

**Pupils' beliefs about Norwegian Nynorsk:
'I don't believe we need to learn a second Norwegian language'**

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Abstract

According to the national curriculum, Norwegian pupils are supposed to learn both official written Norwegian languages, Bokmål and Nynorsk, in school (1-13); one of the written languages as their so-called main written language and the other one as the alternative written language. At the end of lower secondary school (10th grade) and the end of upper secondary school (13th grade), most pupils get three individual grades in Norwegian as a school subject: written Bokmål, written Nynorsk and oral skills. The majority of pupils (more than 85%) have Bokmål as their main written language and Nynorsk as their alternative written language, and many pupils struggle with motivational issues when it comes to learning Nynorsk. In the present study, lower secondary pupils (10th graders) have been asked about their thoughts and beliefs before and after an intervention in the form of a language-history lecture by an external Nynorsk teacher and user (a researcher). The pupils wrote down their opinions and thoughts in class under the supervision of their teacher. These (anonymous) reflection notes were handed to the researcher who categorized and analysed them by trying to extract the overall 'beliefs' about Nynorsk from each text. Even though most pupils admit having learned a little from the intervention, the result is clear: a one-time intervention – even with a clear purpose and good arguments – is not enough to change the pupils' opinion, attitudes or beliefs when it comes to Nynorsk as a second Norwegian language in school, and more fundamental changes in the educational system are needed.

Keywords: *attitudes, beliefs, emotions, language learning, language policy, language teaching*

Introduction

Norway has two written languages, Bokmål (literally *Book language*) and Nynorsk (*New Norwegian*), both being official representations of the Norwegian language (see e.g. Haugan (2017) and references there). Both written languages are mandatory subjects in school. However, one of the written languages is taught as the main written language, while the other one, accordingly, is taught as the second or alternative written language. More than 85% of the pupils have Bokmål as their main written language, and Bokmål is also the dominant written language in the Norwegian society and media. It must also be mentioned that teaching and the use of the alternative written language Nynorsk usually is limited to *Norwegian* as a subject and none of the other school subjects (like math, history, biology etc.). Even though learning goals for both written languages are specified in the national curriculum, depending on the individual teacher, exposure to Nynorsk and formal teaching may not necessarily be prioritized by the individual teacher. Hence, many pupils with Bokmål as their main written language consider Nynorsk being somewhat outside the main curriculum – and their academic interests in general. On the other hand, since the pupils are graded separately in both Bokmål and Nynorsk at the end of lower secondary (10th grade) and upper secondary school (13th grade), the pupils need to deal with it in one way or the other. Many pupils have motivational issues when it comes to investing (cf. e.g. Norton (2013)) in learning

Nynorsk as an alternative written language (see e.g. Haugan (2019, 2023)), and many teachers struggle with teaching didactics and legitimizing Nynorsk as a school subject. Since Nynorsk is the lesser used (Walton 2015) and lesser taught language, being part of the same educational system, many teachers do not master Nynorsk on the same level as Bokmål either. Hence, their skills in teaching Nynorsk as the alternative language may not necessarily be on an adequate professional level. Meeting unmotivated pupils may also be challenging for a teacher since the teacher is a representative of the national curriculum that “forces” the pupils to learn something they do not want to learn. For decades it has been known that most pupils do not like Nynorsk as a subject at school, leading to reoccurring attempts from political parties to make Nynorsk an optional instead of a mandatory subject (see e.g. a recent debate text (Thorkildsen & Hundhammer 2024)). The idea, then, was to investigate whether it would be possible to alter the attitudes and increase the motivation of a group of 10th grade pupils through a one-time intervention by an external teacher (in this case also being a researcher).

The external teacher (researcher) came from teacher education, thereby representing some kind of “external force” that may be considered more or less directly responsible by the pupils for having to learn Nynorsk. Also, the external teacher was a genuine Nynorsk user, hence a very concrete representative of the written language that many pupils dislike – and a potential direct “target”. Some teachers of 10th graders at a local lower secondary school were offered an external lecture on Norwegian language history in order “to give Nynorsk a face”, i.e. to let the pupils meet an actual Nynorsk user and try to present for them some arguments for why they might want to consider accepting Nynorsk as a school subject and as an alternative written language in the Norwegian society, in general, be more positive towards Nynorsk. In return, the pupils were asked to write down their thoughts in the form of a small text (reflection note) about what they expected from the visit and what they got out of it, which gave interesting insight about the pupils’ language beliefs and the emotional dimension of language learning, in this case, learning Nynorsk as an alternative written language. The research question in this context was whether a one-time intervention of this kind would lead to any visible, significant change in the beliefs, attitudes, emotions and motivation of the pupils.

Theoretical background

Debating school subjects

Nynorsk – and only Nynorsk, not the other written language, Bokmål – has been repeatedly debated for decades in Norway as a mandatory school subject. The different school subjects in a national curriculum are, of course, not an a priori decision and not necessarily without any debate. However, apart from “religion” as a school subject, which in the Western countries usually equalled “Christianity”, the content of typical school subjects like math, history, natural science, foreign language etc. has normally been relatively uncontroversial and free for public debates. “Christianity” itself was the reason and foundation of the development of an organised school system in many countries, among them Norway, where education for the Confirmation, i.e. Christianity, was legislated in 1736. In 1739, Norway got a school law with Christianity and reading as mandatory subjects and mathematics and writing as non-mandatory school subjects. In order to widen the perspective, the subject changed name and content in 1974 to *livssynsorientering* (life-view orientation), then, in 1987, to *Annen religion- og livssynsundervisning* (Other religion and life-view teaching); in 1997, so, the subject changed name and content again to *kristendom med religion og livssynsorientering* (Christianity with religion and life-view orientation). In 2008, Christianity was removed as a term, and in 2015, Christianity was back, and ethics was added to the subject (see e.g. Haugen (2017)). There has been a rather dramatic development of “Christianity/religion” as a school subject due to changes in the (global) society and subsequent public

debates. However, it was usually not the pupils who debated this or had any strong opinions about Christianity as a school subject. It was the parents and politicians, the adults, who debated and changed the name and content of the school subject. Nynorsk as a school subject is a topic that not only engages parents and politicians, but maybe even more the pupils themselves, which is very clear in the present study. One reason for the continuous debate might be that the pupils actually believe that they are potentially able to change the situation, i.e. to change the status of Nynorsk as a mandatory school subject.

The traditional subjects reading and writing developed into Norwegian as a school subject (in the beginning, i.e. 18th century, this was practically Danish due to the political situation at that time). Naturally, also the content of Norwegian as a school subject has changed over time. For instance, the historical perspective was much more dominant in the 1800s, during the national romantic period, where it was considered important to legitimise the Norwegian nation. From the end of the 1900s, the historical perspective on language and literature lost more and more ground and new topics like, for instance, media and subsequently especially digital media, demanded more and more space and time and pushed back what was then considered “less important” topics. However, again, these decisions were debated and made by the curriculum designers and not due to pupils’ debates. Naturally, different pupils like and prefer different subjects and different pupils have different interests and talents. If there is any single school subject that pupils might have a strong opinion about, this might probably be mathematics. But even though many a pupil would wish that there was no math subject in school, there has not really been any serious debate or demand among pupils to remove mathematics as a mandatory school subject. Even if you do not master numbers that well, you probably believe and understand that having math skills is handy or even necessary in many situations. The public opinion is generally that mathematics is an “important” school subject, cf. also OECD (2004: 110):

A genuine interest in school subjects is important as well. Students with an interest in a subject like mathematics are likely to be more motivated to manage their own learning and develop the requisite skills to become effective learners of that subject. Hence, interest in mathematics is relevant when considering the development of effective learning strategies for mathematics. In contrast, anxiety about learning mathematics can act as a barrier to effective learning. Students who feel anxious about their ability to cope in mathematics learning situations may avoid them and thus lose important career and life opportunities.

It may seem obvious that mastering a nation’s written language would be important for career and life opportunities, cf. UNESCO (2005: 5) (see also Haugan (2020)):

There are good reasons why literacy is at the core of Education for All (EFA) – a good quality basic education equips pupils with literacy skills for life and further learning; literate parents are more likely to send their children to school; literate people are better able to access continuing education opportunities; and literate societies are better geared to meet pressing development challenges.

However, benefits of mastering two varieties of the same national language may not seem equally obvious to everyone (see e.g. Vartdal & Rødseth (2022)), especially when the second variety may be hardly visible or even absent in every-day life (see e.g. Grepstad (2020)).

The national curriculum

The Norwegian core curriculum is centred around learning five basic skills:

School shall facilitate for and support the pupils' development in the five basic skills throughout the entire learning path.

The curriculum defines five basic skills: reading, writing, numeracy, oral skills and digital skills. These skills are part of the competence in the subjects and necessary tools for learning and understanding them. They are also important for developing the identity and social relations of each pupil, and for the ability to participate in education, work and societal life.

Utdanningsdirektoratet (2020a): *Core curriculum, 2.3. Basic skills*

In the general part of the curriculum, there is no specification or differentiation when it comes to language skills, it just says “reading”, “writing” and “oral skills”. It does not say reading, writing and speaking *Norwegian*, as if these skills can be detached from an actual language. Since most subjects in public school are taught in Norwegian, skills in Norwegian reading, writing and speaking are obviously “part of the competence in the subjects and necessary tools for learning and understanding them”. However, these skills are, naturally, also important skills in the learning of a foreign language. Furthermore, it may be mentioned that Norway also has Sami languages as official languages (Lovdata 2021), and Sami languages are also used and taught at schools in certain regions. The Norwegian language law (Act relating to Language) of 2021 states that both Bokmål and Nynorsk represent “the Norwegian language” (Lovdata 2021):

Section 4. Norwegian language

Norwegian is the primary national language in Norway.

Bokmål and Nynorsk are Norwegian languages with equal value that can be used in all parts of society.

Bokmål and Nynorsk have equal standing as written languages in public bodies.

The five basic skills were introduced in the national curriculum in 2006, which has been revised several times and now has an official version 2020. Interestingly, in the 2006 version for Norwegian as a school subject, Bokmål and Nynorsk are explicitly mentioned in the “purpose” for the subject (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2006a):

Norwegian and Sami are the two official languages in Norway, while the written language forms Bokmål and Nynorsk enjoy equal status. Norwegians speak a wide variety of dialects and vernaculars, but also languages other than Norwegian. Linguistic diversity is an asset in the development of linguistic competence in children and young people. In view of this language situation, children and young people should develop awareness of linguistic diversity and learn to read and write both Bokmål and Nynorsk. The aim of the tuition is to reinforce the pupils' linguistic self-confidence and identity, to develop their language comprehension, and to provide them with a good starting point for mastering the two written language forms both socially and in the workplace.

In the 2020 version of Norwegian as a school subject, there is no longer a “purpose” as an introduction to the subject, but “relevance and values”. When placing Norwegian in the context of learning, the status of Bokmål and Nynorsk is not mentioned explicitly any longer (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2020a):

All subjects shall help the pupils to understand the value system for learning. The Norwegian subject shall provide the pupils with insight into the rich and diverse language and cultural heritage in Norway. Through working with the Norwegian subject, the pupils shall become confident language users who are aware of their own linguistic and cultural identity in an inclusive community in which

multilingualism is valued as a resource. The subject shall develop the pupils' critical thinking abilities and equip them to participate in society through an exploratory and critical approach to language and text. The Norwegian subject shall provide the pupils with literary experiences and the possibility to express themselves creatively and inventively. Reading fiction and factual prose shall give the pupils the opportunity to reflect on important values and moral issues and shall help them to gain respect for human values and for nature.

Apparently, the curriculum designers are now trying to focus more on Norwegian as one language – without telling what that might be – instead of explicitly mentioning the more challenging perspective that there are two written varieties of Norwegian. One might come to think that a euphemism like “the rich and diverse language and cultural heritage in Norway” is used to cover this in order to make the topic less controversial. A statement like “the pupils shall become confident language users who are aware of their own linguistic and cultural identity in an inclusive community in which multilingualism is valued as a resource” also may give the impression that “one” Norwegian linguistic culture is seen in contrast to other languages, i.e. globalization seems to be a more important perspective than the fact that there are two written Norwegian varieties. Hence, the curriculum of 2020 seems to aim at a more global perspective than previous curricula that had a narrower and more national perspective. (See e.g. Larsen (2022) for a discussion on the status of Bokmål and Nynorsk in the latest curriculum.)

Meaningful teaching and learning

Where the curriculum of 2006 had “main subject areas” (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2006b), the 2020 version has “core elements” (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2020b). Under the heading “Text in context”, it is said that the pupils “shall explore and reflect on fiction and factual texts in ‘bokmål’ and ‘nynorsk’ Norwegian (either can be optionally the first-choice and/or second-choice language), in Swedish and Danish, and in texts translated from Sami and other languages.” Even though Bokmål and Nynorsk are mentioned explicitly, the two Norwegian languages figure on the same level as the two neighbouring Nordic languages and translations of Sami texts. Furthermore, Bokmål and Nynorsk are here linked to reading skills. Under the heading “Written text creation”, it is stated that (ibid.):

The pupils shall experience that the teaching in writing the language [*sic*] is meaningful. They shall learn to write in both the written first-choice language (‘bokmål’ or ‘nynorsk’) and the written second-choice language (‘bokmål’ or ‘nynorsk’) in various genres and for various purposes, and learn to combine writing with other forms of expression. They shall also learn to assess the texts of others and to revise their own texts based on feedback.

The formulation that the pupils shall experience the teaching in writing the language as meaningful is very interesting (see e.g. Nilsen (2022: 14) for a discussion on the term *meaningful* in this context), given the fact that many pupils do not really feel that learning Nynorsk is a *meaningful* task at all, hence the title of this paper and the discussion below (cf. also Myklebust (2024): “Learning Nynorsk is as meaningless as cycling backwards” (my translation)). In the original/Norwegian version of the curriculum, the terms “hovedmål” (main written language) and “sidemål” (alternative written language) are used, referring to the fact that the pupils are supposed to have one of the two written varieties as their “main” language and the other variety as their “alternative” written language. The official English translation of the curriculum uses the terms “first-choice language” and “second-choice language”, as if the pupils themselves actually had a real “choice”. In fact, the “choice” of the so-called main written language is made by the municipality that the school belongs to – at best by the parents – and not by the pupils

themselves, and at present, more than 85% of the pupils have Bokmål as their main written language. From 8th grade, the pupils – theoretically – can make an individual choice when it comes to their main written language (Lovdata 2023: Section 2-5), which may be challenging all the time the rest of the class continues with the other written language as their main language. Furthermore, the last sentence of section 2-5 of the Education Act, i.e. that the pupils can choose their main written language, is not necessarily very well known among teachers or communicated explicitly to the pupils:

Section 2-5. Forms of Norwegian in primary and lower secondary education

The municipality issues regulations concerning which form of the Norwegian language (Bokmål or Nynorsk) will be the primary form in any given school. The primary form of Norwegian must be used for written teaching and for written work. From grade 8 onwards, pupils themselves choose which primary written form of Norwegian they wish to use.

However, when changing school, for instance, from lower secondary to upper secondary school, or from upper secondary school to continuous education, quite a number of pupils change from Nynorsk to Bokmål since they consider Bokmål the most important written language in the Norwegian society (see e.g. Grepstad (2020: 214, 585 pp.), Språkrådet (2021: 10, 35), Språkrådet (2022), Sønnesyn (2023)). It may be said that there is a relatively widespread understanding among pupils that Nynorsk is less important or even not important at all – not to say „useless”, at least among pupils who have Bokmål as their main written language, which is also documented in the present study.

Language attitudes and beliefs

Why is it that the pupils with Bokmål as their main written language – in general – see Nynorsk as less important than Bokmål and do not find it “meaningful” to learn? (cf. also Nilsen (2022: 53), Karstad (2015: 99)). Naturally, a first grader does not necessarily have an independent opinion (if any opinion at all) about Bokmål and Nynorsk. Such an opinion is usually “inherited” from or influenced by the parents (cf. Garrett (2010: 26)). It may also be influenced by teachers, who themselves have been a part of the same educational system and may be biased accordingly (see e.g. Nilsen (2020: 60), Blikstad-Balas & Roe (2020: 126), Nordal (2004)). The following quote from Garrett (2010) does sum this up rather well:

For example, some fundamental language attitudes (evaluatively distinguishing a familiar non-standard language from a standard one) have been found to become established as we enter the school system as children (e.g. Day 1982). This suggests that parents and teachers can have some role in the development of such attitudes at the person-to-person level, consciously or not. Parents might indicate approval or agreement at times when their children express attitudes with which they themselves concur. (Garrett, 2010: 26)

Garrett (ibid.) continues with: “Our experiences of the media may also influence attitudes in some area.” For many decades, there have been regularly recurring public debates on whether Nynorsk should be removed from the curriculum or at least be an elective (cf. Myklebust (2024), Thorkildsen & Hundhammer (2024)). There is no debate the other way around, i.e. that Bokmål should not be a compulsory subject in school – which would, indeed, be “meaningless” in today’s Norwegian society. Actually, even the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK), owned and financed by the Norwegian state, just recently asked “Kvifor Nynorsk”, i.e. ‘Why Nynorsk?’ in a public debate on TV and radio (NRK, 2024).

But this bias is actually also visible in the curriculum, written by curriculum designers who, naturally, also have been a part of the same educational system. Before 1940, the number of Nynorsk users was not far from reaching 40%. Since then, it has decreased dramatically, and today, it is below 15% (see e.g. Grepstad (2020)). In public communication, Bokmål is by far the most dominant written language, and in corporate communication, it may be as low as 0.3% (Sanden 2020, Grepstad 2020: 591). A pupil with Bokmål as the main written language may very well have the feeling and belief that Nynorsk only exists in a school context. Even though the curriculum mentions Bokmål and Nynorsk explicitly, the Education Act only states (Lovdata 2023):

During the final two years of the primary and lower secondary school, pupils must receive instruction in both forms of Norwegian. The Ministry may issue regulations concerning exemption from instruction in the secondary form of Norwegian for pupils who receive special language instruction.

The majority of pupils has Bokmål as their main written language. According to the Education Act, the pupils only also need to receive *instruction* in Nynorsk from 9th grade, and there are even reasons why one may “avoid” having to learn Nynorsk (Språkrådet 2021: 29). Hence, the pupils may interpret this as if Nynorsk is extremely difficult to learn at the same time as it seems that one actually does not necessarily “need” Nynorsk in society at all. Many pupils will also notice the fact that some municipalities and, hence, schools change main written language from Nynorsk to Bokmål and hardly ever the other way around. Understandably, the natural impression would be that Nynorsk is less important than Bokmål and is actually “dying” or should be “killed” (Blaker 2015). Hence, many pupils may easily be influenced to believe that Nynorsk eventually will vanish or “die” by itself, i.e. that they do not have to learn it in school.

Bokmål and Nynorsk have been part of the Norwegian educational system for more than hundred years, but the debate is still very much alive. Apparently, many teachers do not feel they have the competence to make their pupils change their attitudes towards learning Nynorsk with the consequence that the pupils underachieve and get a lower grade in that part of the Norwegian subject than they could have had if they were more motivated to invest in learning Nynorsk (cf. Norton (2013)). There are even teachers who would like to make Nynorsk a reading subject instead of a writing subject and who argue that tenth graders should not have written exams in Nynorsk (Holøien 2024).

The idea, then, was a visit of some tenth-grade classes at a local school by an outsider from teacher education who was a Nynorsk user himself and who would try to motivate the pupils through a lecture with facts and sharing of personal experiences, the research question being whether a one-time intervention of this kind would be enough to change the pupils’ attitudes towards Nynorsk. It must here be mentioned that the intervention and data collection happened some years back in time, whereas the analysis was carried out in 2023/2024 in connection with the topic of the present Educational Role of Language Journal: *Links Between Beliefs and Language*.

Method and data

The pupil texts that this study is based on were collected as the result of a collaboration with schoolteachers and a one-time intervention in the classroom, i.e. a gathering of tenth graders from several different classes at a local lower secondary school in Eastern Norway, Innlandet county, i.e. a “typical” district where Nynorsk may be considered “meaningless” by many pupils. Even though all “Bokmål pupils” are supposed to learn Nynorsk as their alternative written language, Nynorsk as a topic in Norwegian as a school subject “lives it’s life” in strong competition with other topics that may be

considered “more important”. When you already know how to write one variety of Norwegian, how can you not find the interdisciplinary topics of the curriculum “more important”? (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2023c):

School shall facilitate for learning in the three interdisciplinary topics health and life skills, democracy and citizenship, and sustainable development.

Hence, many teachers do not necessarily prioritize teaching Nynorsk more than they consider necessary to fulfil the curriculum (repeatedly, pupils report that they have had minimal to none lectures in Nynorsk during the year, e.g. Vikøy (2024), where a pupil said they had had three hours of Nynorsk in five months). Furthermore, teaching Nynorsk may still in many if not most cases be equal to teaching Nynorsk grammar (only), which may not feel very interesting or meaningful to many pupils, cf. Hertzberg (2008), who refers to “overwhelming documentation” (from England and USA) that shows that the teaching of grammar has little or no effect on the improvement of writing. Many pupils have negative attitudes towards Nynorsk or learning Nynorsk which makes teaching Nynorsk more challenging for the individual teachers. This fact may also lead to teachers minimizing teaching Nynorsk. Many teachers simply feel helpless when it comes to dealing with this situation. Of the five teachers Nilsen (2022) interviewed, one reported to engage “to a small extent” in the teaching of Nynorsk (p. 47). To the question whether the teachers felt qualified to teach Nynorsk, two of the five replied “to a small extent” (p. 48). It is, of course, possible that these two teachers were more honest in their replies than the three other teachers. It is not necessarily that easy to admit in an interview that one does not have the competences needed to do a professional job as a teacher.

Regarding the present study, one local teacher – out of pure frustration about her pupils’ lack of motivation to learn Nynorsk – contacted the researcher and asked whether he would like to come and visit her Norwegian classes (tenth grade/lower secondary school), which she intended to gather for a joint lecture where she wanted the researcher to give a lecture on the historical background of the development of Nynorsk and give the pupils concrete arguments for why they should learn Nynorsk. She also wanted to let the pupils meet a “real Nynorsk user” so they might be more motivated to learn Nynorsk. To engage the pupils even more, they would discuss the pupils’ expectations and possible objections in the individual classes beforehand, and the pupils would also be encouraged to prepare questions they would like to ask the researcher. Knowing about the pupils’ antipathies against Nynorsk, the pupils were, furthermore, encouraged to engage the researcher – and Nynorsk user – in a real debate with challenging questions.

After meeting the researcher, the pupils were assigned a task where they were asked to write down their reflections. The pupils were asked for their personal opinion and thoughts, and it was expected that many of the pupils would like to use the opportunity to also share their negative thoughts. Therefore, the reflection notes were submitted anonymously. Twenty-four of the pupils also consented to handing their notes to the researcher for research purposes. These twenty-four texts form the data basis for the present study. The texts are without names or any personal information, and it was here decided to just give them the numbers 1-24, and references as *Text #* or *Pupil #* will be used when referring to the individual texts/pupils.

Twenty-four, is obviously a quite small number in the context of statistics. Furthermore, this study is a documentation of the opinions of a selection of pupils at one single school after preparation by two teachers (the one who contacted the researcher and a colleague of hers) and the subsequent intervention by the researcher. These circumstances make it difficult to replicate the exact same

conditions. Hence, this is a qualitative study of a relatively small number of texts written by pupils at one Norwegian lower secondary school. According to *The Norwegian Education Mirror 2022* (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022), there were 635,000 pupils in primary and lower secondary schools in Norway in 2022. The Education Mirror gives no numbers of pupils per grade but based on the total number of tenth-grade pupils, one should expect that there were roughly about 60,000 tenth graders in 2022. The opinions and thoughts of twenty-four tenth graders from one school can – obviously – not represent the opinions and thoughts of 60 thousand Norwegian tenth graders. However, based on experience and reports from other studies, the content of the pupil texts in this study looks very “recognizable”, and the study does not reveal any unexpected surprises. The finding is still that the majority of pupils do not find Nynorsk “necessary” to learn, and they are rather resistant to changing their opinion based on rational arguments by teachers/adults.

Given the nature of this project, i.e. that the pupils were encouraged to engage in a challenging debate/discussion with the researcher in order to make the lecture/meeting more motivating and “exciting”, it is possible that some pupils may have overdriven their negative attitudes, meaning that they might have found joy in expressing this to a person who they might have thought was in a position to change the educational system. Also, some pupils may have been more positive in their feedback, maybe out of politeness or because they would not trust that their response was anonymous (enough); the teacher may possibly be able to recognize their handwriting.

When working with their reflection notes/texts in class, the teachers asked the pupils to organize their thoughts with a main perspective on before and after the lecture/meeting with the researcher, and guiding questions like:

1. What is your personal opinion about Nynorsk?
2. What do you think we need Nynorsk for?
3. What would you possibly want to learn from the lecture?
4. What did you learn from the lecture?
5. What did you get out of the lecture/meeting?
6. How do you feel about Nynorsk after the lecture/meeting?

These are rather concrete questions about the pupils’ attitudes towards Nynorsk, and the study is, thus, in line with a “direct approach” to the study of language attitudes in Garrett’s (2010: 37 pp.) classification.

As mentioned above, the data set consists of twenty-four pupil texts. The texts have not been sorted in any way and are just given the numbers 1-24 as they lay randomly in the pile of (A4) papers that was received from the teachers. All but one (which is a computer print-out) are handwritten notes with a length of as little as two short paragraphs (actually sentences) up to one page of text, representing the diversity of pupils in a group when it comes skills and willingness to do an effort in an otherwise less motivating subject. The texts show that the pupils followed an outline of guiding questions given by the teachers. These could be as general as opinions/reflections “before the lecture” and “after the lecture”, or more concrete and structured following the guiding questions prepared by the teachers. Many of the texts also had the formal heading “Reflection note”.

The researcher did not receive much concrete information about the working progress in the classroom(s) at school before the lecture/meeting, and the study is, thus, a qualitative analysis of the twenty-four texts that were received from the teachers/pupils. Due to the form and nature and the relatively small number of these texts, it seems most sensible to discuss each text on its own and to give each text/pupil his or her own voice to show how average lower secondary pupils may feel about having

to learn Nynorsk. The discussion below is, therefore, an analysis of each pupil's text following the random order in the pile of texts that was received.

Results and discussion

Given the nature of the data and the present study, each text will now be discussed individually, trying to extract the most important statements relevant to the study. As mentioned in the method and data section above, most of the texts are organized with a main perspective on before and after the lecture/meeting with the researcher, and many of the texts tried to answer more specific questions prepared by the teachers (see the section above).

It is expected that most of the pupils – if not all – have negative attitudes towards Nynorsk, and the main research question of this study is whether the “intervention” of a Nynorsk user and the presentation of “new” arguments for Nynorsk may have the potential to change the pupils' opinions and attitudes towards Nynorsk. As mentioned before, all texts are anonymous, and the pupils in the texts below will be referred to as “s/he” and “her/his”. The texts are translated or paraphrased and, therefore, reflect the style they are written in by the pupils.

Text/pupil 1

Pupil 1 starts with stating explicitly: “I do not think we need to have Nynorsk in school.” It would have been good if Nynorsk was an elective subject. Pupil 1 sees the possibility that there might be pupils who would like to learn Nynorsk, but personally, pupil 1 does not think that we need Nynorsk. This pupil expected from the meeting to hear why the invited lecturer was so fond of Nynorsk, but apparently, this question was left unanswered. Pupil 1 also revealed a fallacy by connecting the fact that there are approximately 500 000 Nynorsk users in Norway with the assumption that these Nynorsk users only wanted Nynorsk (not Bokmål or both) and that this could mean that everyone in Norway would use Nynorsk in the future. Pupil 1 doubted that this would happen in the near future. Pupil 1 states that s/he learned more about what Nynorsk actually was and mentions that s/he learned that there are 500 000 Nynorsk users, but that her/his opinion had not changed because of that fact. Pupil 1 repeats the statement that it would be best for all if Nynorsk was an elective subject at school. Pupil 1 admits having gotten a lot out of the lecture/meeting, but states explicitly that Nynorsk is not something that s/he likes very much.

Text 1 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; accepts Nynorsk users; votes for elective subject; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 2

Text 2 is a rather long text and is divided into “before the visit” and “after the visit”. Pupil 2 accepts that there is Nynorsk in the school system, but it should be an elective. Pupil 2 does not have anything against those who use Nynorsk, but s/he does not want that anyone should be forced to use it if they do not want to use it themselves. Interestingly, pupil 2 also mentions that s/he does not want that anyone should be forced to use Bokmål against their will either. Instead, each pupil should be allowed to choose Bokmål or Nynorsk at the time when they have to learn how to write, and that all teaching should be adapted to the choice of the individual pupil. The pupil also mentions a “standard argument” that is well-known from the public Nynorsk discourse, namely that this would lead to extra hours at school that could be used on other topics (even many teachers may share that opinion, cf. e.g. Slettemark (2006: 63)). Another well-known argument from the Nynorsk discourse the pupil mentions is the fact that government employees are supposed to be able to write both Bokmål and Nynorsk. Pupil 2 argues that

these should learn this during their professional education. As for the lecture itself, pupil 2 found it “interesting” and s/he appreciated the fact that they were allowed to ask questions and that they were given “proper” answers to their questions. Pupil 2 expected that some of the question would be rejected by the researcher but acknowledged that this did not happen. Pupil 2 found that the researcher was good at talking and making his case, but that much of what the researcher said was “foolish” (*tåpelig*), especially some of the comparisons that were made (a point which is not specified). Therefore, pupil 2 writes, has s/he not changed her/his opinion about Nynorsk.

Text 2 may be summarized as: though not explicitly expressed, does not like Nynorsk; accepts Nynorsk users; votes for individual choice of written language; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 3

Pupil 3 argues that one should not spend time at school on Nynorsk and does not believe that s/he will need or use it after having finished school. S/he simply does not want to write Nynorsk and characterizes Nynorsk as useless and boring and states that Norway only needs one written language. Pupil 3 reports that s/he got the answers to the questions s/he had before the intervention, i.e. why we have Nynorsk, what we use Nynorsk for, and why we need two written languages. However, pupil 3 also states that s/he did not get anything out of the visit. Pupil 3 explicitly writes that s/he has not changed opinion about how s/he feels about Nynorsk and does not like it any more than before. S/he did not learn anything new other than why we have two written languages and what is important about it. Then pupil 3 repeats that s/he did not get anything out of the visit.

Text 3 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk, i.e. explicitly negative towards Nynorsk; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture; the perspective of Nynorsk users or Nynorsk as an elective subject is not mentioned at all.

Text/pupil 4

Pupil 4 argues that all Norwegian dialects should be kept, but Bokmål and Nynorsk should be merged into one language so that future generations do not have to learn two written languages and discriminate each other. The only question pupil 4 had before the visit was why there was not just one written language (which is interesting given the fact that this is one of the explicit learning goals in the Norwegian subject). Pupil 4 learned that trying to head against having only one written language was tried out but failed. Pupil 4 also reported that s/he gained more knowledge about Nynorsk and thinks that Nynorsk should be more appreciated. The text is relatively short – five sentences in total, where the last two sentences are fragments. Based on the text alone, pupil 4 put less effort in the topic/task than the previous three pupils and expressed her/his personal feelings less openly.

Text 4 may be summarized as: personal opinion about Nynorsk is not directly expressed, even though some frustration about the fact that one has to learn two written languages is clear; some empathy for Nynorsk on a general level.

Text/pupil 5

Text 5 reveals some of the well-known arguments from other discussions: Nynorsk is unnecessary and boring; many are not interested in learning Nynorsk at school, and personally the pupil thinks that Nynorsk should be an elective and there should not be any assessment of the pupils’ Nynorsk skills. Pupil 5 wanted to know why they had to learn both written languages, and if they have to learn both, why do they not learn it before they reach lower secondary school? This makes learning Nynorsk very

“unnatural”. Pupil 5 states that s/he did not learn anything new during the visit and did not get that much out of it. Pupil 5 has not changed opinion, which is that Nynorsk is unnecessary and should be an elective.

Text 5 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; Nynorsk should be an elective; Nynorsk should be taught earlier; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 6

Pupil 6 thinks that Nynorsk is very unnecessary to learn for them in the same way as it is unnecessary for Nynorsk users to learn Bokmål. Furthermore, pupil 6 states that it is not very motivating to learn Nynorsk when one is fourteen years old. One should rather spend time on doing something else and there is no use for Nynorsk anyway. At least it should be an elective subject. Pupil 6 does not feel that s/he learned very much new. S/he has the same opinion as before.

Text 6 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; Nynorsk should be an elective; Nynorsk is taught too late (i.e. should be taught earlier); accepts Nynorsk users (in a way); not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 7

Pupil 7 finds Nynorsk somewhat boring and believes that we do not need it in the future. Nynorsk should be an elective subject. Before the lecture, pupil 7 wondered why they had Nynorsk at all. Pupil 7 reports that s/he did not learn anything new – and adds that s/he had been thinking about something else during the lecture. Pupil 7 reports that s/he did not get anything out of the lecture and still thinks that Nynorsk is very boring.

Text 7 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; Nynorsk should be an elective; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 8

Pupil 8 sees no point at all in having Nynorsk. Nynorsk should be an elective subject and pupil 8 wants to know why it is not. Pupil 8 states that s/he did not learn anything new, but that s/he got something to think about after the lecture. The latter statement is repeated, and the text ends with the opinion that Nynorsk should be an elective subject.

Text 8 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; Nynorsk should be an elective; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 9

Text 9 has is quite a bit longer and has better text qualities than the previous texts. Pupil 9 reasons that s/he likes Bokmål better because this is the language s/he learned to write first and that s/he knows best. This reasoning is followed by reflecting on whether the same would be true if one had learned Nynorsk as the first written language. But now pupil 9 thinks that Nynorsk is boring and some of it may also be difficult at times. Very few like Nynorsk and no one understands why one needs to learn it. As a written language pupil 9 finds Nynorsk easy to understand whereas those who speak Nynorsk (or something like it) are more difficult to understand. And learning it and the rules for using it are difficult. Therefore, pupil 9 does not understand why they have to learn it, and Nynorsk is just another thing to concentrate on which makes it even more difficult to learn other IMPORTANT (in capital letters) topics/subjects. Pupil 9 had three concrete questions: Why does the researcher (addressing him directly) think that we need to speak/write Nynorsk? Does the researcher want that Bokmål shall vanish and that everyone shall speak

and write Nynorsk? Why did the researcher move here (i.e. to Norway) if he does not like the way we speak? (Referring to the fact that the researcher moved to Norway from another country.) These questions clearly reflect some kind of anger, anxiety or feeling of threat when it comes to the pupil's linguistic identity. Pupil 9 did not learn anything new, just more of the same s/he knew before and did not get much out of the visit. Pupil 9 still does not like Nynorsk and does not want to learn Nynorsk. Pupil 9 has the same opinion about Nynorsk than before.

Text 9 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 10

Text 10 is of the shorter kind again and pupil 10 thinks that Nynorsk is unnecessary, or that it is at least unnecessary to have two written languages. Pupil 10 wanted to know about the perspective of those who use Nynorsk and what kind of solutions they would have to offer. Pupil 10 reports that s/he learned more about Norwegian language history and the perspective of Nynorsk users. Pupil 10 has not changed opinion.

Text 10 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; accepts Nynorsk users (in a way); not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 11

Pupil 11 thinks that it is unnecessary to learn a second written (Norwegian) language, especially when Nynorsk is only used at school. Nynorsk is unnecessary and difficult, and the time spent on learning Nynorsk could rather be spent on other things, like mathematics or physical education, since the Norwegian society complains about adolescents being too little active and that math skills are a problem in Norwegian schools. Many struggle with Nynorsk, so why not use more time on math? Pupil 11 wanted to know why we have Nynorsk, what we shall do with it, and why it is not an elective subject. Pupil 11 reports that s/he did not really learn anything new and that s/he still has the same opinion about Nynorsk. Nynorsk should be an elective subject, and anyone who wants to learn it should be allowed to do so. Pupil 11 still thinks that Nynorsk is unnecessary for us who live in this part of the country (i.e. the Eastern part of Norway).

Text 11 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; accepts Nynorsk users (in a way); not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 12

Pupil 12 states that Nynorsk is boring and unnecessary. Why can Norway not understand that the language changes over time and becomes more modern? Let go of the obsolete and meaningless language! This would make it much easier for younger generations. Why do we need a written language that most people do not want? Pupil 12 found the lecture itself very interesting and educational and understood better why we had Nynorsk. Pupil 12 also found that the arguments for Nynorsk were well presented. Even though the last paragraph shows appreciation of the lecture itself, there is no sign that pupil 12 has changed opinion, and there are clear arguments against Nynorsk without even making it an elective.

Text 12 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 13

Pupil 13 finds Nynorsk boring, unmotivating, difficult, unnecessary, and if you know Bokmål, you do not need Nynorsk – and the other way around. Pupil 13 wanted to know why we had to learn two written languages, and if we have to learn it, why not earlier? Why could we not learn Nynorsk from 1st grade instead of from the end of 8th grade? Pupil 13 did not learn anything new but reports that s/he got some explanation for why we had to learn two written languages – but admits that s/he did not understand everything. Pupil 13 still finds Nynorsk unnecessary.

Text 13 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 14

Pupil 14 states that those who write Bokmål and those who write Nynorsk understand each other (with a little goodwill), so there is no need for everyone to learn both written languages. Pupil 14 argues that it would be more important to have subjects like English, math and physical education. English would strengthen Norway internationally. As for math, the skills are really bad today, and regarding physical education, adolescents are lazy and unmotivated (pupil 14 and pupil 11 seem to have talked to each other during their writing). Nynorsk and Bokmål should be elective subjects so that those who want to use Bokmål can choose that, and those who want to use Nynorsk can choose that. This way, we can take care of both written languages, and no one has to be forced when s/he is totally against it. Pupil 14 found the lecture very interesting and educational and appreciated the fact that they could ask questions and got good answers. Pupil 14 saw the case from two perspectives but did not change opinion. The meeting was still very good since he (the researcher) argued well for his case.

Text 14 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 15

Pupil 15 thinks that it is unnecessary to learn Nynorsk and believes that s/he will not ever have any need for it. It is also very unnecessary that the pupils are assessed in Nynorsk. Pupil 15 does not think that s/he will ever have any need for it in the future (repeated). Pupil 15 wanted to know why they had Nynorsk, why they had to be assessed in Nynorsk, why Nynorsk was not an elective and stated that adolescents get less motivated when they have Nynorsk. Pupil 15 did not really learn anything new, only about the perspective of someone who uses Nynorsk and about equality. Pupil 15 has the same opinion as before and states explicitly that s/he has no intention at all to change that opinion.

Text 15 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; accepts Nynorsk users (in a way); not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 16

Text 16 is rather short. Nynorsk is an unnecessary subject that takes a lot of time that could be used on so many other things. Nynorsk should be an elective. Pupil 16 asks the rhetorical question: “What do we need Nynorsk for?” followed by an exclamation mark. Pupil 16 sees no point in a subject that none of the pupils wants and states that almost all pupils in Norway are against Nynorsk at school. Even if it is not clearly stated in the text, pupil 16 did not change her/his opinion.

Text 16 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 17

Pupil 17 is the first one among this group of pupils that states that s/he got a different impression of Nynorsk after the lecture. Before that s/he only had a negative opinion. This is because the lecturer talked a lot about that we have to see things from two sides, that Bokmål is equal with Nynorsk, that we have two official written languages, and none of them is worth more than the other. After pupil 17 came home s/he thought what the researcher had said, and that it was something that was very true: none of the languages should dominate the other. The text is relatively short, and there are no concrete remarks on whether or how the new insight will affect pupil 17's actions in the future. But at least, pupil 17 clearly expresses a change of attitude/opinion.

Text 17 may be summarized as: did not like Nynorsk; changed opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 18

Interestingly, also pupil 18 changed opinion based on the lecture. So, this makes two out of eighteen so far. This is also the first text in the pile of texts that is written in Nynorsk. The remaining texts are also written in Nynorsk. Apparently, the texts 18-24 belong to a different group/class where the reflection part was supposed to be written in Nynorsk. Pupil 18 states that s/he has gained more respect for Nynorsk after having heard the perspective of a Nynorsk user. Pupil 18 had never thought about how it would feel for those who actually like Nynorsk that all the others hated it. It is true that having to read Nynorsk subtitles on TV is irritating for Bokmål users. How irritating must it be for Nynorsk users when everything is in Bokmål? Hence, s/he understands much better now! (The pupil uses an exclamation mark.)

Text 18 may be summarized as: did not like Nynorsk; changed opinion based on the lecture (at least got more empathic towards Nynorsk users).

Text/pupil 19

Even though also text 19 is written in Nynorsk, pupil 19 states that Nynorsk is quite boring and useless. If one had started with it in 1st or 2nd grade it would have been much easier. Apart from that pupil 19 actually thinks Nynorsk may be a nice language. Pupil 19 lists some arguments for and against Nynorsk. For: one can understand each other; good for literature; good so the language does not die; against: wasted time because the majority nevertheless writes Bokmål; one can spend less time on the Norwegian subject which then can be used for other subjects. Questions that pupil 19 wanted answered: Is it difficult to learn Norwegian? What do you (the researcher) like about Norwegian? What do you think about that other people talk badly about Nynorsk? The text stops after the questions, and pupil 19 did not tell anything about reflections after the lecture. Based on that, text 19 is summarized the same way as most of the texts. However, pupil 19 is capable of seeing a few positive aspects, too.

Text 19 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; some degree of acceptance of Nynorsk; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 20

Pupil 20 thinks that Nynorsk at school is unnecessary simple because s/he does not see any point in that they suddenly, in lower secondary school, have to learn a new written language. If at all, they should have started in primary school, like they did with English. Pupil 20 also finds that Nynorsk is a little difficult, which does not help the motivation to work steadily with it. Pupil 20 does not have anything against Nynorsk as a language. After the lecture, pupil 20 gained more respect for Nynorsk but still thinks that it should be an elective subject, so that everyone could choose which language s/he wants to use. However, it is important to respect the opinion of others and what they would like to do. One shall not

judge people based on how they speak or write. Pupil 20 found it very interesting to hear the opinion of a Nynorsk user, but s/he still thinks that one should have started to learn Nynorsk earlier or that it should be an elective.

Text 20 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk (at school); more acceptance of Nynorsk; changed attitude towards Nynorsk, but not willing to change general opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 21

Text 21 is rather short (one paragraph, four sentences). Pupil 21 thinks that Nynorsk is very unnecessary to learn. It may be nice for those who learned it when they were young. That Norwegian adolescents have to learn a new written language is just nonsense. There is already enough “crap” (Norwegian *drit*) that we have to learn at lower secondary school.

Text 21 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk (at school); not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 22

Text 22 is more diplomatic than text 21. Pupil 22 states that s/he does not have anything against Nynorsk as a language, and those who like to speak (*sic*) Nynorsk may very well do so. Nynorsk as a subject, on the other hand, is unnecessary (with an exclamation mark). Pupil 22 states that s/he does not have any use for it. It could have been an elective subject, so those who want it could have used it. Pupil 22 also has a list of arguments for and against Nynorsk (cf. pupil 19). For: one can avoid angry West-Norwegians; people can understand each other; against: it takes time that could be used on other subjects instead; if everyone uses Bokmål, we would not need to discuss this. After the lecture, pupil 22 has gained more respect for Nynorsk, but still thinks that one should be allowed to choose. At the same time, one should accept what everyone wants for her- og himself. It was nice to see the perspective of a Nynorsk user, but if everyone wrote Bokmål one would avoid arguing about this.

Text 22 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk at school; accepts Nynorsk users (but would prefer that everyone wrote Bokmål); Nynorsk should be an elective; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 23

Text 23 is relatively short and divided into before and after (two paragraphs, five sentences). Pupil 23 thinks that Nynorsk is nonsense. The “reason” for this is that s/he thinks that one wants to write Bokmål or Nynorsk (a “reason” that makes no sense as it is stated). Pupil 23 adds that it is totally unnecessary to have two written languages in the same country. After the lecture, pupil 23 still does not like Nynorsk and has – more or less – the same opinion about Nynorsk. However, pupil 23 has gained more respect for Nynorsk users.

Text 23 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; gained more respect for Nynorsk users; not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

Text/pupil 24

The last text in the pile reveals no surprises compared to the rest of the texts. Text 24 is short with only two paragraphs (three sentences). Pupil 24 does not like Nynorsk because s/he finds it unnatural to write. One should be allowed to choose whether one wants to learn Nynorsk or Bokmål. After the lecture, pupil 24 still does not like Nynorsk but thinks if s/he had grown up with Nynorsk s/he might have liked it better.

Text 24 may be summarized as: does not like Nynorsk; accepts Nynorsk users (in a way); not willing to change opinion based on the lecture.

The one aspect of statistics with this survey is that two out of twenty-four pupils may have changed their opinion towards Nynorsk because of the lecture/intervention. That would be 8% of the group. This also means that 92% of the pupils do *not* seem to have changed their opinion. The high percentage of negativity towards Nynorsk in this particular group of pupils is by no means surprising. The ambiguity between the arguments for and against are also in line with what previous research has shown. Røed (2010), for instance, asked upper secondary pupils in the same area whether they meant that learning Nynorsk in school was important; whether they should learn to write Nynorsk or read Nynorsk; whether the time spent on teaching Nynorsk should be used on other topics/subjects, or whether everyone should learn Nynorsk. While the numbers referring to the “importance” of Nynorsk are a little bit scattered over the scale, the more concrete questions yielded the same results as the present study. Out of 25 pupils in Røed’s group of Eastern Norwegian pupils, there are only two - four pupils that are on the more pro-Nynorsk side (summarized in table 5.6.15 in Grepstad (2020)). Nilsen’s (2022) survey from Northern Norway showed similar results. Nilsen had 19 ninth graders and 18 tenth graders in her sample. Only 2,7% answered that we need to learn to read Nynorsk (Nilsen 2022: 42). Whereas 5,4% partly agreed that we need to learn to write Nynorsk. These answers are interesting given the fact that pupils usually want to avoid writing Nynorsk. On the other hand, this seems to be only one pupil that had not reflected on this. In both cases, more than 70% of those pupils do not think we need to learn to read or write Nynorsk (ibid.).

Even though the amount and the teaching practise may vary (see e.g. Tørring (2019), Hagesveen (2023)), tenth graders are supposed to have learned (been taught) Nynorsk actively for at least three years. According to the curriculum, the pupils are supposed to having been exposed to Nynorsk (i.e. at least have been read for by the teacher or have read themselves) since 1st grade. Still, for those who have Nynorsk as their second/alternative written language, exposure to Nynorsk is minimal compared to Bokmål. According to Garrett (2010: 23), attitudes have three components:

Attitudes are cognitive insofar as they contain or comprise beliefs about the world, and the relationships between the objects of social significance: e.g. judgements of standard language varieties tending to be associated with high-status jobs. Attitudes are affective in that they involve feelings about the attitude object. This affective aspect of attitudes is a barometer of favourability and unfavourability, or the extent to which we approve or disapprove of the attitude object. This positive-to-negative directionality of attitudes is usually augmented by an assessment of intensity: for example, whether we mildly disapprove of something or we well and truly detest it. Thirdly, the behavioural component of attitudes concerns the predisposition to act in certain ways, and perhaps in ways that are consistent with our cognitive and affective judgements.

The tenth graders in this study (and other studies) seem to believe that Nynorsk is not important in society and that they, therefore, do not need to learn it at school. Nynorsk is not believed to be socially significant. The pupils also feel that they are forced by the system, i.e. the curriculum and the teachers, to learn Nynorsk, and they truly disapprove of being graded in Nynorsk, which, then, extends to disapprove of Nynorsk as a school subject. The “natural” way to react to this, would be to express this disapproval and to minimize investment in learning Nynorsk (cf. Norton 2013). Nynorsk is not a vision within the pupils’ future self (cg. Dörnyei 2009), and the motivation to learn Nynorsk is minimized accordingly. A one-time intervention in the form of an extra lecture on Nynorsk, even if it is filled with “good” arguments for learning Nynorsk, is not enough to change the beliefs and the attitudes of these

tenth graders. The leader of the Nynorsk association (Noregs Mållag), Peder Lofnes Hauge, recently tried a similar “stunt”, i.e. a one-time intervention, where he met pupils at an upper secondary school in Bergen for a pep talk to motivate them to learn Nynorsk. The arguments from the pupils in that group were the same, and the effect was more or less the same, i.e. hardly anyone gets “convinced” (Vikøyr 2024).

Conclusion

In this survey, a group of Norwegian tenth graders have been visited by a researcher who tried to motivate the pupils to change their attitudes towards Nynorsk, their alternative written Norwegian language, through a lecture on Norwegian language history and arguments for Nynorsk and learning both written languages. It was expected that more or less all the pupils had negative attitudes towards Nynorsk, which was confirmed by the written feedback from the pupils after the intervention. Out of twenty-four pupils, only two admitted that they had changed attitude after the intervention. This can be interpreted negatively, i.e. that it is (almost) impossible to change the pupils’ attitude through a one-time intervention. Or one could also take this as a positive result, i.e. it is, in fact, possible to change the pupils’ attitudes and beliefs through targeted argumentation. An investigation of all the twenty-four texts showed clearly that many pupils felt a lack of good arguments and generally knew too little about Nynorsk and Norwegian language history. This may be due to their lack of interest and motivation in the subject, but it may also be due to the amount of time and effort that is spent on Nynorsk in school, i.e. a result of too little teaching and exposure to Nynorsk. Naturally, a one-time intervention would not be able to compensate for the lack of three (ten) years’ teaching. It is reasonable to assume that more focus on Nynorsk during all the years of primary education would have a huge impact on the situation. Of course, it would be nice if the pupils would change their attitudes towards Nynorsk by themselves. However, given the nature of the educational system and Norwegian society, the pupils cannot really be “blamed” for their attitudes and beliefs. If teacher education and teaching would be improved, one may be able to change the attitudes and beliefs over time. On the other hand, as long as it looks like even the Norwegian state acts as if Nynorsk is less important than Bokmål, through curricula and legislation, neither teachers nor pupils can be that easily convinced to change attitudes.

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