

***Helping Refugees and Immigrants in Norway to Finish Lower Secondary School
– Self-Regulation, Motivation and Mastering of English in Adult Learning***

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Abstract

Immigrants and refugees who aspire to live and work in Norway must often finish the equivalent of 10 years of primary and secondary school in one or two years of intensive studies. In the case of the subject English, students' levels vary enormously, from complete beginners to fluent users. To help students find motivation and self-regulate their own learning in class, a five-step method has been applied, where the students identified 1) What is important when learning English? 2) What do I master already? 3) What is challenging for me? 4) What should I focus on? and 5) How can I work with this? This case study presents findings from a class of immigrants (n=8) who worked with these five questions to self-regulate and define their own needs in the subject English. By building their own metaphorical staircase based on the answers to these five questions, the students made plans concerning what to work with and how and followed up on this for periods of one to two weeks. When evaluating, the students reported to be able to choose activities, to feel in control, and to see their own limitations. One student commented that "I get to practise everything I need (read, listen, write, speak)" and another wrote "I can see my goal. It's my own decision how much time I need to get there." The data shows that with the five-step method, all students can work at their own pace, allowing for individual adaptation, self-regulation and motivation.

Keywords: Self-Regulation, Motivation, Mastering, English, Immigrants

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Introduction

Many refugees and immigrants who come to Norway must adapt to a radically different culture and society from what they are used to. There are requirements to learn Norwegian, take a course in life mastery (Integreringsloven, 2020), and generally a formal education is needed to get a job. As part of the adaptation process in Norway, they must finish the equivalent of 10 years of primary and secondary school within two years. This means that not only do they need to master the Norwegian language well, but they also need to have knowledge about various subjects in Norwegian. In other words, they must graduate from lower-secondary education as adults according to the Norwegian curriculum, to continue to upper-secondary education or vocational training. In addition to learning about Norway and learning Norwegian, English is one of five compulsory subjects. This obviously means language learning, but the subject competence objectives focus much on social science and social studies in English, learning about and reflecting on topics like English as a global language, sustainable development, democracy and citizenship, as well as indigenous peoples in Norway and the English-speaking world. Alongside their lower-secondary education, learners must also continue to develop their Norwegian language skills. All things considered, it is easy to assume that many immigrants in Norway find themselves in an overwhelming situation that is challenging for their motivation.

Naturally, students' backgrounds differ socially and culturally, in civil status and work experiences, as well as in education. In the classroom of the current study, the variation also includes an age span from 16 to 30. Since the students are not the same age, some are parents and others are living with their parents. One is a teenager dreaming of becoming a medical doctor, playing football in his sparetime, while his classmates try balancing the roles of parenting and being a partner as well as being a full-time student. Their children catch all kinds of bacteria and viruses, which sometimes prevents their parents from attending school. Other students are occupied with finding a spouse or part-time jobs. Two of the students have come back from maternity leave after two babies were born during the school year.

Within two years these students will be evaluated according to the competence aims for 10th grade English, and they may possibly have written and oral exams so that they can receive a diploma for lower-secondary education. All of this makes way for several challenges, motivationally as well emotionally, but also when it comes to time management. The classroom includes students who have studied English for several years, who have difficulty finding motivation to re-do lower-secondary level English at first. Some boredom is to be expected, both for those who struggle and those who find some of the teaching too basic.

Very often students believe that they know what to expect in class, only to find that the English classes in Norwegian lower-secondary education have different content or other work methods and goals compared to that of their home country. Others fear the English subject, due to bad experiences or lack of experience, and some even are used to not having teaching materials at all or having worked with teaching methods that only reward reproduction, resulting in low listening comprehension and speaking skills. Low self-esteem related to previous English learning experiences may be a motivation killer for those who expect failure.

According to the Norwegian Education Act (1998 § 9a), every student has the right to a safe and good learning environment that promotes health, well-being, and learning. Immigrants need not only feel safe, but they also need to feel a sense of belonging and of purpose. This

can be challenging enough by itself. On top of this, Norway is a country with a cold climate and generally a somewhat reserved population who not necessarily is inclusive of foreigners, whether they are immigrants or refugees who come from abroad or ethnic Norwegians who come from another part of the country. Without generalising too much, it is safe to say that many immigrants and refugees are likely to experience a cultural shock.

One of the best ways to overcome this shock and adapt to the Norwegian lifestyle and culture is presumably to go to school and study. It may not be enough just to live in the country and try to adapt, because more knowledge and perspectives are needed. Like all students and students in Norway, immigrant students have both the right to feel inclusion as well as to participate in class. (Meld. St. 6, 2019-2020, p. 11). The research question of the current study is: How can we help adult immigrants to self-regulate and be motivated when learning English in school? To answer this question, a case study is presented, including 8 immigrant students of English in an adult teaching centre in the south of Norway who worked with a five-step method and metaphorical staircases with individual learning aims to increase their self-regulation and motivation for learning English. The methodology applied will be presented below, after a short description of what self-regulated learning means, followed by results and a discussion of results related to relevant theory.

Self-Regulated Learning

Self-regulation in a learning context means that learners activate their thoughts and actions to achieve their learning goals (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012). More specific, this means that learners set goals, decide on strategies, monitor and evaluate their own learning (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002). Another definition of self-regulation emphasizes identifying problems and comparing different solutions to these, as well as making a plan to carry this out (Boekaerts og Niemivirta, 2005), which is a process that is quite similar to the approach applied in the intervention in the current study. In general, self-regulation is about planning one's own learning process, carrying the plan out, and evaluating the process, in order to make new plans (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Research has shown that self-regulation in learning, meaning identifying goals, planning learning activities and evaluating one's own learning process, leads to more efficient learning (Black & William, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, motivation also plays a part in this picture. Students with higher motivation are more concerned with and conscious about their own learning process, leading to efficient learning (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012), whereas unmotivated students engage less in their learning process, leading to less efficient learning. One of the problems within self-regulation is how to get students who struggle, with motivation and subjects, to become engaged in their own learning process. The method described below is one suggestion of how to approach this problem. This method aims at engaging students on both low and high levels in their learning process and supporting them to set their own goals and get adequate challenges in the learning process.

Methodology

This is a case study that investigates the outcomes of a five-step method for mastery, participation, and motivation in relation to engaging immigrant adult learners of English to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. The study may be considered an intervention, albeit without a control groups, where the method was implemented in class so that all eight students worked with their personal staircases individually. Based on this, they then

identified their own needs and levels, and built metaphorical staircases with specific aims and goals included for each step.

The method used in this classroom and outlined here comes from a project called SAMM, a systematic approach to mastering life (Horverak & Aanensen, 2019; Horverak, 2020; Horverak et al., 2022). SAMM includes a five-step method to help learners achieve their goals through finding answers to five central questions: 1) What is important for me? 2) What am I good at? 3) What is challenging for me? 4) What should I focus on? and 5) How can I work with this? This approach builds on Ryan & Deci's self-determination theory (2017), stating that in order to achieve intrinsic motivation, the basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness must be met.

The five-step method can result in various approaches in the classroom, as sub-areas of "mastering life". In this case the questions have been slightly adjusted, to reflect the status of English as a school subject in general, aiming for prior knowledge, acknowledging their expectations, and previous experiences when the school commences. The method was also used in a micro-perspective, as a learning reflection, after working on a topic (figure 1).

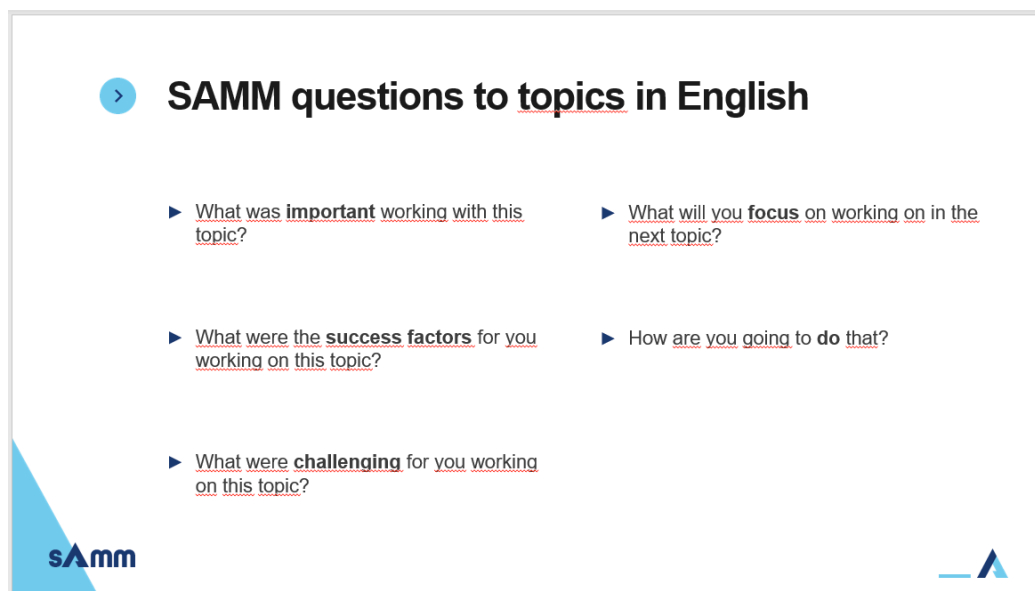


Figure 1: Five-step method for topics in the English subject

The students then reflected on what was important, success factors, challenges and what they found would be necessary to be able to move on to the next topic or chapter. Students shared reflections like: "Next time I must learn vocabulary in a better way", "I want to retake the vocabulary test", or "I will write more summaries to practice extracting what's the most important ideas".

This class used an adaptation of the five-step method as a plan for working on a topic or a chapter in English classes. This means that the teachers devised a staircase with five steps where some basic elements are set. After a period of implementation guided by the teacher, the students took on the responsibility of filling in what they planned to do, how much they would work, which phase they would work with, which method they would use, and finally how they wanted to present what they had learned (figure 2).

English Subject

Time: _____
 Book: _____
 Topic: _____
 Chapter: _____

5. Explore and present (choose 1-2)

- Write a 5 paragraph text
- Make a PP presentation
- Make a podcast/video presentation
- Write a learning log with SAMM questions (self evaluation)

4. Continue language learning choose what suits you:

- I must practice more: _____
- Watch English speaking TV-series: _____
- Find and learn and use new phrases/vocabulary: Write in notebook
- Follow and study with Instagram/teacher: _____
- Write a summary of the chapter: _____
- _____

3. Use the language

- Dialogue practice: «Let's talk» questions: p _____
- Read to teacher (WhatsApp or at school)
- Write: exercises in workbook: p _____

2. Practice

- Online exercises chapter: _____
(keep a logg on exercises you do)
- Grammar at «test-english» _____ (topic)

(ex.)							
1							

1. Get to know and learn new content

- Vocabulary: workbook p _____ practice pronunciation, spelling and comprehension.
- Choose **minimum 10 words** you want for Friday's vocabulary test – take a photo, mark words and send on WhatsApp
- Listen and read: textbook p _____

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Figure 2: Five-step staircase in the English subject

As figure 2 shows, step 1 is basically about getting familiar with new content. The students plan the number of pages to read and decide which vocabulary to work on and learn the upcoming week. It even becomes so concrete that they can pick which 10 words they want for their vocabulary test by the end of the plan. Step 2 is where they work with the language, using online resources and grammar exercises. The students should here log what they work on. Step 3 is about using the language they are trying to acquire, by writing exercises, conversation and speaking exercises, and reading out aloud to the teacher, either in person or through a recording. The latter can be done on any mobile and sent for example through WhatsApp.

Step 4 opens for various learning activities, where the teacher has made several suggestions for the students to choose from, but also left open space for student suggestions. Finally, step 5 is where the students choose to dig deeper into some of the content and choose how to present what they have learned. Step 5 is also where evaluation is made, both teacher evaluation on presentations but also the self-evaluation through the SAMM questions (figure 1).

After the intervention, the students participated were asked about how they perceived working with the staircase in English. They were also asked what they liked about this way of working, and what could be challenging. The results present a summary of the students' reflections and reflections from the teacher that carried out the intervention in her English class on how the approach worked, and why it worked this way.

Results

Students reported a high level of satisfaction with the method. They emphasised the feeling of being in control of their own studies, being able to work independently of the teacher and the other students, while at the same time having a sense of belonging in a class. The teacher mentioned that this approach presupposes that the teacher has spent time and effort on building relations with the students and between the class members, to make a safe

environment for having different prerequisites for learning the subject, a variety of levels, working on different topics or books, even different paces, and progress. In this group, applying the approach in such a safe learning environment, this has led to students supporting each other, motivating each other, and acknowledging and applauding classmates' achievements and mastery instead of competing. The teacher emphasized that the stronger students could reach far, whereas the students who started late in life learning English were allowed to work in a pace and on a level they felt adequate. Whenever students were absent for longer periods of time, they generally reported that they were neither stressed out nor demotivated. Rather, when they came back, they knew right away where to pick up and continuing working from.

The teacher also mentioned challenges. One was that some students were passively attending school or even being absent due to life being overwhelming in so many ways, that school was just even one more possibility of failure in life. She reflected that teaching English to a class in plenary would have the high probability of targeting only a few of the students at a time. High achievers would be difficult to provide with enough and appropriate material, and under-achievers or absentees would be hard to reach and help keeping up the pace. There was a need for meeting a diverse set of needs and a need for giving them the chance to take more control and responsibility for their learning process and setting own achievable goals.

Discussion

To sum up, the results show that there is a potential in applying a metaphorical staircase as a plan for regulating one's own learning, in combination with reflecting on one's own learning process. There are many good reasons for building such a metaphorical staircase. Not only do the students identify their own exercises and goals, but they also build strong self-regulating skills. They can more easily see how their effort bears fruits and are likely to realise more about what is essential for learning more and improving their English. This in turn will probably lead to more motivation. In addition, the method gives them a tool for lifelong learning in that they become more independent and learn more about how they learn best.

Students may benefit from having certain expectations laid before them. Being expected to and given the opportunity to reflect on their own learning, circumstances and not least given the chance to affect factors having effects on mastering in a relevant subject is valuable and meaningful. It acknowledges the individual and is an important factor in emotion regulation and the sense of well-being. While accommodating for individual adaptation, the five-step method also opens up for class discussion about topics and exercises, and even aims.

However, it may be challenging for individuals to take control in the learning process, as the five-step approach and the stairs facilitate. A model that describes student participation outlines four elements of the learning process; content, methods, organization and presentation (Bjørkvold, 2010), and the element of organizing one's own work is pointed out as the most challenging. It is easier for students to choose content and methods, and how to present what they have learnt. The metaphorical staircase described here is meant to support student autonomy in the process of learning to regulate the learning process. Some content, methods and presentation options are outlined, and then the students choose from these, and possibly add new suggestions. This may help them gradually take more and more control in their own learning process, whether they are on a high or a low level.

The main obstacles for implementing this approach with metaphorical stairs are having enough time and getting the students to understand how to work with the stairs. It takes time for the students to realise how the stairs is an efficient tool to support their learning. The stairs provide a plan, and it also gives the user the opportunity to take control, and to adjust according to their own needs. The time factor is also a result of the fact that many of the immigrants have fled a society where their opinion put them in danger, and in some cases even life-threatening danger. Many immigrants have been supposed to follow a leader and not think for themselves. As the opposite is the case in Norway, not only does society expect students and citizens to think for themselves, but our democracy is also dependent on critical thinking. In Norway, members of society are expected to speak up and voice their concerns when they disagree with something. Many immigrants in Norwegian classrooms go through a shock phase or a culture shock in this sense. This may be one of the reasons why this method takes time and effort to adapt. However, in this class, they finally did not only adapt to it, but even embraced it. It takes time and efforts to help students build their own staircase. They need to identify goals and think about which exercises to work with, and this takes both time and energy.

Conclusion

The results of this study show that the five-step method gives the students freedom and power, something which leads to stronger self-regulation and higher motivation for working with learning English. Although students must discover a sense of belonging and purpose themselves in the learning process, the teacher can assist through plenty of facilitation, customization, and guidance individually, and less teaching in plenary. The five-step method outlined below offers differentiation and adaptation to each student's unique challenges and style of learning while simultaneously directing them towards a stronger sense of taking part in their studies and taking responsibility for their own development.

The approach outlined here aims at empowering immigrants in a situation where they may feel that they have lost control (Horverak et al., 2022). However, whether this type of empowerment is possible in a situation where much is outside of an individual's control could be questioned. Empowerment was originally about making people aware of suppression, to make them fight for freedom (Askheim & Starrin, 2007), whereas in the programme for immigrants in Norway, there is an expectation to adapt to the system. This is a form of state-governed empowerment. The same could be said about the stairs in the classroom. The teacher strives to empower the students, by making them become more independent in the learning process. The frames and competence aims are still given, and the students have to adapt to the situation. Still, having some influence on activities in the classroom, and one's own progression, gives some autonomy and control to the learner.

Having autonomy in the learning situation may lead to more intrinsic motivation to learn (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and more efficient learning (Black & Willian, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Through building their own metaphorical staircase with individual learning aims, these students felt more satisfied with their learning process, and they also gained an improved feeling of control of what they were learning and when and why. By making the five questions in the five-step approach more concrete and relevant for the subject, learners were able to identify specific needs and requirements, as well as aims, desires and goals for each step of the staircase. They could themselves identify what they wanted to work with and when, and the teacher would be available to help them out whenever they faced challenges. By applying the five questions described above when

evaluating their own learning, the students reflected on relevant elements for their own learning process, which have been emphasized in research on assessment (Black & Willian, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007) – where are they going, how will they get there, and where will they go next?

This case study is very limited in scope and time, but the results are promising, and both the teachers and the students were positive to the five-step method. There is a need to try out the approach in more contexts, as different subjects and also different countries or cultures. The hope is that giving the students independence and responsibility will give them motivation and help them increase their self-regulation, and that this will support them to succeed in a new and foreign situation.

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