these mental constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classroom’ (Borg, 2003, p. 81). The study is based on in-depth interviews with eight 6th grade EFL teachers, focussing on how they approached the teaching of reading.

While there are a number of studies into teacher cognition and the teaching of EFL, the teaching of grammar and of literacy in particular, few studies have been conducted in state school settings, in foreign language classrooms where

the target language is also foreign to the teacher, in foreign language classrooms as opposed to first or second language classrooms, or in classrooms of young learners (Borg, 2003, 2006; Sendan & Roberts, 1998). This study contributes to the research by focusing on the teaching of EFL in young learner classrooms in state schools in Norway.

The poor results in Norwegian pupils' general reading skills in several PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) tests, the PISA-2000 test in particular, catalysed an increase of public and political interest in the development of reading skills among Norwegian pupils and students on all levels of formal schooling (Anmarksrud, 2009; Hellekjær, 2007). Later PISA-tests have not showed significant improvements in the reading skills of this group. Generally, Norwegian pupils appear to have inadequate reading strategies in relation to reflecting on, interpreting, understanding and assessing texts, while their abilities to scan texts for information appear adequate (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (a)). As a countermeasure the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training published guidelines for teachers at the lower secondary level to help pupils develop into strategic readers. Examining what texts Norwegian EFL teachers employ, how they approach teaching them and the rationale for their decisions and practices related to the teaching of reading are relevant subjects of research. The article therefore addresses the following research questions:

- What materials and practices do the 6th grade EFL teachers employ in the teaching of reading?
- What knowledge, attitudes and beliefs form the basis of their choice?
- What role does teacher education play in this context?

Background

The *Knowledge Promotion* curriculum (LK06) of 2006 continues the focus on reading from the previous curriculum, L97, which acknowledged the interrelation between skills in reading and the development of other linguistic and cognitive skills. The LK06 curriculum defines reading as one of five 'basic skills', inferring that it should be a central classroom activity across all subjects. The LK06 English subject curriculum further has a multiple view of reading, including how it can be a means to gain knowledge about the world or develop reflective skills. At the same time reading is considered crucial for the development of learners' linguistic proficiency, including their reading skills. The learning objectives in the curriculum therefore require, for example, that pupils after year 7 have developed the abilities to use reading and writing strategies, to express themselves in creative ways about different types of English-language literary texts from various sources, and to read and discuss

English-language literary texts for children and young people (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (b)). This multiple view of reading has implications for the teaching of reading in Norwegian EFL classrooms as it requires teachers to use a wide selection of materials and methods.

Despite the added focus on reading in English since *L97*, no follow-up measures were implemented in EFL teacher education. Lagerstrøm (2007) discovered that 52 percent of EFL teachers in grades 5 to 7 had no formal qualifications in English. English was not a compulsory subject for teacher trainees, yet students who graduated with a Bachelor of Education were frequently asked to teach English (Drew, 2009a; Lagerstrøm, 2007). Studies also found that the number of formally qualified English teachers decreased from 1999 to 2005 (Drew, 2009b; Lagerstrøm, 2007). However, the Teacher Education Reform of 2010 required student teachers in principle to receive training in the subjects they would be teaching (Ministry of Education: 'Om den nye grunnskolelærerutdanningen'). It may be assumed that English teachers graduating post 2010 will be better prepared to teach the subject. However, many unqualified teachers will still be teaching English for years to come, delaying the effects of the 2010 reform.

Developing the reading skill

The development of efficient L2 reading skills depends on a number of factors. Firstly, adequate reading strategies are considered vital (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Hellekjær, 2007; Šamo, 2009). Secondly, the level of reading proficiency can be enhanced if the teacher includes a variety of materials in the EFL classroom, such as authentic reading materials or graded readers, and a variety of methods, such as oral reading-related activities and pre- and post-reading activities. It may also be valuable if teachers implicitly or explicitly address their learners' development of self-monitoring skills and reading strategies (Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

Pre-reading reading activities are considered important because they prepare the reader for the form and contents of the upcoming text, while post-reading activities are considered important as they allow teachers and pupils to assess level of text comprehension and address incomprehension, which in turn help develop pupils' self-monitoring skills (Day & Bamford, 1998). Oral reading-related activities, such as the teacher reading aloud or the dramatisation of texts, are regarded to be motivating and educational as they frequently provide comprehensible input for developing readers (e.g. Brewster, Ellis, and Girard, 2004; Hall, 1994; Rixon, 1992). Such activities also contribute to the establishment of a good learning environment. A good learning environment is likely to increase pupils' self-confidence and motivation to read, which in turn

may generate more reading, thereby assisting the development of reading skills (Krashen, 1984; 2004).

It is widely recognised that knowledge of text structures, such as genres, is significant to text comprehension and therefore to the development of EFL reading skills (e.g. Carrell, 1984; Day & Bamford, 1998; Lugossy, 2007; Nunan, 1999). Familiarity with different genres may point the reader in the right direction in terms of what to expect, thus freeing capacity to concentrate on comprehension of the content. A text opening with “Once upon a time ...”, for example, would normally indicate the start of a fairy-tale, hence preparing the reader to accept fantastic, mysterious and unbelievable characters, places and events. The reader consequently spends less mental capacity negotiating an understanding of the fantastic elements and can concentrate on the meaning of the story. Similarly, the pre-knowledge of the world that the reader brings to the text is useful because it frees mental capacity which can be used to understand new structures, e.g. new words or concepts. This may in turn help the reader to fill in gaps in their understanding of the text and thereby arrive at an overall understanding of the text (Carrell, 1984; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Nunan, 1999). Post-reading activities may assist the metacognitive development of the reader. Metacognitive abilities, such as the ability to think about texts in an abstract way, which also involves knowing how to talk about literature and language, are important for overall language development (Bearne & Cliff Hodges, 2000; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Hall, 1994; Lancy, 2004).

A reader becomes fluent by developing efficient reading strategies, i.e. an action or sequence of actions that the reader uses while reading in order to construct meaning (Šamo, 2009). Reading strategies may include reading rapidly in order to understand the general idea of the text, or reading rapidly in search of specific information in the text, frequently called ‘skimming’ and ‘scanning’, respectively. Other reading strategies may include receptive reading, which is automatic and rapid, used when reading e.g. a narrative, and reflective reading, which involves frequent pauses in order to reflect on the content of the text (Hellekjær, 2007; Nunan, 1999; Susser & Robb, 1990). Self-monitoring skills refer to the ability to assess one’s level of text comprehension and preferred reading and learning strategies. These skills are considered important to the development of reading as they activate the reader through the continuous evaluation of the level of text comprehension against the level of the material (Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 2004; Little, 2003). In order to be able to read efficiently, developing readers should be instructed to approximate the meaning of difficult or unfamiliar words instead of stopping the reading process to look up unfamiliar words (Hellekjær, 2007). The short-term memory, which is where the input is processed before being transferred to the long-term memory, can only retain information for 25-30 seconds (Hellekjær, 2007). Pausing during reading may therefore impair text comprehension because what the reader was reading immediately prior to a pause, will have dropped out of the short-term

memory by the time the reader returns to the text. As a consequence, the reader will have to reread the passage (Day & Bamford, 1998; Hellekjær, 2007). Self-selection of reading materials allows for pupils to read comprehensible texts; i.e. texts that allow for the approximation of unfamiliar words, and therefore provide learners with valuable opportunities to develop and practise their self-monitoring skills (Krashen, 2004).

Teacher cognition and the teaching of reading

Norwegian teachers traditionally base much of their teaching on their textbooks (Charboneau, 2012; Drew, 2004; Hellekjær, 2007). A core issue is whether the typical Norwegian textbook series alone can offer a sufficiently wide exposure to the English language and different text genres that developing readers need. Another important issue is how texts are approached. In Norwegian EFL classrooms, the most common approach to working with texts has been to rely heavily on Intensive Reading (IR) of textbook texts, i.e. the close and detailed study of shorter texts (Drew, 2004, 2009a; Hellekjær, 2007; Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (a)). In contrast, the Extensive Reading (ER) approach offers learners frequent opportunities to read many longer texts while focusing on meaning rather than on form (Day & Bamford, 1998). Being able to read efficiently and rapidly for meaning is considered the basis for fluent reading (Day & Bamford, 1998). Activities such as the teacher reading longer texts aloud in the classroom or learners reading self-selected texts are considered valuable literacy events for developing readers (e.g. Barrs, 2000; Bearne & Cliff Hodges, 2000; Cameron, 2001; Hall, 1994; Rixon, 1992). The lack of ER may partly explain why Norwegian pupils in general have not reached a higher level of reading proficiency (Hellekjær, 2007; Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (a)).

According to teacher cognition theory, it is teacher education, the teacher's personal experiences as a language learner and the teacher's classroom experiences that are the constructs that together form the mental dimension of the teacher's cognition (knowledge, attitudes and beliefs). These constructs in turn manifest themselves in the teacher's decisions about classroom practices and the choice of materials (Borg, 2003). Teacher cognition is assumed to be resistant to change (Borg, 2003), and regarded as being particularly difficult to change if teachers have not had the opportunity to develop the cognitive tools required to be able to reflect around and articulate their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. Teachers' practices and decisions may then become subject to 'impulse, intuition, or routine', which may further prevent professional growth in the teacher (Richards, 1998, p. 21). It is therefore argued that teacher education is valuable as it provides teacher trainees with the necessary cognitive tools, for example knowledge of concepts, to be able to understand and address their

cognition (Borg, 2003; Richards, 1998). Because a large proportion of Norwegian primary level EFL teachers do not have any formal qualifications in English, one may assume that many of them base their teaching of reading on intuition, impulse, or routine, and that they have established practices and decisions relating to the teaching of reading which are already resistant to change.

Method

The study was qualitative, involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight 6th grade EFL-teachers from different schools. The eight teachers and their workplaces were selected by contacting headmasters of state schools from across the county of Rogaland by telephone. Schools that only included the upper primary grades (1-7 schools), schools that included the upper primary and the lower secondary grades (5-10 schools), and schools that included both the primary and the lower secondary grades (1-10 schools) were contacted. Teachers from three urban and five rural schools were eventually included in the study. Of these, one school was a 5-10 school, one was a 1-10 school, while the remaining six were 1-7 schools. Neighbouring schools were not contacted, as the goal was to cover as large an area of the county as possible. Consenting headmasters were asked if any of the English teachers at the school would be willing to be interviewed. The teachers who volunteered were thereafter contacted by telephone and email. They then received further information about the focus of the study and how the interview would be carried out. The contacting of headmasters was ended once the sample of respondents reached eight teachers as this number was considered sufficient for an interview-based study.

The semi-structured interview was chosen because of its flexibility and appropriateness for researching 'human phenomena, human interaction, or human discourse' (Lichtman, 2010, p. 12). The direct verbal interaction that the interview allows for offers an opportunity for an in-depth description and understanding of human processes, such as the teaching of a foreign language (Borg & Gall, 1989). Each interview lasted approximately an hour.

The data obtained from the interviews form the basis for the researcher's interpretation, which creates a risk of bias. The importance of collecting, organising, analysing and presenting the data in an appropriate manner is therefore regarded as crucial for the credibility and legitimacy of an interview-based study (Lichtman, 2010). It is acknowledged that factors such as the potential inaccessibility of cognitive processes are difficult to control for in a study like the present one, yet the stability and the dialogical nature of the semi-structured interview hopefully help to disclose, for example, whether the respondents' reported practices and decisions are rooted in the contextual or the

cognitive dimension. In addition, a qualitative study does not rely on duplication to claim reliability (Basit, 2010). It was therefore hoped that the semi-structured interview guide, since it allowed for probing about the cognition of the teachers, would reveal some trends across the interviews.

The interview was piloted twice, which is regarded as sufficient for the scope of the present study (Basit, 2010). The piloting ensured that the interview guide was suitable in terms of length, and in terms of unambiguity and objectivity of the questions. The piloting process also provided the opportunity to test the laptop and software that would be employed to audio-record the actual interviews. The two pilot interviews involved two 6th grade teachers of English from Stavanger, neither of whom were part of the actual study. The piloting process revealed no problems in terms of leading questions or length of interview. Therefore, no alterations were made to the original interview guide before conducting the eight actual interviews. The piloting process nevertheless revealed that one of the questions was less clear to the teachers than predicted. Yet, once the actual question was explained to each teacher, comprehension was secured and no changes of the questions were made.

The interview was divided into the following five sections:

1. 'Background', e.g.
 - 'What qualifications do you have?'
 - 'For how long have you been teaching English?'
2. 'Materials', e.g.
 - 'What texts do you use in the classroom?'
 - 'Who decides what materials you can have/use in your school?'
3. 'Practices', e.g.
 - 'How would you normally go through a text in class?'
 - 'What do you think has influenced your teaching practices?'
4. 'Beliefs and attitudes', e.g.
 - 'What do you consider to be important when selecting texts for a class?'
 - 'What are your attitudes towards using the textbook?'
5. 'Resources', e.g.
 - 'Are you familiar with the *European Language Portfolio*?'
 - 'Have you received any information about how to implement the curriculum?'

All the interviews took place in meeting rooms in the respective schools. This prevented any interference from colleagues, which could result in interruptions or less open answers. The choice of location also offered ample opportunity to examine and discuss the materials that were employed in the respective classrooms.

The teachers were offered the choice of whether to be interviewed in English or Norwegian. They were also offered the choice of which of the two languages in which to respond. According to the wishes of the teachers, all the questions were asked in English. Six of the teachers responded in English, while the remaining two teachers responded in Norwegian. For the purpose of elaboration or clarification, some information was sporadically communicated in Norwegian by both the interviewer and the teachers.

All of the interviews were audio-recorded and concise field notes were additionally taken to ensure all the data was registered should the recording device fail. The field notes also provided opportunities to record non-verbal communication, such as body language. The audio-recordings and field notes were reviewed several times in order to discover any trends/deviances across the interviews. All the teachers were anonymised.

Findings

The findings are presented thematically under the three themes of ‘materials’, ‘practices’ and ‘the role of teacher education’.

Materials

All eight teachers based their teaching of reading on textbooks, and they were all in principle positive towards regularly employing textbooks in their EFL classrooms. Seven of the teachers used the audio-CD connected to the textbook, and two of them used a related workbook. The frequency of textbook use ranged from approximately three out of every eight lessons to every lesson. The single most important reason for the teachers’ frequent textbook use was that it noticeably reduced the burden of planning the lessons. Using a textbook assisted the teachers in differentiating their teaching and in meeting with the *LK06* requirements. Yet, across the interviews, the efficacy of the textbook with regard to differentiation was the feature with which the teachers were most dissatisfied, as they felt the textbooks did not include a wide enough range of texts. The teachers’ positive attitudes towards using textbooks widely did not exclude similarly positive attitudes towards and beliefs in using additional reading materials among all of the eight teachers. These included authentic English books, graded readers, games, songs, bilingual dictionaries, magazines and fairy-tales. While six of the teachers regularly used additional reading materials, two of them used such materials only to a marginal extent. In addition to pupils’ motivation to read, differentiation was a reason for the frequent use of additional reading materials.

Practices

All eight teachers approached worked with textbook texts in similar ways. For example, all of them prepared their pupils for the upcoming text by going through it before the pupils started working with it on their own. The pre-reading activities would typically include the teacher reading the upcoming text aloud or having it read from a CD (all eight teachers), working with the meaning or pronunciation of difficult words and discussions around the content (topical pre-knowledge) of the text. Four of the teachers prepared their pupils for a text by talking about pictures, making predictions about the plot or the characters of the text, or exploring the pupils' topical pre-knowledge. These four teachers explicitly expressed that they believed pre-reading activities to be highly important for the pupils' comprehension of the text. One of the teachers encouraged her pupils to approximate the meaning of unfamiliar words prior to the pupils reading the text themselves. Only two of the teachers taught their pupils about genres and, moreover, two of them regarded genre knowledge to be unimportant for 6th grade pupils.

While-reading activities were seldom used among the eight teachers. However, post-reading activities were frequently employed, although one of the teachers only used such activities to a limited extent. With five of the eight teachers, post-reading activities would typically include activities such as talking and reflecting on the content of the text or linguistic features in the text. All eight teachers also asked the pupils to read the text aloud, either individually, in chorus, in small groups or in pairs. These activities were mainly used to assess the pupils' text comprehension. Four of the teachers also regularly used dramatization as a post-reading activity as it was particularly enjoyable for the pupils and teachers and allowed the pupils to practise their pronunciation. The four teachers who used dramatisation allowed their pupils to dramatise parts of or entire texts and they would typically use a play or a dialogue from a text. Dramatisation was not only used as a post-reading activity, but also as an activity in its own right. One of the teachers believed that the visual support of the drama aided text comprehension, and another of the four teachers who used dramatisation as a post-reading activity would occasionally also allow the pupils to adapt a prosaic text for the stage themselves. Two of the teachers, one of whom did not use dramatisation as a reading-related activity, set aside two weeks a year for the pupils to go through a text by means of Readers Theatre. This method involves a group of learners taking turns to read small chunks of a text aloud (Drew, 2010). As with dramatisation, this activity is also regarded as an enjoyable way of working with linguistic development in language learners (Rixon, 1992).

Furthermore, seven of the teachers also had exclusively positive experiences with reading longer texts aloud to their pupils, for example fairy-tales, and one of the teachers regularly told stories and anecdotes in her EFL classroom. The teacher who had negative experiences of reading texts aloud nevertheless had

positive beliefs about this method. Despite the teachers' enthusiasm towards and mainly positive experiences with the reading aloud of enjoyable texts, only four of the teachers actually included this approach in their EFL classrooms.

The majority of the teachers believed that it was important that the pupils focused on meaning rather than on form. Nevertheless, only one teacher explicitly addressed reading strategies in the EFL classroom, including the approximation of unfamiliar words during the reading activity. One other teacher encouraged her pupils to approximate the meaning of unfamiliar words as a pre-reading activity. Only two of the teachers, neither of whom taught reading strategies or the approximation of words, had implemented consistent systems of self-monitoring in their classrooms. Of these two, only one employed the *European Language Portfolio (ELP)*, which is a standard tool to help pupils monitor their progress in languages. The Norwegian Ministry of Education has participated in the development of the *ELP* and encourages teachers to employ it in foreign language classrooms. Six of the eight teachers allowed their pupils to select reading materials, and all six guided their pupils in the selection process. The development of self-monitoring skills was not a reason for this practice, as the pupils' motivation to read and differentiation were the reasons why these teachers allowed their pupils to choose their own reading materials.

The Role of Teacher Education

One of the teachers did not have any formal qualifications in either English or in teaching. This teacher had some problems comprehending and articulating abstract notions. For example, she did not understand the question 'What do you think has influenced your teaching practices?' She also had difficulties answering questions relating to attitudes and beliefs, such as 'What do you think are the benefits of reading aloud to the class?' This teacher nevertheless frequently read aloud to her pupils, frequently arranged for her pupils to dramatise texts, and taught reading strategies and genre knowledge. She also discussed metacognitive aspects of the learning of EFL reading with her pupils by asking questions relating to how one becomes a good reader and the relevance of learning English. She also encouraged her pupils to express their intellectual or emotional experiences from a text or from the reading activity itself. In addition, she employed pre- and post-reading activities and allowed for the teacher-guided self-selection of reading materials in her classroom. Yet another teacher did not have any formal qualifications as a teacher, although she had formal qualifications in English. However, this teacher also attended to reading strategies, allowed for the self-selection of reading materials and had included a range of reading-related activities into her practice.

In contrast, two of the teachers who did have formal qualifications in both English and teaching employed very few reading-related activities. Further, they did not address issues such as genre knowledge, self-monitoring skills or reading strategies. One of these teachers had positive attitudes and beliefs towards using

reading-related activities, but felt she did not have enough time to include such activities in her teaching of EFL reading. The other teacher was also generally positive towards employing such activities, with the exception of pupils' self-selection of reading materials, but explained that he was so satisfied with the textbook that he regarded such activities as redundant. The classroom practices and decisions varied little among the remaining four teachers, as they all regularly employed reading-related activities and to a greater or lesser extent, attending to, for example, reading strategies and the development of metacognitive skills.

Across the study, the teachers emphasised personal experiences as language learners, input from colleagues and classroom experiences from their careers as important influences on their practices. Only two of them believed that their formal education, either in English or in teaching, had influenced their teaching practices significantly and one of them believed his teaching to be completely unaffected by his formal education in teaching. The remaining five teachers were neutral towards whether their formal qualifications had influenced their practices or not.

Discussion

One of the aims of the study was to find out what materials and practices the teachers employed in their teaching of EFL reading. The findings show that all eight teachers employed their textbooks widely and were generally satisfied with their respective textbook series. The predominance of textbook use and related materials confirmed the established textbook tradition of Norwegian EFL teachers (Charboneau, 2012; Drew, 2004; Hellekjær, 2007). Still, the ambivalence relating to the textbook and differentiation may imply that it is difficult for one single textbook series to accommodate all teachers' and pupils' needs. Thus, employing additional reading materials is likely to be beneficial for individual pupils' reading development. This solution appears to have been acknowledged by the majority of the teachers in the study, as the majority employed additional reading materials.

Turning to practices, four of the eight teachers had positive attitudes and beliefs towards and regularly used pre-reading activities. They did so mainly to avoid incomprehension or anxiety among the pupils when the text was later to be discussed or read aloud in class. All eight teachers attended to post-reading activities. Assessment of pupils' text comprehension was the main reason given for this practice. Despite the focus on assisting and assessing text comprehension through pre- and post-reading activities, it could also be that these practices to some extent rested on the fact that the primary teaching resource of the teachers, i.e. their textbooks, included suggested pre- and post-

reading activities. The use of these methods could therefore, at least partially, be a result of teachers' positive attitudes to and belief in textbooks.

The decisions to include pre-and post-reading activities may additionally rest on impulse, routine or intuitive decisions. Classroom practices based on such factors are nevertheless assumed to be unarticulated cognitive systems founded in teachers' own experiences as language learners, on accumulated experiences from their teaching career, or on their teacher educations (Borg, 2003; Richards, 1998). Although the teachers mainly used post-reading activities to assess pupils' level of text comprehension, they may intuitively have understood that assessing and assisting pupils' text comprehension may be a way of maintaining or increasing pupils' reading motivation, hence turning this practice into a routine. Thus, and relating to the second research question, decisions to include post-reading activities in the EFL classroom may not only reveal the teachers' attitudes or beliefs relating to their textbooks, but also the teachers' knowledge, attitudes and beliefs relating to these practices per se.

The marginal focus on genre awareness, reading strategies and pupils' self-monitoring skills suggest that there was room for improvement in these areas of EFL teaching among the teachers in the study. As it has been suggested that a lack of adequate reading strategies with Norwegian pupils on all levels of formal education is the primary cause of their relatively poor reading skills, it is important that Norwegian EFL teachers are instructed about the importance of addressing these matters in their classroom practices. It could also be beneficial if pupils were provided with structured opportunities to monitor their linguistic development, e.g. by using the *ELP*. Still, the majority of the teachers in the study allowed their pupils to select reading materials, and they guided their pupils in their selection processes. The development of reading strategies was, however, not a reason for this practice. Yet, this practice assumedly supports the pupils' development of reading strategies even if this was not an explicit reason for the practice.

Developing metacognitive skills is important to becoming a fluent reader (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Hall, 1994; Lancy, 2004). The competence aims of the *LK06* curriculum include pupils' abilities to express and argue opinions on familiar topics both orally and in writing, and abilities to read English-language literature for children and young people and discuss their characters and contents. Five of the eight teachers encouraged their pupils to express their thoughts and reflections about the text they had just read. The practice of the majority of the teachers thereby corresponds with the aims of *LK06* that pupils between the 5th and the 7th grades should develop in this respect. However, once again the teachers' practices seem to be based on routine, impulse or intuition rather than on overt knowledge as none of them mentioned the development of metacognitive skills as a reason to encourage pupils to reflect around texts.

In relation to the third research question, i.e. the role of teacher education, the majority of the teachers believed that their formal education impacted on

their teaching practices, but they ranked the effect of this education to be significantly lower than that of their informal education, such as in-service courses or input from colleagues. That teachers continue to be influenced throughout their careers indicates that teacher cognition may be more flexible than asserted by, for example, Borg (2003), and hence teaching may change practices during their careers. Such flexibility of teacher cognition underlines the importance of in-service courses. However, it appears that the abilities of teachers to articulate their knowledge, attitudes or beliefs benefit from formal teacher education, as the formally qualified teachers had fewer problems understanding the interview questions and responding to them. It is also likely that practices and decisions that appear to be based on impulse, intuition or routine are, in fact, at least partially based on teachers' formal education.

The study did not reveal a definite relationship between quality of teaching and teacher education. It is difficult to understand why two of the teachers without formal qualification had a focus on, for instance, genre knowledge or the approximation of words that was more or less in line with the six formally-educated teachers with respect to the curricular aims and the development of reading skills (e.g. Day & Bamford, 1998). Since the study deals with both overt and covert cognitive processes and it can therefore be difficult to conclude on causal relationships. In addition, teaching practices may be affected by contextual aspects, for example the lack of time or poor access to adequate reading materials. The apparent competence of the two formally unqualified teachers may at least be partially explained by the flexibility of their cognitive constructs. However, there is a range of other factors that may have contributed to compensate for their lack of basic teacher education, such as taking appropriate in-service courses, having had proficient teachers of English themselves, receiving and being receptive to input from qualified teachers, or experiences from their careers as teachers. The impact of such factors is also recognised by Borg (2003).

The finding that the teaching of two of the formally qualified teachers was less in line with both reading development theory (e.g. Carrell, 1984; Day & Bamford, 1998, Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Hellekjær, 2007), and the *LK06* curriculum may be easier explained as both expressed generally positive attitudes towards and beliefs in methods that they did not use, such as the teacher reading aloud to the pupils or attending to pre-reading activities. Both of these teachers explained the deviation between their cognition and their practices by contextual factors, e.g. a lack of time or poor access to an adequate selection of additional reading materials. One of them had also had negative experiences with, for example, reading aloud to his pupils. Thus, although this result does not necessarily undermine the importance of formal teacher education, it nevertheless supports the inference that teacher cognition is flexible and may cause teacher practices to develop in both positive and negative directions.

The present study only included a small sample of interviewees from a limited geographical area. Still some general recommendations may be made on the basis of this study. Firstly, teacher cognition is a relatively new field of research and it is therefore important that more research is carried out on teacher cognition and the development of foreign language reading skills. Further, as teachers' abilities to articulate and reflect around their cognition form the basis for their abilities to adjust their practices, maintaining the focus on teacher education is important. The suggested flexibility of teacher cognition puts additional emphasis on the relevance of in-service courses. It is recommended that pre- and in-service courses aim to provide teachers with the cognitive tools and necessary arenas to reflect around and articulate their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, and about how these constructs affect their classroom practices in relation to the teaching of reading. Furthermore, since there will still be formally unqualified EFL teachers teaching in the years to come, and since the quality of teacher education may differ between educational institutions, in-service courses could help stabilise the overall quality of EFL teaching in Norway while awaiting the full effects of the teacher education reform of 2010.

It seems reasonable to assume that the textbook will continue to be an important tool for Norwegian EFL teachers. However, it is possible that the 2010 teacher education reform may lead to EFL teachers using more additional materials, and in different ways, to counteract the predominant dependency on textbooks. It should therefore be an aim of teacher education to promote teachers' professional confidence, thus strengthening the link between what teachers' think, know and believe, and the relationships of these mental constructs to their classroom practices (Borg, 2003). Thus, it is important for student teachers and professional teachers to gain insight into the reasons for attending to such aspects of the teaching of EFL reading.

Norwegian EFL classrooms are complex and seem to increase in complexity, including pupils from a variety of social, national and linguistic backgrounds. Assisting the development of adequate reading skills with pupils from different backgrounds requires access to a variety of texts of different topics and levels of difficulty. This in turn underlines the importance of access to a wide selection of additional reading materials in schools. Class sets of a single text cannot be the entire solution, as one single text may not meet with the needs of all the pupils in one class. The self-selection of texts becomes more difficult if a class has to use a public library to find titles of interest. Thus, well-stocked class and school libraries will arguably play an important role in the teaching of EFL reading skills in Norway in the years to come.

Conclusion

The study aimed at exploring the teacher cognition and practices of eight upper primary EFL teachers in Norway. Although generalisations cannot be made, the study confirms the traditionally strong relationship between Norwegian teachers and their textbooks. Nevertheless, the teachers also made independent decisions in the classroom, relating both to reading materials and practices. The study found that it was not necessarily only formally/educated teachers who were able to make such independent decisions. At the same time the study found that formally educated teachers appeared more able to reflect around and articulate their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs (teacher cognition) and how these constructs influenced their practices. The study emphasises the importance of access to a wide selection of reading materials and in-service courses. The main focus must nevertheless remain on the formal education of teachers and its quality as this prepares teachers to understand the background for their practices and decisions. Such an understanding is essential for current and future teachers so that they are able to adjust their teaching to the diverse needs of their pupils.

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