



# 15 Norway

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## 15.1 Introduction

Norway is a small and homogeneous language community with about 4.5 million inhabitants. While there are Sami- and Finnish-speaking minorities in Northern Norway, and a variety of speakers of other languages in urban immigrant communities, the overwhelming majority use Norwegian as their first language. That is to say, they write one of the two recognized written forms of Norwegian, known as Bokmål and Nynorsk, but speak local or regional dialects.

The first and main foreign language taught is English, which has been a compulsory school subject since 1959. Next, in order of importance, are German, French and Spanish. Until recently these were elective subjects, experiencing declining numbers of students as well as a loss of status. In order to reverse this development a second foreign language has been made compulsory for lower secondary level students as part of the ongoing curriculum reform (*Undervisnings og forskningsdepartementet*, 2004, subsection 4.6.6). It can also be mentioned that although minority students are expected to learn Norwegian, they are offered mother tongue classes when possible. In the Sami communities, however, students are expected to become more or less bilingual in both official languages, Sami and Norwegian.

Before continuing with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) it might be useful to take a very brief look at how the Norwegian school system is organized. To start with ownership, the overwhelming majority of Norwegian schools are run by local municipalities or counties. The municipalities are responsible for the compulsory school levels (age 6–16), while the counties are responsible for the upper secondary level (age 16 and above). All students must follow the national curriculum, and there are examinations, oral and written, upon completion of the 10th year at the lower secondary level and after completed courses at the upper secondary level. Grades are used to apply for higher education, for which the national government is responsible.

## 15.2 Early Developments

The first four CLIL classes in Norway started up in 1993. All four were at the upper secondary level, two in vocational and two in academic subjects, and were supported by the Ministry of Education and Research. The language of instruction was English, and the subjects were History, Religion, Tourism, and Cooking Theory. During the next few years

the number of classes increased, and came to include a small number taught in French and German as well. The subjects covered were predominantly from the General Studies branch: History, Religion, Social Science and Physics. In the following, the discussion will be limited to this type of CLIL, taught to students with Norwegian or English as their first languages (L1). The issue of instruction in languages other than the L1 for minorities will not be dealt with.

These first CLIL classes were organized as single subject – sheltered – classes with volunteer pupils (Brinton *et al.*, 1989). This was partly the result of limited resources and partly due to the guidelines for CLIL courses, as determined by the Ministry.<sup>54</sup> The guidelines, which are still current, require that in order to be called a CLIL class at least 30% of the teaching must be in the target language, the students must be volunteers, the teaching must be in accordance with current curricula, and the course must have the same examination requirements as for other students. While students do not receive any extra points for these courses, they are specified in their school diplomas. There are no rigid requirements with regard to language use for examination purposes, although use of the target language is encouraged. The textbooks and other materials are either American or British, and/or produced locally if the subjects have a syllabus specific to Norway.

Although there was no registration of how many CLIL classes were taught in the course of the nineties, the general impression is that the numbers increased gradually until the end of the decade, when declining student numbers led to a lack of volunteers for CLIL classes. In other cases CLIL classes disappeared when teachers willing to teach such classes became redundant as a result of dropping student numbers.

In the autumn of 2004 a national survey of CLIL in Norway was carried out (Bøhn *et al.*, 2004). This exploratory and descriptive survey took place at the initiative of the 'Eurydice' National Unit in Norway at the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. In the following we will briefly present the survey and its main findings.

### 15.3 The Survey and its Limitations

The main survey tool was an e-mail questionnaire, sent out in early January 2005 to all schools at the primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels. This was followed up with telephone contacts when necessary. A number of factors caused difficulties. One was the tight time schedule given, the second was that schools were beginning their Christmas holidays as the work on this report commenced, and third, the survey coincided with the introduction of new and controversial large-scale national tests at all levels of the educational system. We would therefore like to emphasize that the return rate was

<sup>54</sup> These conditions were first set down in a letter of 10 May 1993 from the Ministry of Church, Research and Education, reference 93/8622, 'Tilbud om midler til prosjekter i fag på fremmedspråk 1993/93; Forsøk med bruk av fremmedspråk som medium i andre fag, bilingval undervisning.'

not as high as it might otherwise have been, and we are aware that a number of schools with CLIL courses did not return the questionnaires. However, the trends revealed in the questionnaire appear to be clear, and we would argue that they provide a useful picture of the current status of CLIL in Norway.

### *The survey findings*

The findings of the survey, despite all the above-mentioned limitations, indicate that for the 2004–2005 school year about 3 to 4 per cent of the total number of upper secondary schools offered some type of CLIL provision. No primary or lower level secondary schools had CLIL classes or programmes. English was without exception the language of instruction. The subjects offered were: History, Natural Science, Religion, Aviation, Physics, Social Studies and Mathematics. The maximum number of CLIL classes in any one school was three, but most schools had just one class. The longest CLIL course lasted an academic year, the others half a year. An example of the latter would be the teaching of Modern History, with World History taught in English, and Norwegian History in Norwegian.

A closer analysis of the data revealed that a lot of the schools providing CLIL are particularly innovative schools, often functioning as resource centres. As often as not they also enjoy a competitive advantage in the competition for students, ensuring sufficient numbers of student volunteers for the CLIL groups. In fact, a comment from one of the responding schools indicates how vital good recruitment is. They point out that their ability to promote themselves through CLIL is limited, since some counties deny students free choice of schools. This leaves continued CLIL provision vulnerable to shifts in the student body instead of being a recruitment factor, and is one of several reasons for the low number of CLIL provisions found.

### 15.4 Why CLIL?

Since there is no official policy on CLIL in Norway, any provision is the result of local initiatives, either from counties, schools, or individual teachers. To give an example, the counties of Rogaland and Vest-Agder have actively supported CLIL classes as part of internationalisation programmes. Consequently, these counties have a disproportionately high number of schools with CLIL programmes.

At the school level, apart from ensuring a competitive advantage in student recruitment in areas where students may choose between schools, schools offering CLIL often do so because they are aware of the importance of English as an international language. In addition, as an increasing number of courses currently offered at universities in Norway are taught in English, the need to be prepared for further studies is another important motivation. Another reason given is that CLIL courses contribute to improved proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as well as grades.

In fact, improving English proficiency, in particular academic English reading proficiency, is the most important reason teachers give when asked about their own reasons for starting and teaching these courses. They also expect more motivated and ambitious pupils, which means more rewarding and inspired teaching.

### 15.5 Curriculum and Content

Apart from the provision of content-based instruction in Sami/Norwegian and Finnish/Norwegian in Northern Norway, there is, as mentioned, no national curriculum for the teaching of CLIL in Norway. As for non-Finnish/Sami CLIL instruction in Norway, the courses follow the normal curriculum of the subject being taught. The number of hours of teaching per week and the exam structure thus follow the guidelines specified in the syllabi in the national curriculum. Indeed, the only difference between a regular course and a CLIL course is that the latter is fully or partly taught in English or another foreign language.

The schools providing CLIL instruction in Norway also report that there is no specific language curriculum for the CLIL classes. With the exception of Aviation, which is solely taught in English, all the courses have both Norwegian and English as their languages of instruction. The majority of courses split the language instruction time evenly, but one course gives priority to Norwegian at a ratio of 70:30% or 60:40%.

With regard to preparatory language teaching, no schools report that they provide such training, either prior to, or parallel with, the teaching of a CLIL course. The reasons for this may be that the CLIL courses are optional and that students at upper secondary level are generally considered to have sufficient English language skills to master such instruction.

### 15.6 Teacher Background and Education

In Norway prospective teachers may study at a teacher training college, at university, or in specialized programmes for vocational subjects. A degree from a teacher training college qualifies someone to teach at the 1- to 10-year compulsory school level, while a university or vocational degree is required for the upper secondary level. It is, however, possible to combine one or more university subjects with a teacher training college degree to qualify for teaching at the upper secondary level.

While a teacher training college degree includes a number of compulsory subjects such as Pedagogy, Norwegian and Mathematics, teachers with an academic degree from a university have usually studied two or more academic subjects appropriate for teaching in schools. Many may have double degrees in a foreign language and a non-linguistic subject, the most common combination being English and History. Combinations such as modern languages and the natural sciences, economic subjects or vocational subjects are relatively rare.

Despite the lack any formalized courses on CLIL, the many teachers with double degrees means that a lot of teachers are formally qualified for teaching a CLIL subject. Whether they are willing to do so, however, usually depends upon their oral proficiency. In addition, the many subjects that are rarely combined with a modern language have led to a variety of solutions. This means that the qualifications of CLIL teachers vary greatly. The survey data shows that the usual minimum requirement for teachers, i.e. education in the subject matter, prevails. Skills or education in the target language, on the other hand, are not subject to formal requirements, and depend more on each teacher's individual assessment of their skills, their oral proficiency in particular. Whereas the survey shows that there are teachers with subject-matter degrees only who teach through a foreign language, there are no examples of teachers with language degrees only who provide CLIL. Some schools seem to accept as the only language qualification the fact that the teachers are native speakers of the target language. Non-native speakers may also be considered qualified to teach in the target language on the basis of having lived in an English-speaking country for more than six months.

The lack of any systematic policy, and the fact that most courses come about as the result of the ambition of particularly interested teachers, is reflected in the answers to the survey questions. A number of respondents also expressed a sense of being alone in the field, not only on an inter-school level, but also within their own school. One teacher, when asked whether there are other teachers who can take over bilingual teaching if he/she should become sick, replied, 'Doubtful. Many attempts have been made – in vain. I feel that I am pretty much on my own with this – not even the administration seems particularly interested.' Another, in response to the same question, replied 'There should be, but I doubt whether they will want to.'

### 15.7 Methodology

Even though the requirements for teaching a CLIL subject are the same as for other subjects, research has shown that teachers of bilingual courses have, as often as not, 'a more learner-centered approach to the teaching of their subject, among other things putting heavy emphasis on study skills' (Hellekjær, 1998, p. 21). As a result, for the pupils, the period of adjustment to instruction in a foreign language normally lasts for only a couple of weeks (Hellekjær, 1996); that is to say, if care is taken to ease the transition.

Several teachers in survey interviews also mention that Norwegian students seem to adapt fairly quickly and easily to instruction in English. History teachers in particular point out that pupils often come to prefer the English textbook versions to the Norwegian, and conclude that language barriers pose only minor problems in subject-matter teaching. Similarly, Social Sciences teachers maintain that owing to the subject-matter focus of the course, there is a great degree of communication and dialogue going on between the teacher and the pupils. In other words, language barriers do not appear to impair subject-matter

instruction, and language learning is not deemed inferior to regular foreign language instruction. Thus the methods and practices in Norwegian CLIL classrooms appear to contribute successfully to achieving the aim set out for bilingual instruction, which is to eliminate the 'artificial separation between language instruction and subject matter classes which exists in most educational settings' (Brinton *et al.*, 1989, p. 2).

### 15.8 Research

There has been little interest in research on CLIL and related topics in the Norwegian research community. One of the first of the few published articles focuses on the challenges of starting up and teaching CLIL classes ('Easy does it: Introducing Pupils to Bilingual Instruction'; Hellekjær, 1996). It sums up three years of experience of teaching and organizing Modern History in the General Studies branch of a Norwegian upper secondary school. A more recent project dealing with the same issues is from an international exchange programme where trainee teachers from the Netherlands and the USA taught in English in Norwegian lower and upper secondary schools in Trondheim (Hestnes, 2004). It surveys student and staff reactions to the CLIL classes as well as the experience of the teacher trainees in addition to practical problems such as finding appropriate textbooks in English.

With regard to quality and outcomes, in a doctoral thesis, *The Acid Test: Does Upper Secondary EFL Instruction Effectively Prepare Norwegian Students for the Reading of English Textbooks at Colleges and Universities* (Hellekjær, 2005) the English academic reading proficiency of senior students from the General Studies branch of a Norwegian upper secondary school was tested. The majority of the respondents had EFL instruction only, but a large enough number had a single, sheltered CLIL subject to make comparison possible. Using the Academic Reading Module from an internationally recognized test (the IELTS test) as an instrument, Hellekjær found that students with as little as a single CLIL subject scored markedly better than students with ordinary EFL instruction. In fact, 66% of the CLIL students achieved scores comparable to Band 6 level or better, compared with only 33% of those with EFL instruction. Closer analysis indicated that CLIL students were better able to adjust their reading strategies to reading purpose. In addition, they had developed a higher tolerance for vagueness and uncertainty of meaning when they encountered unfamiliar words.

Last in this short list, a recent survey of the number of CLIL provisions in Norway referred to in this article can be mentioned (Bøhn *et al.*, 2004).

### 15.9 Summary and Conclusions

As mentioned above, the first CLIL classes started up in Norway in 1993. Nevertheless, after more than 12 years, no more than 3 to 4 per cent of Norwegian upper secondary schools offer CLIL classes, while there are none at all at the lower secondary and primary levels. A probable reason is the lack of an official policy, which means that implementation of CLIL teaching and initiatives is the result of local initiatives, from schools or, as often as not, from individual teachers. This, naturally, places the projects that are in place in an extremely vulnerable position. One reason is the requirements concerning volunteers, which means that courses are highly dependent upon student recruitment. Another is the limited pool of teachers willing to teach CLIL courses, which means that courses often have to be closed down if the teacher involved retires or moves to another school or job. This lack of teachers, despite double degrees, highlights possible deficiencies in Norwegian college and university language degrees, in particular the lack of focus on the development of oral proficiency (Hellekjær, 2001).

A third reason for the current situation is that many teachers and schools do not know about CLIL at all, or that such teaching is permitted. This was made clear in many replies to the e-mail survey reported above, when a large number of teachers replied that they had not known this was an option and that they and their schools were interested in trying. This lack of awareness has undoubtedly been exacerbated by a lack of interest in CLIL among teacher educators and researchers. This is a somewhat paradoxical situation at a time when language proficiency requirements, for English in particular, are increasing radically, and when research indicates that traditional FL and EFL instruction are in urgent need of improvement. At the same time, the reason most commonly given for the introduction of CLIL, i.e. as a preparation for further study, is increasingly relevant, as a great deal of university tuition in Norway is given in English.

Recognizing the need to use CLIL to improve the quality and outcomes of FL and EFL instruction will be crucial to any future expansion. A clear, nationwide policy advocating and supporting the use of CLIL will also be necessary.

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