

A survey of students' perceptions of how English writing instruction is carried out in Norwegian upper secondary schools.

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Abstract

This study investigates how Norwegian upper secondary school students attending General Studies perceive how English writing instruction is carried out, their own writing skills and what assessment strategies are applied from a genre-pedagogical perspective. A questionnaire was distributed to 15 randomly selected schools, resulting in 522 students responding. The analysis of the current survey reveals that Norwegian upper secondary school students do not feel confident about their English writing skills, neither when it comes to narrative nor argumentative writing, and they perceive writing instruction and feedback practices differently. If practices vary as much as students report here, this is a serious issue that needs to be addressed both in schools and in teacher training institutions, and this article suggests that applying a genre-pedagogical approach to teaching writing could be one solution to ensure more similar practices in line with official guidelines for the Norwegian educational system.

Keywords: *Writing instruction, self-confidence, genre-pedagogy, feedback, self-assessment, peer assessment*

Introduction

Writing in a second language is a complex skill, and includes several cognitive processes like planning, organisation, translation and revising (Shaw & Weir, 2007, p. 34). Writing is not just about producing language, it is also about organising language into a coherent text. This seems to be a challenge, particularly regarding argumentative writing, in both first language (L1) (Andrews, 1995; Beard, 2000; Berge, Evensen, Hertzberg, & Vagle, 2005; Freedman & Pringle, 1988) as well as second language (L2) contexts (Silva, 1993). Research on L2 writing (Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008; Silva, 1993) suggests that L2 writers have even more difficulty with organizing material when they write than do L1 writers. Little research has been carried out recently on how Norwegian students master English writing, but one international study has shown that young Norwegian learners, and other learners as well, struggle more with writing than with understanding and speaking English (Bonnet, 2004). In addition, some studies from upper secondary school and higher education show that Norwegian students' English writing skills are inadequate in terms of mastering an accurate language and using devices for constructing written texts on a higher level (Lehmann, 1999; Nygaard, 2010). Also, a small-scale study on teachers' perception of their English teacher training in Norway reveals that the teachers did not feel that they were properly prepared to teach how to produce written texts (Rødnes, Hellekjær, & Vold, 2014). The findings from these studies indicate there is a need for more ESL (English as a second language) writing research in Norway.

The lack of English writing research within a Norwegian context, and the increased use of English in higher education as well as in business and governance (Hellekjær, 2007, 2010),

provides a motivation for this study. The purpose of the study is to investigate how Norwegian General Studies students in upper secondary schools perceive English writing instruction practices, their own writing skills, and feedback practices in relation to writing. The focus in this study is on what type of practices the students perceive are applied in the classroom, rather than how they evaluate these practices, which has been the focus in some other studies on student perspectives on feedback (Carless, 2006; Taylor, Mather, & Rowe, 2011; Zumbunn, Marrs, & Mewborn).

Norwegians are generally perceived to be rather proficient in English (Education First, 2012). It has even been argued that English has an in-between status as neither a foreign nor a second language in Norway (Graddol, 1997; Rindal, 2012, p. 23; Rindal & Piercy, 2013), as the exposure to English, through media among others, and the proficiency level of English is different compared with other foreign languages. With the Knowledge Promotion curriculum reform of 2006 in Norwegian schools, English also changed status from foreign language to second language (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2006). However, English is not an L2 when compared to countries where English is an official language (Graddol, 2006, p. 84). Still, the change of the status of English in LK06 signals that English has a different position from other foreign languages taught in the Norwegian school, and it signals a rather high competence in English compared to other languages. Whether students actually feel they have a high competence concerning writing in English is one of the issues investigated in the present study.

A recent interview-study investigating Norwegian teachers' perceptions of English writing instruction in upper secondary schools indicates that Norwegian students also face challenges with organising material and structuring texts when writing English (Horverak, 2015a), as well as creating coherence and adjusting language to situation. These are central features of learning languages (Council of Europe, 2001), and also important in the English curriculum for Norwegian students: "The aims of the studies are to enable students to write different types of texts with structure and coherence suited to the purpose and situation" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013). These curriculum aims comply well with what is considered central in the Australian genre-pedagogy approach to teaching writing, which is chosen as the theoretical framework for this study. This pedagogy was developed in the 1980s based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Cope, Kalantzis, Kress, Martin, & Murphy, 2012), a linguistic theory focused on language in context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), a view on language which we see reflected in the curricula in the Norwegian educational system, as quoted above.

Central in the genre-pedagogy tradition is the teaching-learning cycle, describing the process of applying various strategies when teaching writing and learning how to write (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012). The teaching-learning cycle includes three phases: 1) Deconstructing model texts, 2) Joint construction and 3) Independent construction. In the first phase, the students study model texts with the teacher, revealing stages or key features of genres regarding language and structure (Martin, 2012). In the second phase, the students are to copy the stages revealed in phase 1 when they produce texts, and mimic the language features revealed. They are supported through joint construction with the teacher, meaning that the class write one text together with the teacher (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012). In the third

phase of the cycle, when the students write independent texts, the teacher and peers support them through feedback.

Genre-pedagogy was developed in Australia in the 1980s in a primary school context as a reaction against the dominating approach at the time, a type of process-writing with a focus on children finding out on their own how to write texts. As this type of process-writing seemed to marginalise certain groups, a research team developed and carried out research on the genre-pedagogical approach as described above, with the aim to ensure equal opportunities for everyone (Cope & Kalantzis 2012). The approach proved to be particularly useful in the teaching of factual texts (Walsh, Hammond, Brindley, & Nunan, 1990). A more recent, longitudinal study from an upper secondary school context in Australia has revealed similar positive outcomes (Humphrey & Macnaught, 2015). Relevant elements in the teaching intervention in this study were using a meta-language with grammatical terms, modelling example texts and giving feedback on writing.

Similar strategies as applied in Humphrey and Macnaught's study were included in a teaching intervention in an experiment that was carried out in a Norwegian upper secondary school context with positive results (Horverak, 2016a). The teaching intervention focused on how to structure argumentative texts in the form of five-paragraph essays. This included deconstructing model texts, investigating what elements are found in each paragraph in these types of texts, investigating linguistic features such as formality level of language and cohesive devices, and practicing writing with support from the teacher through feedback. The students participating in the study improved regardless of gender, first language and previous level or grades they had been given in English.

This type of genre-pedagogy gives an example of how formative assessment could be integrated with writing instruction. A distinctive feature of formative assessment is that the information provided by any type of agent through feedback is followed up in the following learning process (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 9). Research has found the use of formative assessment strategies to be central in achieving significant learning gains (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Formative assessment is also central in a programme called "Assessment for Learning" run in Norwegian schools recently (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2014). There have been a few small-scale studies investigating whether the intentions from this programme have been followed up in upper secondary school, and these have shown that practices vary (Brevik & Blikstad-Balas, 2014; Nyvoll Bø, 2014; Vik, 2013; Horverak, 2015a). Some teachers seem to apply assessment strategies in line with requirements given in the programme "Assessment for Learning", but as these studies are very limited in range, there is a need to investigate this further.

The current study focuses first on whether students perceive that they have been instructed in how to structure texts and adjust language to purpose and situation. These are central concerns in the first phase of the teaching-learning cycle developed within genre-pedagogy. Second, there is a focus on the students' self-confidence concerning perceived L2 competence (Dörnyei, 1994). Third, this study investigates the students' reflections on what type of feedback strategies are applied when they write independent texts. There is a focus on formative assessment strategies included in the third phase of the teaching-learning

cycle. The research question of this study is: *How do Norwegian upper secondary school students perceive how English writing instruction is carried out, their own English writing skills and what assessment strategies are applied in relation to English writing seen from a genre-pedagogical perspective?*

To investigate this, a questionnaire called the English Writing Instruction – Questionnaire (from now on referred to as the EWI-questionnaire) was developed, based partly on genre-pedagogy and partly on an interview-study on teachers' perceptions of writing instruction practices (Horverak, 2015a; Horverak, 2015b). The questionnaire was developed to collect data for both this study and another study on feedback, so not all the elements concerning feedback in the questionnaire are included in this study. The only questions included are those which concern what type of practices students perceive to exist in the classroom relevant in a genre-pedagogical approach. This perspective is chosen as genre-pedagogy complies well with the Norwegian curriculum where language-learning is focused on language in context (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013), and producing different types of texts, and it complies well with the requirements in the programme "Assessment for Learning" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2014).

Method

The purpose of this study is to investigate how upper secondary school students in Norway attending General Studies perceive English writing instruction practices including feedback strategies, as well as their own English writing skills. To answer this, a questionnaire was distributed to first year General Studies students preparing for higher education. The current study is a descriptive study with the purpose of making inferences about the perceptions of the population of first year upper secondary school students of General Studies based on a representative sample (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 12).

Survey Instrument

The EWI-questionnaire used for this survey is divided into two parts. Part 1, called English Writing Instruction Questionnaire – Teaching (EWIT), deals with how English writing instruction and writing skills are perceived, and Part 2, called English Writing Instruction Questionnaire – Feedback (EWIF), deals with how feedback practices are perceived. The questionnaire was piloted with 6 groups of students recruited by contacting acquaintances, which resulted in 142 respondents. As a result of the piloting process, a category concerning whether students mastered formal and informal writing was excluded as the factor analysis revealed that this overlapped with a category concerning whether students mastered writing argumentative texts. Also, questions concerning teachers' follow up of feedback were extracted and included as background variables, as they did not load on the same factor as other questions concerning follow up of feedback in the questionnaire, and a frequency table was introduced for these questions. The factor structure revealed in the pilot study was

confirmed through factor analyses of the collected data in the current study¹. The parts of the EWI-questionnaire dealt with in the current study are included in Appendix 1.

The questionnaire includes background information such as classification questions (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 132) concerning gender, first language, grade obtained in English for Christmas, meaning the first semester, and grade generally obtained on written assignments in English. Also included are statements about type of texts written and frequency of writing. Part 1 of the questionnaire consists of 5 sections presented in table 1 below. The students reported on a seven-point Likert scale anchored from (1) “totally disagree” to (7) “totally agree” in both parts of the questionnaire (*totally disagree, disagree, disagree more than agree, neither disagree nor agree, agree more than disagree, agree, totally agree*). The statements in each category focus on various stages or features of the genres in question. From a genre-pedagogical perspective, these are relevant elements in phase 1 of the teaching-learning cycle.

Table 1: Sections and items in the EWIT-questionnaire: English Writing Instruction - Teaching

Section	Items
Teaching of narrative texts ($\alpha = 0.95$)	I have been taught how to write narrative texts . I have been taught how to start a narrative text . I have been taught how one can build up suspense in narrative texts. I have been taught how to write a conclusion to a narrative text.
Self-confidence regarding writing narrative texts ($\alpha = .93$)	I can write a good narrative text . I can write the beginning of a narrative text. I can build up the tension in a narrative text. I can write a conclusion to a narrative text.
Teaching of argumentative texts ($\alpha = .95$)	I have been taught how to write the introduction to an argumentative text. I have been taught how I can discuss a topic or an issue in an argumentative text. I have been taught how one can build up paragraphs in argumentative texts. I have been taught how to argue in an argumentative text. I have been taught how to create coherence in argumentative texts. I have been taught how to organise and structure an argumentative text.

¹ A more detailed description of the piloting procedures is presented in a separate article (Horverak and Haugen, 2016). The complete EWI-questionnaire including Norwegian translations can be obtained by contacting the author.

<p>Self-confidence regarding writing argumentative texts ($\alpha = .94$)</p>	<p>I can write the introduction to an argumentative text. I can discuss different topics or issues in argumentative texts. I can build paragraphs in an argumentative text. I can write arguments for my opinions. I can write a conclusion to an argumentative text. I can use connectors to create coherence in argumentative texts.</p>
<p>Teaching of formality level ($\alpha = .91$)</p>	<p>I have been taught how to adjust my language to the genre or type of text I am writing. I have been taught what is typical of informal language. I have been taught what is typical of formal language. I have been taught how to change the language in an informal text so it becomes more formal.</p>

Note. Scale from 1 to 7, where 1 = totally disagree and 7 = totally agree. Chronbach's alpha is given in parentheses, indicating the internal consistency within the categories.

From part two, there are two items included in this article concerning the teachers' follow up of feedback 1) by making students revise and 2) giving new evaluations. The scale for these two items ranged from 1 to 5 i.e. from "never" to "always". In addition, two sections concerning whether students worked to improve and whether they used self-assessment strategies, presented in table 2 below, were included, and reported on the same seven-point Likert scale as used in part 1 from (1) "totally disagree" to (7) "totally agree".

Table 2: *Sections and items in the EWIF-questionnaire: English Writing Instruction - Feedback*

Section	Items
<p>Working to improve ($\alpha = .94$)</p>	<p>I work with improving the language in the texts we have received feedback on. I work with improving the structure in the texts we have received feedback on. I work with improving the content in the texts we have received feedback on.</p>
<p>Self-assessment ($\alpha = .87$)</p>	<p>When writing a text, I try to evaluate it in relation to evaluation criteria set for that particular type of text. When working with writing texts, I evaluate my language in relation to what the teacher says is important. When working with writing texts, I evaluate how well I manage to include relevant content according to the requirements in the exercise. Working with evaluating my own text is an important part of the writing process.</p>

Note. Scale from 1 to 7, where 1 = totally disagree and 7 = totally agree. Chronbach's alpha is given in parentheses, indicating the internal consistency within the categories.

Finally, questions concerning peer assessment are reported. These include yes/no-questions about whether the students had participated in peer assessment and if so, whether they had

received training in this. The assessment strategies focused on in part 2 of the questionnaire are relevant strategies in the third phase of the teaching-learning cycle developed within genre-pedagogy.

Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed digitally through e-mails to the teachers who agreed to participate with their classes. It had an introduction about how to carry out the survey, an open link and with a back-up document of the questionnaire in case of technical problems. The instruction told the teachers to give the students a lecture of 45 minutes to fill out the questionnaire, to distribute the link to the students, and emphasise that it was anonymous and voluntary. The teachers were also asked to give the students numbers without connecting these to names, so that it would be possible for us to identify whether students had answered the survey twice.

A systematic sampling procedure was used to identify upper secondary schools at a fixed interval from a comprehensive list of upper secondary schools in Norway to select participants for the study (Langdrige & Hagger-Johnson, 2013, p. 54). The list consisted of 536 schools, and we recruited 15 schools to participate, and this resulted in 522 student respondents when respondents with missing values are excluded. The participating schools were located in different regions in Norway, from the eastern to the western region, and from the southern to the northern region.

Table 3 below presents the distribution of General Studies classes and students in the participating schools, as well as the number of schools and students that responded to the survey.

Table 3: *Respondents and non-respondents in participating schools*

School number	Classes in total	Students in total	Classes that participated	Students that completed	Students with missing values
School 1	1	32	1	28	
School 2	5	108	2	44	
School 3	3	86	1	23	
School 4	2	56	2	42	
School 5	1	18	1	11	
School 6	7	182	1	23	3
School 7	3	64	2	44	1
School 8	9	210	1	26	
School 9	5	150	3	68	1
School 10	2	42	1	18	1
School 11	3	48	1	19	3
School 12	5	136	1	16	1
School 13	2	65	1	26	
School 14	8	198	4	113	2
School 15	3	76	1	21	
Total	59	1471	23	522	12

Note. Missing values: 2 %. School 6 and 11 had technical problems with the link to the survey, so school 6 filled in the survey in a Word-document, school 11 on paper. The respondents with missing data are excluded in the analyses.

Of the total number of 59 General Studies classes, 23 classes responded to the survey. This resulted in a sample size of 522 respondents out of a total population of 1471 students after excluding those with missing values. This constitutes a response rate of 36% in the 15 participating schools.

The total group of 522 participants comprised 213 males (41%) and 309 females (59%). Of these, there were 488 students with Norwegian as first language (94%), 2 with English as first language and 32 with other first languages (6%). The students' level in the form of grades is presented in table 4 below. Grade 1 is the lowest and grade 6 is the highest grade. If the students have not participated on tests, they may get no evaluation instead of a semester grade. Grade for Christmas means a temporary grade given after the first semester.

Table 4: *Level of the participating students in percentages, grades from 1 as lowest to 6 as highest, N = 522*

	No evaluation	1	2	3	4	5	6
Grade for Christmas	1	0	1	20	45	30	3
Grade in general	0	0	2	18	44	31	5

Note. "No evaluation" means that the student did not get a semester grade due to lack of evaluations.

As displayed, most students seem to be on a medium to high level, as around 95% of the students report grades from 3 to 5. The students are similarly distributed regarding the grade they received for Christmas, including evaluations of both written and oral English, and the grade they generally receive on written assignments.

Analysis

In the analysis, I first present some background information about how many students report having written different types of texts, and the percentage of students who report different frequencies of writing. Second, I present the total responses for each score on the various scales as percentages. For the sections with Likert scales in part 1 and 2 of the questionnaire, the percentages presented refer to the total responses for all the items in each section for each score on the scale from 1 to 7. As the data was from ordinal scales, medians are reported to give indications about central tendencies.

Reliability and validity

There are various challenges with reliability and validity when investigating attitudes by using a questionnaire like in this study. One threat to the reliability of the questionnaire is that the measurements may not be stable and precise (Bryman, 2012). By using sets of questions,

the more stable components are maximised (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 147), and this approach was applied in the EWI-questionnaire to ensure reliability of the results. The internal consistency of the sets of items measuring each construct was established by calculating the Chronbach's Alpha coefficient, which was satisfactorily high for the different sections of the questionnaire (reported in tables 1 and 2).

One may also question the construct validity of the questionnaire (Bryman, 2012), whether the categories and statements included reflect what writing instruction and assessment really are. There are many aspects of writing instruction left out of the questionnaire, as covering all relevant elements would result in a too comprehensive study. I have chosen a genre-pedagogical perspective, as this complies well with official guidelines for English teaching in Norway (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, 2014), and therefore the focus is on whether teachers have instructed the students in how to write different types of texts, and whether they use various assessment strategies in the process of teaching students how to write. Basing the questionnaire on theory strengthens the validity of the relevant constructs (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013, p. 107), however, other aspects that could have been included in the questionnaire are left out as they are outside the scope of the theory.

There may be other challenges as well with students reporting on practices in the classroom. Students may present positively biased answers to give a good impression, and there is also a tendency to agree rather than disagree when answering questionnaires (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013). It is also a challenge that teachers distributed the questionnaire to the students, who then evaluated the teachers' practices. Another challenge with surveys like this one is that there is a risk of bias due to the fact that it is voluntary to participate, both on the level of teacher and student. Teachers that are more concerned about the issues being surveyed are perhaps more likely to agree to participate than teachers that are not. Also, teachers that fear being evaluated are perhaps less likely to agree to participate. In the groups of students that participate, some students who feel very uncertain may choose not to fill in the questionnaire. In order to deal with these types of challenges, teachers and students were informed that the survey was totally anonymous (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, Podsakoff, & Zedeck, 2003). Still, the issues discussed here are threats to the external validity of the study (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002), whether the findings can be generalised to the whole population of General Studies students.

Another problem with the reliability and validity of this survey is that it is assumed that students understand the items they respond to. If the students do not understand the concepts of argumentative and narrative writing and formality level of language for example, they may have given answers that do not represent the reality. Still, the questionnaire is based on a preliminary interview-study with teachers, and the terms seem to be familiar in the school context. Even though the interview-study was a rather limited study, it gives an indication of concepts being used in upper secondary schools. In addition, there were explanations with exemplifications included in the questionnaire concerning what was meant in all the main categories.

Results and analysis

In the analysis, there is a focus on whether key features of different text-types have been taught according to the students, whether the students feel confident that they master writing these types of texts and whether the students perceive that various feedback strategies central in genre-pedagogy have been applied. First, I give some background information about what type of texts the students have written and the frequency of writing as reported by the students. Following this, I present the findings of part 1 of the questionnaire, examining the students' reported practices of the teaching of writing, relevant in the first phase of the teaching-learning cycle presented above, and the students' reported self-confidence concerning English writing. Finally, I report the findings of part 2 of the questionnaire concerning feedback practices, relevant in the third phase of the teaching-learning cycle.

Background information about types of texts written and frequency of writing

Most of the students (94%) report having written argumentative texts such as essays or articles during this school year, whereas only about half of the group (45%) report that they have written narrative texts like short stories or personal stories. The majority of the students (87%) also report having written other types of texts like applications, letters and presentations. There seems to be some variety in the types of texts students write although only less than half of the students report that they have written narrative texts.

Students report different frequencies of writing exercises, distributed from never to several times a month in each of the three categories 1) written tests at school, 2) written home assignments that are graded and 3) written exercises as homework (see table 5 below).

Table 5: *Frequency of writing in percentages, scale from 1 to 5, N = 522*

	Never	Less than once every semester	Once every semester	Several times a semester	Several times a month
Written tests at school	3	4	24	67	3
Written home assignments that are graded	7	11	28	49	6
Written exercises as homework	5	8	19	35	33

Note. As decimal numbers are rounded off, the added sum of the rows does not necessarily equal 100%.

In the first category, only 3% report having no written tests at school and 4% less than once every semester. On the other end of the scale, 3% report having written tests at school several times a month. The majority of 91% report having written tests at school once or more times a semester. In the second category, 7% report having no written home assignments that are graded and 11% less than once every semester. On the other end of the scale, 6% report having written home assignments that are graded several times a month. The majority of 77% report having such assignments once or more every semester.

The results are somewhat different in the third category concerning written exercises as homework. More students report a more frequent use of written homework. 33% report having written homework several times a month, 35% several times a semester. Hence, a majority of 68% report quite frequent use of written homework. However, there is also a quite large group of 32% reporting that they very seldom or never have written homework.

Teaching and self-confidence concerning perceived L2 competence

The results from part 1 of the questionnaire are presented as percentages in table 6 below. The first category includes four statements examining whether the students have been taught how to write narrative texts, how to start these, build up suspense and write a conclusion. The second category follows up this with “I can”-statements about the same issues. The third category includes six statements about whether the students have been taught how to write the introduction to argumentative texts, discuss an issue, build up paragraphs, argue, create coherence and organise and structure argumentative texts. The fourth category follows up this with six “I can”-statements about the same issues, except for the statement about organisation and structure, which is replaced by “write a conclusion”, and the statement about coherence is specified with “use connectors to create coherence”. The final category includes four statements about whether the students have been taught how to adjust language to text-type, what is typical of informal and formal language and how to change the language in an informal text so it becomes more formal.

Table 6: Total scores in percentages, part 1- Teaching and self-confidence, Likert scale from 1= totally disagree to 7 = totally agree, N = 522

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Median
Taught NW	18	13	17	22	18	10	3	4
Self-confidence NW	3	4	11	22	31	20	9	5
Taught AW	4	4	11	20	24	21	16	5
Self-confidence AW	1	2	8	19	26	27	18	5
Taught formality level	6	5	14	19	26	18	11	5

Note. As decimal numbers are rounded off, the added sum of the rows does not necessarily equal 100%. NW = Narrative writing, AW = Argumentative writing, “Taught NW” and “Self-confidence NW” include four items each, “Taught AW” and “Self-confidence AW” include six items each, “Taught formality level” includes four items.

The medians for the different categories indicate that there is less focus on teaching narrative writing than argumentative writing from the students’ perspectives. The category concerning teaching of narrative writing has a median of 4, whereas the categories concerning teaching of argumentative writing and the level of formality have medians of 5. The medians for whether students feel they can write narrative and argumentative texts are

the same, which indicates that they feel equally confident in writing narrative and argumentative texts regardless of the difference in instruction.

Of the total responses concerning the teaching of narrative writing, only 13% are in the categories agree or totally agree that they master this. About half of the responses, 57%, express an uncertain attitude from 3 to 5 on the scale, meaning disagree more than agree, neither agree nor disagree and agree more than disagree. 31% of the responses are in the categories disagree or totally disagree. This means that they report not having been taught how to write narrative texts. This indicates that instruction of typical features of narrative writing is not prioritised, like how to start or conclude a narrative text, and how to build up suspense. Still, some students are confident that they can write narrative texts as 29% of the total responses in the section concerning whether they master this are in the categories agree or totally agree, and only 7% are in the categories disagree or totally disagree. There is, however, a majority of 64% responses that express an uncertain attitude to whether they master narrative writing.

The respondents give slightly higher scores concerning whether they have been taught argumentative writing compared with narrative writing. 37% of the total responses in this section concerning whether they have been instructed in argumentative writing are in the categories agree or totally agree, and only 8% of the responses are in the categories disagree or totally disagree. However, also in this category, a majority of 55% of the responses express an uncertain attitude. This means that many of the students are not certain whether they have been taught typical features of argumentative writing, like how to structure, build paragraphs, discuss and create coherence in argumentative texts. Still, only 3% of the responses on whether the students master argumentative writing are in the categories disagree or totally disagree. Also here, a majority of 53% expresses an uncertain attitude, but quite a large proportion, 45% of the responses, express a confident attitude about mastering argumentative writing.

The responses concerning the teaching of formality level of language are quite similarly distributed as the responses in the other categories. 29% of the responses here are in the categories agree or totally agree, and only 11% are in the categories disagree or totally disagree. There is a majority of 59% responses expressing an uncertain attitude to whether they have been taught about formality level of language.

Feedback strategies

The results from part 2 of the questionnaire are presented as percentages in tables 7 and 8 below. In table 7, information about frequency of feedback and teachers' follow up of feedback is presented. A frequency scale was used for these items.

Table 7: *Teacher’s follow-up of feedback, Scale from 1 to 5, N = 522*

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
The teacher makes the students work with revising	7	21	37	28	8
The teachers give new evaluations on revised texts	40	19	22	15	5

Note. Results are given in percentages. As decimal numbers are rounded off, the added sum of the rows does not necessarily equal 100%.

A majority of 73% report that teachers follow up feedback on written texts in English sometimes or more often by making students revise their texts. However, 28% report that this never or seldom happens, so the practices vary. The results on whether teachers follow up this revision work with new evaluations present a somewhat different picture. Whereas 42% report that the teachers do so sometimes or more often, a majority of 59% report that this seldom or never happens. These results indicate that feedback practices vary.

Table 8 below presents the responses in two different categories concerning feedback strategies answered on a Likert scale from 1 to 7 from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”. The first category includes three statements about whether the students work on improving the language, the structure and the content of their texts. The second category concerns self-assessment strategies and includes four statements about whether students evaluate their texts in relation to evaluation criteria, whether they evaluate the language, how well relevant content is included and whether evaluating their own text is an important part of the writing process.

Table 8: *Total scores in percentages, part 2: Feedback, Likert scale from 1= totally disagree to 7 = totally agree N = 522*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Median
Working to improve	6	7	13	23	25	16	11	5
Self-assessment	3	4	9	22	25	22	17	5

Note. As decimal numbers are rounded off, the added sum of the rows does not necessarily equal 100%. “Working to improve” includes three items, “Self-assessment” includes four items.

The students report differently to whether they work on improving their texts or not, as revealed from the results above in the category “working to improve”. Only 27% of the responses in this section are in the categories agree or totally agree, whereas a majority of 61% responses express an uncertain attitude to whether they do so or not. However, only 13% of the responses are in the categories disagree or totally disagree concerning whether they work on revising their texts. The median is 5, slightly higher than the neutral mid-score. We see here that there is a tendency among students to do revision work, although not all students do so.

In the category dealing with whether students use self-assessment strategies when writing, 39% of the responses are in the categories agree or totally agree. About half of the

responses, 56%, express an uncertain attitude to this, whereas only 7% of the responses are in the categories disagree or totally disagree. The median of the total scores in this section is 5, slightly above the mid-score. The results indicate that there is a tendency towards using self-assessment strategies. However, not all students do so when writing in English.

On the question concerning whether the students had participated in peer assessment, 50% answered “yes” and 50%, answered “no”. From the 50% who answered that they had participated in peer assessment, 44% reported that they had received training in how to do this. From these findings, it seems to vary whether peer assessment is applied in the classroom or not.

Discussion

This study set out to investigate how Norwegian upper secondary school students perceive how English writing instruction is carried out, their own writing skills and what feedback practices are applied in relation to writing in English. One of the main findings is that a minority of the students agree that they are taught how to write narrative and argumentative texts. What they perceive that they have received the least teaching of is how to write narrative texts, as the scores are somewhat higher on the questions concerning whether they have been taught how to write argumentative texts. This confirms the findings of a preliminary qualitative study, which concluded that English teachers focused their writing instruction on argumentative writing (Horverak, 2015b). Even though students report receiving more instruction on how to write argumentative texts than narrative texts, the findings here show that not all students think that they are taught how to write argumentative texts either.

A second main finding of this study is that the majority of the students do not feel particularly confident about their own writing skills. However, 47% per cent of the respondents either agree or totally agree that they can write argumentative texts and 29% that they can write narrative texts. As research generally shows that writing argumentative texts is generally challenging (Andrews, 1995; Beard, 2000; Berge et al., 2005; Freedman & Pringle, 1988), these findings may be surprising. However, this difference could be related to the fact that there is more teaching of argumentative writing than of narrative writing, if the students' reports of writing instruction practices are correct.

A third main finding is that feedback strategies are not fully exploited in English teaching according to the students' perceptions of feedback practices. Even though formative assessment practices have generally been demonstrated to have a positive effect on writing skills (Black & William, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007), these types of strategies are not necessarily applied. 28% of the respondents report that their teachers seldom or never make them revise their texts, and only 42% report that revision work is followed up by assessments. This reveals that there could be different practices concerning how feedback is followed up, as previous studies also have shown, though these are all studies with a limited sample (Nyvoll Bø, 2014; Horverak, 2015a; Vik, 2013). Giving students the possibility to improve their texts on the basis of feedback before handing in a final product is one of the central formative assessment strategies applied in phase three of the teaching-learning cycle developed in the Australian genre-pedagogy tradition.

The results concerning self-assessment and peer assessment also indicate that practices differ, and these are also central strategies within genre-pedagogy. As research on feedback has revealed that using self-regulating strategies like self-assessment is particularly important in the learning process (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), this is a strategy that all students should be trained in using. Even though there are unclear conclusions about the efficiency of peer assessment in contexts of L2 writing (Hyland, 2000; Hyland & Hyland, 2006), this is a strategy that may contribute to train students in assessing texts. If a genre-pedagogical approach to the teaching of writing was applied in English, this would ensure that assessment strategies were better exploited, and also that feedback practices were applied in line with requirements in the programme “Assessment for Learning”, recently run in Norwegian schools.

Whether or not text structure instruction, which is central within the genre-pedagogy tradition (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012), is efficient or not is still unclear (Graham & Perin, 2007). In genre-pedagogy, revealing the stages of text-types is central in teaching students how to master to write different types of texts (Martin, 2012). A quasi-experiment recently conducted showed that this type of teaching approach may have a positive effect on students’ writing skills (Horverak, 2016a), and is appreciated by students and teachers (Horverak, 2016b). Though some teachers use text structure instruction according to the students’ responses, not all students report this type of practice. One may of course ask the question whether it is true that they have not been taught how to structure texts, or whether they just do not remember having been taught this. Still, in light of the requirements in the English curriculum for Norwegian schools (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013), it is worrying that many students are uncertain about whether they have been taught how to write different types of texts, and adjust language and structure to purpose and situation.

Validity and reliability

There are challenges with the validity and reliability of the findings of this study as the conclusion are based on students’ self-reporting, or their perception of writing instruction practices. The main reason for arguing that the findings of this study could be transferred to other settings is that the study is based on a reasonably representative sample given the selection process. The reported scores also vary on the scale, indicating that students with different types of perceptions chose to participate, and that they answered honestly rather than agreeing to everything. Even though it is difficult to know for certain that a sample is representative, one may assume that the sample in this study is so, and that the findings are representative for, and provide useful information about, the total population of General Studies students. Another important aspect with this study is that what is measured are not actual practices in the classroom, but students’ perceptions of these. The construct validity may also be questioned, as only certain elements of writing instruction and feedback are included in the questionnaire, as the study is limited to focusing on what is most central in a genre-pedagogy approach to teaching writing. Nevertheless, the findings may yield some insights into how students perceive what happens in the classroom concerning writing instruction.

Conclusion

My research shows that Norwegian upper secondary school students do not feel confident about their English writing skills and that they perceive writing instruction and feedback practices differently. Not all students think that they have been instructed in how to structure texts in English and adjust language to purpose and situation, central features in writing instruction from a genre-pedagogical perspective. In addition, many students report that assessment strategies are not integrated as part of the writing instruction process, which is central in the third phase of the teaching-learning cycle developed within genre-pedagogy. If the picture outlined here based on student perceptions is true, there is a need to improve writing instruction and feedback practices in English teaching in Norwegian upper secondary schools. I would argue that applying a genre-pedagogical approach to English writing instruction could be a way of ensuring practices in line with official guidelines for the Norwegian educational system, and in line with what has been found useful in previous research.

However, this study does not give a complete picture of the students' perceptions in upper secondary schools, as it is limited to General Studies. Vocational studies classes follow the same English curriculum as General Studies classes, but the situation may be different for these students. This is something that needs further investigation in future research. There is also a need to investigate what the situation is on lower levels, to find out how lower secondary school pupils are prepared for the requirements they will meet in later English studies. This has not been investigated yet.

As what happens in the classroom is to a certain degree influenced by what happens in the teacher training at universities and university colleges, a final conclusion is that the teacher education programs need to do a better job of training teachers in how to carry out writing instruction, and focusing on genre-pedagogy in English studies and English teacher educations could be one way of ensuring more similar practices that comply with the English curriculum and requirements in the programme "Assessment for Learning".

Biodata

May Olaug Horverak recently finished her PhD. research at the University of Agder in Norway, and is currently a teacher at Asdal lower secondary school. Her research interests include systemic functional linguistics and genre-pedagogy in the context of second language writing. More specifically, she has been investigating how English writing instruction is carried out in Norwegian upper secondary schools seen from a genre-pedagogy perspective and how systemic functional linguistics applied through genre-pedagogy may support students in developing their English writing skills.

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Appendix 1

English Writing Instruction

- Teaching and Feedback Practices in the Context of Writing.

1. *Background variables:*

1.1. Gender: Male Female

1.2. Grade for Christmas in English
1 2 3 4 5 6 IV (IV = no evaluation)

1.3. Grade I usually get on written work in English
1 2 3 4 5 6 IV (IV = no evaluation)

1.4. First language
Norwegian English Other

2. *What type of texts have you written in English this school year?*

TEXT-TYPE	YES	NO
2.1. Argumentative texts like f.ex. essay or article,		
2.2. Narrative texts like short stories or personal stories		
2.3. Other types of texts like applications, letters, presentations		

3. *Frequency of writing practice*

Scale:

1 = Never

2 = Less than once every semester

3 = Once every semester

4 = Several times a semester

5 = Several times a month

TYPE OF WRITING	1	2	3	4	5
3.1. Written tests at school					
3.2. Written home assignments that are graded					
3.3. Written exercises as homework					

Part 1: Teaching and self-confidence

Cross out on the scale:

- 1= Totally disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Disagree more than agree
- 4 = Neither disagree nor agree
- 5 = Agree more than disagree
- 6 = Agree
- 7= Totally agree

4. To what degree have you been **taught how to write narrative texts or stories this school year**, like how to start, how to describe characters, how to build suspense, etc.?

Scale: 1= Totally disagree 7 = Totally agree

4.1. I have been taught how to **write narrative texts**.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

4.2. I have been taught how to **start a narrative text**.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

4.3. I have been taught how one can **build up suspense** in narrative texts.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

4.4. I have been taught how to **write a conclusion** to a narrative text.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

5. To what degree do you think **you can write narrative texts**, like writing a good start, building tension, etc.?

Scale: 1= Totally disagree 7 = Totally agree

5.1. I can **write a good narrative text**.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

5.2. I can **write the beginning** of a narrative text.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

5.3. I can **build up the tension** in a narrative text.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

5.4. I can **write a conclusion** to a narrative text.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

6. To what degree have you been **taught how to write argumentative texts this school year**, like how to write the introduction, how to discuss and how to build paragraphs in argumentative texts like essays/ articles?

Scale: 1= Totally disagree 7 = Totally agree

6.1. I have been taught **how to write the introduction** to an argumentative text.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

6.2. I have been taught **how I can discuss a topic or an issue** in an argumentative text.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

6.3. I have been taught **how one can build up paragraphs** in argumentative texts.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

6.4. I have been **taught how to argue** in an argumentative text.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

6.5. I have been **taught how to create coherence** in argumentative texts.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

6.6. I have been taught **how to organise and structure** an argumentative text.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

7. To what degree do you think **you can write argumentative texts**, like writing an introduction, writing arguments and building paragraphs, etc.?

Scale: 1= Totally disagree 7 = Totally agree

7.1. I can **write the introduction** to an argumentative text.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

7.2. I can **discuss different topics or issues** in argumentative texts.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

7.3. I can **build paragraphs** in an argumentative text.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

7.4. I can **write arguments** for my opinions.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

7.5. I can **write a conclusion** to an argumentative text.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

7.6. I can **use connectors to create coherence** in argumentative texts.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

8. To what degree have you been **taught about different genres or text-types**, and the **difference between formal and informal language** and when to use which style **this school year**?

Scale: 1= *Totally disagree* 7 = *Totally agree*

8.1. I have been taught **how to adjust my language to the genre or type of text** I am writing.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

8.2. I have been taught **what is typical of informal language**.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

8.3. I have been taught **what is typical of formal language**.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

8.4. I have been taught how to **change the language in an informal text so it becomes more formal**.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Part 2: Evaluation criteria and feedback practices

9. Background variables

Scale:

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Seldomly
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Always

9.1. The teacher **makes sure that we work with revising and improving our texts** in lectures at school.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

9.2. The teacher gives us **new evaluations** on texts handed in a second time after working with improving the texts based on feedback from the teacher.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

10. To what extent do you **work with improving the texts** you have written on the basis of feedback?

Scale: 1= Totally disagree 7 = Totally agree

10.1. I work with **improving the language** in the texts we have received feedback on.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

10.2. I work with **improving the structure** in the texts we have received feedback on.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

10.3. I work with **improving the content** in the texts we have received feedback on.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

11. To what extent do you use **self-assessment strategies** when writing in English?

Scale: 1= Totally disagree 7 = Totally agree

11.1. When writing a text, I **try to evaluate it in relation to evaluation criteria** set for that particular type of text.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

11.2. When working with writing texts, I **evaluate my language** in relation to what the teacher says is important.



1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

11.3. When working with writing texts, **I evaluate how well I manage to include relevant content** according to the requirements in the exercise.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

11.4. Working with **evaluating my own text is an important part** of the writing process.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

12. **Peer assessment** - working with **your class-mates** with giving and receiving feedback on written work?

12.1. I have **participated in evaluating my classmates'** written work.

YES NO

If you answer NO on 12.1., skip the following question.

12.2. I have received **training in evaluating my classmates' texts.**

YES NO