

## *Abstract*

Minority students constitute an increasing percentage of the total number of students in Norwegian primary and secondary classrooms. This multilingual reality demands a multilingual approach to language teaching. The curriculum gives every student the right to differentiated instruction in all subjects, and the English curriculum states that the students should make use of their mother tongue in the language learning (Kunnskapsløftet, 2013). In order to meet these needs, language teachers need a high degree of language awareness and language competence.

Research is clear on the advantages bilinguals have when acquiring a third language. According to the interdependence hypothesis (Cummins, 1991, 2000), skills and content known in one language enhance the acquisition of consecutive languages. International research has confirmed the advantages bilingual students have in the acquisition of foreign languages compared to their monolingual peers (Cenoz, 2013; Cenoz & Hoffmann, 2003; Jessner, 2008; Komorowska, 2011; Kroll & De Groot, 2005; Sagasta Errasti, 2003). However, some research conducted among immigrant students in Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden suggests that immigrant students perform below average (Cenoz, 2013; Cenoz & Hoffmann, 2003). This is also confirmed in several European reports and in the grades minority students receive in English in Norwegian schools (Bonnet, 2002; EVA, 2003; Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2015).

This paper presents findings of two qualitative research projects investigating the socioeducational context for minority students in the English classroom in Norwegian schools. Through a total of 17 interviews with minority students from four different schools located in four different areas in Norway, the role and situation of minority students and minority languages in Norwegian English teaching is explored from the point of view of the minority students themselves. In addition, five teacher interviews are included in the analysis in order to provide the teachers' perspectives on this issue.

The findings suggest that many of the participating teachers view bilingualism as a challenge rather than an asset. They do very little to support the development of bilingualism in their students and do not adapt their teaching practices to accommodate these students. Generally, the students report that their bilingual background has not received necessary attention in the English classroom. Rather, their complex linguistic backgrounds have often seemed to be

invisible to the teacher; hence, no differentiations have been made to exploit the potential that their backgrounds represent. Nevertheless, there seem to have been a strong sentiment of equality dominating the English classrooms, where the students expressed that they had been treated equal to those who have a monolingual background. These findings suggest that the school is characterized by a subtractive socioeducational context and that it does not leave the bilingual students with any advantages in their acquisition of English compared with the monolingual students.

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