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Student perspectives on EFL oral participation: what they want and what they need

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Abstract

This thesis examines how to encourage Norwegian students to speak more English in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. To answer this, I have conducted group interviews with 10th grade students. I elicited questions about their feelings towards English and the English subject, how they practice oral English in class and their preferences on oral activities. I examined the Norwegian curriculum, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the output hypothesis, student-centered classroom and Willingness To Communicate (WTC) to understand why students should speak, and approaches to increase their participation.

My results indicate that many of the students are negative towards English class and find English unnatural to speak in the classroom. There are different reasons for this, but the most common ones were the classroom environment and low confidence in English speaking. Furthermore, they prefer oral activities where they are working together and doing something practical, fun or useful. Lastly, an interesting finding was that the students want a common agreement on only speaking the L2 in the EFL classroom. Overall, these findings suggest how oral activity can be increased in this classroom.

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1.   Introduction

Today, English is an important language to communicate both locally and globally and has become the lingua franca of the world (Brevik & Rindal, 2020). Therefore, practicing English speaking in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom is important. Firstly, because of the global need for communication. Secondly, one of the goals of the curriculum is to communicate in English. Furthermore, speaking English is one of the basic skills and important to practice in order to improve and be able to communicate (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2020a). As a result, it is important for teachers to support students' oral skills and optimize the amount of speaking time in the second language (L2).

In this thesis, I am investigating how we can aid students to speak, therefore we have to look at the factors that influence students' willingness to speak in the classroom. According to Dörnyei, the success of learning a L2 depends on the level of motivation (2014, p. 520). In addition, factors such as self-confidence, classroom environment, choice of topics and so on, can influence the amount of speaking in the EFL classroom (Azwar, Harahap & Azwandi, 2021, Riasati & Rahimi, 2018). Moreover, the aims of teaching and learning English in Norway have shifted over the years. According to Simensen (2020, p. 31), inspiration towards a more communicative approach to learning English began in the 1980s and 90s. The Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) made prototypes for teaching and assessment, which first and foremost compromised a model of communicative competence. It included knowledge and skills that can refer to the language users´ ability to communicate and communicative language competences, such as linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences (Simensen (2020, p. 33). According to Simensen (2020, p. 35) "we might say that the Norwegian educational system LK20 is a third generation document with regard to the CEFR".

However, encouraging students to speak in the EFL classroom is an issue. As teachers we need to focus on oral skills and motivate students to speak. To be able to do this, it is important to include the students in the learning process and provide them with opportunities to decide. The overarching research question is: What are students' perceptions of their own oral participation in the EFL classroom? This is divided in two:

Sub-research question 1: What are students' experiences with oral activity in the EFL classroom?

Sub-research question 2: How would students prefer oral activities to be taught?

These two questions cover the main goal in this thesis, which is to examine how they practice oral English, and factors that can increase their oral participation. To gain students' perspectives, I conducted interviews with 10th grade EFL students. I interviewed this age group because I was teaching them in my practice period.

2.   Background

To set the context for my topic, I will look at speaking in the English subject curriculum, examine students' involvement in the classroom and look at previous research on my topic.

2.1. LK20 and oral skills

According to the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training (2020a), the development of the basic skills is incorporated in every subject. This means that oral skills, one of the basic skills, are general and relevant in every subject. In the general curriculum for the English subject, it says oral skills in English "refers to creating meaning through listening, talking and engaging in conversation". To develop oral skills in English, students need to speak the L2 gradually more accurately and add more nuances to be able to communicate on different topics in different situations (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2020a). This is why it is important to focus on oral skills. Moreover, the curriculum emphasizes student participation. To illustrate, one competence aim after 10th grade includes "self-chosen texts", which implies that the students have some choices and co-determination in their learning process (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2020b).

2.2. English subject curriculum

The English subject curriculum also emphasizes oral skills within the subject. I will examine the competence aims after 10th grade because many of the aims concern speaking and communicating in class. One is: "express oneself with fluency and coherence with a varied vocabulary and idiomatic expressions adapted to the purpose, recipient and situation" (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2020b). To be able to reach this aim, students need to practice speaking and communicating with each other, and hence it is important that students participate in such activities in the classroom. In addition, written in the core elements of the subject (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2020c), it says "The teaching shall give the pupils the opportunity to express themselves and interact in authentic and practical situations". Here it is important that the teacher provides the students

an opportunity to practice English and communicate with others in class. However, this can be problematic if the teacher does not have activities that give the learners this opportunity.

2.3. Student involvement

In the new curriculum from 2020, there is a large focus on formative assessment, which shall help to promote learning and develop competence in the subject. It says: "The teacher shall facilitate for pupil participation and stimulate the desire to learn by using a variety of strategies and learning resources to develop the pupils' reading skills and oral and writing skills" (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2020d). There is a large focus on including the students. As a result, the focus has shifted over the years to a greater emphasis on student involvement.

It is important to listen to students' viewpoints, and Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT) explains this. SDT "maintains that an understanding of human motivation requires a consideration of innate psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness" (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The need for autonomy or self-determination has become a larger focus in school, which refers to the students' need to feel independent. Being a teacher that supports this, one listens to the students and lets them express their opinions, gives them the opportunity to choose when it is possible, takes their questions and wishes seriously and encourages them to take initiative. This way, teachers can promote autonomous motivation (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 69). Moreover, this relates to a more student-centered classroom, which considers the needs of the students. In this approach, students do not necessarily depend on the teacher all the time, which I will elaborate on in the theoretical framework (Jones, 2007, p. 2). In relation to my thesis, it is important to listen to students' wishes and needs. For instance, if they have the opportunity to choose an oral activity, it might engage them to speak more.

2.4. Literature review

Studying my topic, it is important to look at previous research. I did not find much research on what makes students speak more from Scandinavia, but I found some from outside of Europe. All of the studies are fairly recent, this was to get studies most up to date, conducted between 2015-2021. I narrowed my search to willingness to speak in the EFL classroom, foreign language anxiety, motivation and factors for speaking in class.

In the international research, I found studies from Iran and Indonesia where they had found several factors that influenced students' willingness to speak from interviews and questionnaires (Azwar, Harahap & Azwandi, 2021, Riasati & Rahimi, 2018). However, both studies involved participants in university. Factors that were found in the two studies includes topic of discussion, such as topic familiarity, topic interest, topic preparation and topic comfort, effect of interlocutor, gender and age of interlocutor, interlocutor familiarity, shyness, self-confidence, teacher, classroom atmosphere, group size, seating arrangement, fear of making mistakes and fear of evaluation.

Furthermore, I found research on reluctant speakers (Mahdi, 2015). Mahdi examined articles and strategies conducted by teachers in classrooms that could motivate reluctant students to participate and converse. He believed that the learning power of the student depended on their willingness. He thinks that some students are naturally eager to learn, while others need the teacher to inspire and challenge them. If they are not willing or enthusiastic to speak, this can cause reluctant speakers. In addition, lack of confidence in speaking and fear of making errors. This lack of conversation leads to limited opportunities for further learning of new things.

In the Nordic countries, I found one study from Sweden (Ahlquist, 2019). The study showed that a storyline project based on a young adult fantasy novel during six weeks discovered a number of benefits on speaking and writing. The most important finding was that it increased the students' motivation to speak English and enhanced self-confidence through doing so. Which indicates what can be done to increase their willingness to speak in class.

In the Norwegian context, Bøhn and Myklevold (2018) conducted a study in Norway exploring communication strategy use and metacognitive awareness in the EFL classroom. They also examined to what extent the proficiency and motivation levels of the students played a role in the use of communication strategies. One of their findings was that the students who received training in communication strategies (CS) used a higher number of CS than the students who did not receive training.

To sum up, there are conducted studies concerning willingness to speak, motivation to participate and studies on communication, among others. However, my study examines 10th grade students and provides their perspectives on how to increase their oral participation. It adds new findings on this area and provides information from the Norwegian EFL classroom.

3. Theoretical framework

This section will discuss the relevant theory used to shed light on reluctance to speak in the EFL classroom. Firstly, I will explain Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which focuses on speaking and authentic communication. Secondly, I will present the output hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of producing the L2 in the classroom. Lastly, I will elaborate what is meant by the term ´student-centered classroom´, as this thesis investigates student preferences. In addition, I will elaborate on the term ´Willingness to Communicate´ (WTC), because I am examining how to encourage students to speak more and what influences this.

3.1. Communicative Language Teaching

My understanding of effective language teaching is influenced by the paradigm of CLT, which is heavily imbued in teacher education in Norway and abroad. Examining what encourages students to speak more, I will elaborate on CLT. It is a newer approach to language teaching in the later years. CLT understands the language classroom as the place to practice and prepare for the real world and therefore it is a large focus on real or authentic communication (Richards, 2006, p. 20). However, it is challenging to define CLT, because it can mean different things to different people. Although, a definition includes that CLT was a shift from focus on how language was formed, to more emphasis on what language was used for. Moreover, CLT "centers around the essential belief that if "language is communication", then students should be involved in meaning-focused communicative tasks so that "language learning will take care of itself" (Harmer, 2015, p. 57). CLT is based on a cooperative approach to learning with more group work activities, role plays and project work (Richards, 2006, p. 4). The approach focuses on communicative competence, which according to Richards (2006, p. 3) includes knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions, how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants, how to produce and understand different types of texts, and how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge.

3.2. Output hypothesis

We have examined CLT, whose goal is to increase students´ communicative competence and focus on authentic communication. Another hypothesis that is closely related, is the output hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of producing language. I am examining this

theory to understand why students should speak more in the classroom. Swain is known for formulating the output hypothesis, and thinks that the production of language, both written and spoken, is important for learning an L2 (Swain, 1995, p. 373). She studied whether young adolescent students in a French immersion program would identify problems as a result of trying to produce the target language and what they might do to overcome it (Swain, 1995, p. 376). This theory is important within studies of second language acquisition, since output is one element of language acquisition. The impetus of Swain's study was that the French immersion students after years of academic study in the L2 had low development in the target language. She figured that lack of proficiency was connected with lack of productive use of French. As a result, she suggested that output of the L2 is crucial for the development of the target language (Gass, Behney & Plonsky, 2020, p. 407).

The output hypothesis explains that the learners' production of the L2 can show gaps in their output and force them to modify the output, which leads to language learning. Accordingly, producing language can force the learner to discover what they do not know and what they know, and motivate them to fill the knowledge gap (Swain, 1995, p. 375). This is why it is important that we encourage students to speak. While they practice speaking, they can notice what they are struggling with, and that might motivate them to improve their speaking skill.

Furthermore, Swain thinks that focus on form-meaning relationships is important and can be facilitated in students' own language as they struggle to convey meaning and through conscious reflection on the relationship between form and meaning in authentic language samples (Swain, 1998, p. 81). Through this, the goal is to ensure authentic use of language forms, as for CLT. According to Swain, the goal is "to provide learners with the motivation to use language accurately, coherently and appropriately by writing for, or speaking to, real audiences" (Swain, 1998, p. 82). An important function of output is the development of fluency and automaticity of processing (Gass, Behney & Plonsky, 2020, p. 414). That is why it is so important to have students produce the target language.

3.3. Student-centered classroom and Willingness To Communicate

Since my thesis is focusing on student perspectives, I will look into the approach of a student-centered classroom. The goal of a student-centered classroom is to encourage students to participate in their learning process, while the teacher has more of the role as a facilitator than instructor. The emphasis in this approach is on working together, both in groups or pairs, and

as a class. They help each other and learn from each other, and they can ask their teacher for advice if they are struggling with problem solving (Jones, 2007, p. 2). This approach is relevant for my project because I want more student participation in oral activities, therefore it is important that the students are in focus.

However, there are several factors that can influence oral participation, and that is their Willingness To Communicate (WTC). There is a model that examines these factors, which displays six different layers that can influence students´ WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). The first layer explains that WTC depends on communication behavior, such as speaking up in class. Secondly, behavioral intentions of the students influence their WTC. To illustrate, raising your hand in class expresses WTC in the L2 (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). Thirdly, the desire to communicate with a specific person and state communicative self-confidence can influence their WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 548-549).

Furthermore, the last three layers represent stable, enduring influences. The fourth layer indicates that the student's interest in communicating with the interlocutor and their L2 confidence can influence their WTC, which refers to the students' self evaluation of L2 skills and their mastery of achievement. However, language anxiety and discomfort experienced when using a L2, can affect their L2 self-confidence (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 550-551). The fifth layer indicates that attitudes towards the L2, the experience that one has with members of the L2 class, and the individuals´ L2 proficiency and communicative skills will have effect on the learners WTC and the pleasantness of speaking the L2 (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 551-555). Lastly, the sixth layer displays that both the intergroup context and the learners´ personality are variables that set the stage for L2 communication. Whereas a good classroom environment can influence communication positively, and the learners´ personality types can also play a role at the communicative arena (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 555-558). Many of the layers mentioned, could be a huge influence on the students WTC in the age group I am examining. In that age, others' opinions have a lot to say, and students´ self-assessments are often based on social comparison and others evaluation (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 34). Hence, it is important to know about these factors when I will later discuss how to encourage students to speak in the EFL classroom.

4.   Methodology

In order to answer my research questions, I needed to gain students' perspectives. Therefore, I chose interviews, which means that the researcher generates knowledge and grounded theory

from data collected during fieldwork (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 34). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.24), the purpose of qualitative research interviews is to understand themes from the subjects´ own perspectives of their daily world. To gather my data, I conducted semi-structured group interviews in Norwegian with 9 students from one school. I chose to interview students instead of asking teachers with years of experience because the teachers cannot speak for the students. I wanted to ask the students directly to gain insight into their thoughts, not from a teacher perspective.

I chose group interviews instead of individual interviews because collective interaction may bring forth more spontaneous expressive and emotional views. In group interviews the main goal is to encourage a variety of viewpoints on the topic. My task as an interviewer was to create an atmosphere that allowed for the expression of conflicting and personal viewpoints on the topic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 150).

The structure of the interview was close to an everyday conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 24), but I followed an interview guide approach, where the interview was divided into topics with questions prepared for each of them. Moreover, it is a method where the wording and order of the question can change, but the general topics and questions are covered in every interview. I had open-ended questions and asked follow-up questions when needed (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 203).

4.1. Participants

I interviewed nine students in 10th grade and conducted three group interviews with three students in each group. The students I interviewed were in my class at my practice school, and I had been there approximately three weeks ahead of the interviews. Selecting the students, I wanted to have all genders. In groups one and three there are two girls and one boy in each group, and in group three there are three girls. In addition, I wanted different English levels to gain answers from several perspectives. Also, this class is not that orally active in English class. I observed the class one time ahead, and the teacher had to ask specific students to get answers mostly. In addition, the English teacher told me that they in general do not speak much English in class. However, the students in my interview are pretty talkative outside of class.

4.2. Tool

I compiled the interview guide used, where I had open-ended questions. I did this, because I wanted the students to interpret the questions in some way. To ensure relevant answers, I divided my interview into three topics:

- What are the students' feelings towards English and the English subject?
- How do the students work in the EFL classroom?
- What do the students prefer in the EFL classroom?

This was to clarify to myself what I was examining, and to make sure I got some background information as well. In addition, I wanted students' perspectives on the questions, and to examine if there were any coherence between the three topics and their oral participation in class. For instance, I wanted to know if the activities done in class coordinated with the students' wishes and needs. Hence, if the classroom is partly student-centered or much dependent on the teacher.

4.3. Data collection

Gathering my data, I conducted three different interviews that lasted approximately 30 minutes each. I chose to do the interview in Norwegian, because all of the students spoke Norwegian as their first language (L1). Doing this, they could provide me with more in-depth answers. In addition, we got a flow in the interview and avoided stops. Moreover, since I did not apply to NSD for my interview, it was anonymous and I wrote notes instead of recording. In total, I wrote approximately sixteen pages of notes. That was challenging because I had to interview and write at the same time. Besides, I had to separate the answers for three different students, who sometimes almost spoke at the same time. Moreover, the interview felt similar to a conversation, since it was me and three students who knew each other. I chose to interview them after a few weeks in practice, so the students would know me better.

4.4. Data analysis

Analyzing my data, I based it on the three topics I had in my interview protocol. I started to gather all the answers in one document and divided them into different categories of answers. For instance, positive versus negative answers concerning English. Then, I got approximately fourteen pages of questions and answers. Furthermore, I wrote summaries of the answers where I included the main findings. I found many similar answers between the students, and

some disagreements. Lastly, I tried to rewrite these four to five pages, and gain even more specific answers to each of the three topics.

4.5. Research reliability

Interview as a method raises some issues on research reliability during interviewing, transcribing and analyzing. The reliability pertains to the consistency and trustworthiness of the findings of my study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 245). During the interview it concerned whether the interview subject would answer differently to different interviewers, or if I as an interviewer asked leading questions which could influence the answers. Moreover, my notes can question the reliability because I wrote what I found most important during the interview. In addition, the analysis of the findings can reflect on the interviewer´s subjective meaning on the topic. Even though the task of an analysis is to find the correct and objective meaning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 212).

Moreover, I wanted to research this topic because my experience as a student and earlier teacher practice in the EFL classroom has shown me that there are many reluctant speakers in class and that there should be more speaking. Besides, I can relate as a student that I am not always willing to speak in the EFL classroom. Furthermore, I am critical to the way oral English is taught in classrooms. I have seen great examples of teaching oral English from observation in teacher practice, but I have also seen fewer good examples where there is more focus on drilling the language rather than actually speaking it. Accordingly, I want to shed more light on the topic so it can be improved in all classrooms. As Swain argues in her output hypothesis, I agree that producing a language is important to learn a L2.

However, there are some limitations of my study. Conducting interviews, I can use different wording in questions which can lead to different responses from different perspectives. This can reduce the comparability of responses. Also, since one can change the order of the questions, one may inadvertently omit important topics or questions. In addition, since follow-up questions can be asked, this might vary in each interview and can also reduce the comparability of responses (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 200). Besides, answering my research questions, my findings only reflect on nine students' answers. Therefore, doing a larger research in several parts of Norway could result in different findings. In addition, it might benefit to have teacher perspectives on the topic as well, to gain an insight in what activities they have seen works.

4.6. Ethical consideration

Conducting interviews, there are some ethical guidelines to follow. First and foremost, informed consent and confidentiality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 68). I informed my students in class about my study and gave them an information slip explaining the project. I did not need written consent from their parents because I was not gathering personal data. However, I told them I would choose nine students to interview in groups, and that they had to tell me ahead of the selection if they did not want to participate. Concerning their anonymity, I am not mentioning the place the interview was conducted, or personal information about the students. I am only mentioning gender and mostly writing a summary of their answers.

5.   Results

The results suggest that most of the students do not like the English subject, which reflects on their lack of speaking in the classroom. Secondly, there is little variety in activities and lack of reflection tasks that plays a part in the students' lack of speaking. In addition, the students find it unpleasant and unnatural to speak English in the classroom. Lastly, I found that students find practical activities, group work and reflection tasks motivating and fun, which would encorage them to speak more English. In addition, an important finding is that the classroom environment has a lot to say if they would speak or not, and that there needs to be a joint agreement in class for them to speak English.

   In the groups, the students mostly agreed and often followed up each other's answers. But the different groups sometimes answered differently, depending on how they interpreted the questions. In addition, there were some dominant voices in some of the groups. But they mostly answered longer, they did not necessarily override the others. In the results, I have differentiated between Groups 1, 2, and 3.

   In this chapter, I have divided my findings into three sections according to categories in the interview protocol: (1) students' opinions about EFL; (2) how they practice oral English in the classroom; (3) how the students would prefer to practice oral English.

5.1. Students´ opinions about English

I began the interview by asking the students´ about their thoughts and feelings towards English and the English subject. This was to get their mindset to the topics, and to gain some background information. Furthermore, I noticed that the students' thoughts and feelings

towards English and the English subject reflects on their lack of speaking in the classroom. Most of the students were negative towards the English subject, arguing that it is unnatural to speak English in the classroom and that the subject was boring, hard and requires more effort to understand than other subjects. They enjoyed the subject better in primary school, because there was more variety in methods. However, two of the students liked the subject and were interested in the language in their spare time. One of them spoke English a lot at home. She thought it was fun, especially to practice speaking British English. Other than that, none of the students spoke English outside school, except when they were on vacation. A student in Group 1 mentioned: "It is okay to speak English abroad because everyone has to and those around also speak English on vacation" (translation mine). Then the students mostly found it okay to speak, since it was more natural to speak English abroad.

5.2. Practicing English in the classroom

I continued the interview by asking how they practiced oral English in the classroom. This was to find out if there was a coherence in what they did in class and how much they spoke. I found that little variety in activities and lack of reflection tasks plays a part in the students' lack of speaking. Considering activities done in class, they said they were mostly listening to texts being read from the computer aloud in class. Afterwards, they did tasks and went through them together. They mentioned that there is little variety, and that the majority of the students were not orally active. Most of them only spoke if the teacher asked them to, or because the teacher asked easy and obvious questions. Rarely anyone raised their hand, because they found it unnatural and unpleasant to speak English in class. Many of them answered in Norwegian, because they thought it was hard to speak English. In addition, many of them did not dare to speak proper English in class. As a result, they ended up speaking Norwegian-English, so peers did not think they were trying too hard. Also, they were afraid to answer wrong. They felt there is only one correct answer in subjects such as English and Norwegian, which made them avoid answering instead. However, a few students found it okay to speak English if they were in smaller groups. Then it felt more natural and less scary.

Moreover, I asked for examples of specific situations that were unpleasant, and situations that were particularly fun. Group 2 talked about an episode where they had presentations in class. During the presentation the teacher commented on the pronunciation, if they pronounced something wrong. The students found it unpleasant since it was in front of the class. In addition, the rest of the class got nervous because they knew they were also going to

have a presentation later on. On the other hand, they told me about positive experiences as well. One time they had "murder mystery" which they thought was fun. They were given notes about roles and tools and had to go around and investigate. A student (Group 1) commented: "I like these kinds of activities because when we do something interesting, the learning comes more naturally and I don't feel forced, but I want to" (translation mine).

5.3. How they prefer to practice oral English and what can encourage them speak more

In the last category of the interview protocol, I asked the students about their preferences on oral activities and what would encourage them to speak more. I asked about this to gain an insight into the students' thoughts and perspectives on how to increase their oral participation. The last findings were that students found practical activities, group work and reflection tasks motivating and fun, which would encourage them to speak more English. Also, the students stated that the classroom environment plays a role in if they would speak more or not, and that there needs to be a joint agreement in class for them to speak English.

Group 1 said that group work increases their speaking, because there are fewer people to deal with. Also, if they worked in groups, they became more confident since they could discuss opinions together. And if they had to speak afterwards, they had support from their group. However, Group 2 said that if they were in groups, they mostly spoke Norwegian. But if it was with the entire class, at least the teacher spoke English, and sometimes reminded the students to speak English. They also said that if everyone else spoke English in the classroom, it would make them speak more. This is an interesting finding because the groups have different opinions on group work. What works for some students might not work for others.

I asked what kind of oral activities the students preferred, and the answers were divided into three categories: practical activities, reflection tasks and variation in presentation form. They preferred oral activities that were practical, fun, and useful, where they could use their own reflections and discuss, and where there was no correct answer. For instance, they mentioned competitions and games because then they practiced English and were having fun. An example they referred to was adapting games to English learning such as "Alias". Another activity they enjoyed was making a news channel. Then they had to find news articles, and film themselves presenting the news. Other students said they liked reflection tasks, because then they could express their own meanings. They preferred when there was no correct answer and thought it should be more of those tasks. Because then they could

express what they thought about a topic, which made it easier to speak and they were more interested. Lastly, the students mentioned that they liked variation in presentation forms. For instance, sending a video to the teacher, instead of presenting in class. Also, in "Engelsk fordypning" they could choose which presentation form, and that made them more willing to present when they could decide for themselves. In addition, students unprompted mentioned different oral presentations and assessments as positive for their learning outcome and speaking skill. To illustrate, the oral assessment "fagsamtale" was mentioned as a positive experience because it was one to one with the teacher. They were given an interesting topic, and it felt similar to a normal conversation where the teacher followed up with questions in the conversation.

In addition, other factors played a significant role in their oral participation, such as confidence and classroom environment. They mentioned that if they did not feel good in speaking English, it did not encourage them to speak either. Also, everyone agreed that the classroom environment influenced their willingness to speak in class. They would prefer a positive environment where it is okay to make mistakes, and where everyone is supportive. Some of the students thought it was unpleasant to speak in class because many of their peers were quick to comment. As a result, they avoided speaking instead. In addition, Group 3 said there is an uncertainty in their classroom about whether to speak English or Norwegian. Because they did not always get corrected if they spoke Norwegian, which made them speak more and more Norwegian in the EFL classroom. They felt they could choose language as mentioned by a student (Group 3): "When we get a choice on which language to speak, it is a bit awkward to choose to speak English. That can appear to our peers as we are trying too hard. The teacher should say that we always have to speak English, because then I would have done it" (translation mine). So, the student meant that they would speak more English if there was a joint agreement in class about speaking English only.

6. Discussion

In my thesis, I am examining students' perceptions of their own oral participation in the EFL classroom. In order to answer this, I interviewed students and I looked at previous research and theory. It is common that there are many reluctant speakers in EFL classes, and that it is hard to motivate them to speak (Mahdi, 2015). However, interviewing students, they have many preferences and improvements on what would encourage them to speak more. Below, I will first discuss the importance of fostering a safe learning environment because this is an

important pillar for participation in class. Secondly, I will discuss the importance of choosing the right oral activities to increase speaking in class. Lastly, I will examine the importance of speaking the target language and discuss why students need to be aware of this. Awareness can make students speak more if they understand the importance.

6.1. Fostering a safe learning environment

Common for my students is that many of them do not like the English subject and find it hard and unpleasant to speak. Besides, many of them do not have confidence in speaking English and do not feel comfortable speaking in front of their classmates. Therefore, I found that an important factor to encourage them to speak more, is a good classroom environment and more confidence in speaking foreign languages. That is also shown in the heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC, that self-confidence and the social context can affect their WTC. Therefore, it is important that the learning arena is a safe place where it is okay to try and fail. Because students´ WTC is influenced by their L2 class and can affect their pleasantness of speaking (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Moreover, if they experience discomfort when speaking English, as many of the students in my interview mentioned, that can lead to language anxiety and lack of L2 self-confidence. (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Hence, it is important that the classroom is a safe space, because you can only get better at speaking English by actually practicing it. As mentioned in the curriculum, the students need to speak the L2 and gradually add more nuances to be able to communicate in different situations to develop oral skills (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2020a). Also, no one is expecting each other to have perfect pronunciation and vocabulary in the L2 in 10th grade. Having a good classroom environment where the students are comfortable, the self-confidence in the L2 would most likely increase since the students are less afraid to speak with their peers. However, their L2 self-confidence is not only affected by this. If they do not get any mastery of achievement, they most likely would evaluate their L2 skills lower (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 550-551).

6.2. Methods and activities that promote oral participation

The significance of oral activities to motivate speaking were mentioned by the students. They preferred first and foremost practical activities, group work and reflection tasks that had no correct answer. Many of their preferences fit with the CLT approach and having a student-centered classroom. Group work and benefitting from helping each other is a newer focus in

language learning. However, the students I interviewed expressed that they did not have this approach too often. But if this was more used in the classroom, I believe that these students would be more willing to participate in the oral activities. The goal in CLT is to encourage students to speak, and it focuses on authentic communication (Richards, 2006). Accordingly, the teacher has so many options on activities where this can be achieved. Nearly all of the preferred activities mentioned in the interviews focused on speaking and communicating while doing something that was fun or interested the students.

However, there is one factor that is problematic for the students' preferences. When there is more group work and they are depending on their peers more than their teacher, the students have more responsibility to participate and actually work (Jones, 2007, p. 2). As I know from earlier experiences, that is easier said than done. If they do what is expected in oral activities in groups, they will achieve good practice and experiences. However, while working in groups it is easy to trace off and do other things than the task that is given. Besides, the risk of switching to the L1 is high. Even though the teacher follows up the groups, the teacher cannot be everywhere at the same time. One of the interview groups mentioned that activities done with the entire class, not in groups, would work better since there would be more pressure and expectations on speaking L2 and being on track with the activity. In addition, there are often one or several students that do not participate in group work and let everyone else speak or work.

6.3. The students´ awareness of the importance of target language

What strikes me in my findings was that one of the interview groups mentioned the importance of everyone speaking English all the time, while at the same time being unwilling to speak in class. They thought a joint agreement of only speaking the L2 in the EFL classroom would make them speak more and make it less uncomfortable. What is good about this, is that it indicates that the students in my interview are willing to speak English. I did not experience a lack of motivation to learn and speak English, rather a lack of motivation in the subject because of the teaching methods. In the EFL classroom there should be an expectation of only speaking the L2 because that is the best way to practice it. When the learners produce spoken English, they will be aware of their knowledge, and what their gaps are, which leads to language learning (Swain, 1995, p. 375). It is therefore important, while working in groups, that the students actually communicate in English. But as mentioned, it can be hard to make sure that everyone speaks English all the time, and it will probably

always be someone who switches to the L1. However, it can be a good idea as the students mentioned, that the teacher has the exception of only speaking the L2 in the EFL classroom. That way, it might be more unacceptable to use the L1 as a common agreement.

However, this speaks a bit against the student-centered classroom approach. In this situation the teacher would be much more involved, than in a student-centered classroom. The teacher has to control that the students speak English and make them use the language. This is not really optional and might not be exactly what all the students want, but it is important to practice spoken English since this is a fundamental element. You have to practice speaking in order to use it in real life. As a result, it might be necessary in this age group to have a mixed approach. Student-centered to a degree, but also with the teacher controlling the activities and expectation of L2 use only. That the teacher sets rules for language teaching and has some expectations is important. If they get pushed to produce English, that will provide them with more knowledge and communicative competence, which is one element to make them more willing to speak.

7.   Conclusion

To summarize, this study has examined how students practice oral English in the classroom, and factors that can increase their oral participation. I conducted semi-structured group interviews and found that first and foremost, having a good classroom environment and a comfortable, safe place to practice the L2 is important. This can affect the individuals´ L2 self-confidence, which again leads to more willingness to speak. Secondly, the students want oral activities that encourage and interest them. They prefer working in groups and have practical and useful activities or reflection tasks. Lastly, the students expressed that they want a common agreement of speaking the L2 only. If everyone speaks English, they thought it would be more comfortable to speak the L2 and less acceptable to speak the L1.

An implication of my study is that it is the first study to ask this age group in Norway on this topic. My study provided significant findings on students' preferences towards oral activities that could engage the students, such as other factors that influence their willingness to speak. Future research could focus on observing as well as interviewing or use a larger data set and more participants. It could also be interesting to see if there are any differences in preferences from students living in rural areas versus cities in Norway on this topic.

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9. Appendix 1: Interview guide

Hva synes elevene om engelsk og engelskfaget?

- Hva synes dere om engelskfaget?
    - Alltid følt sånn om engelskfaget?
    - Avgjør læreren hva du syns om faget?
- Hva synes dere om å snakke engelsk (generelt)?
    - Hvorfor?
- Snakker dere det ofte utenfor skolen?
    - Eksempler?

Hvordan jobber de i faget?

- Hvordan føles det å snakke engelsk i engelsktimen?
    - Er det en situasjon dere føler dere spesielt ukomfortabel?
    - Er det en gang dere husker dere syns det var ekstra gøy?
- Hvordan arbeider dere med engelskfaget i timen?
    - Noen vanlige aktiviteter?
- Er dere mye muntlige i engelsktimen?
    - Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?
    - Bare hvis dere må?
    - Rekker dere opp hånda/muntlig aktive i andre fag?

Hva foretrekker elevene?

- Hva får dere til å snakke i engelsktimen?
- Hva slags aktiviteter foretrekker dere?
- Hva kan få dere til å bli mer muntlig i engelsktimen?
    - Klassemiljø? Selvtillit i språk, mestring?
- Hva kan få deg til å snakke mer?
- Er det mer sannsynlig at dere er muntlig etter dere har jobbet i grupper/gjort oppgaver sammen?
    - Hvorfor / hvorfor ikke?
- Hvis dere kunne valgt hva som helst i engelsktimen, av muntlige aktiviteter, hvilken aktivitet ville dere valgt?
    - F.eks: Ha en kommunikasjonsoppgave, podcast, konkurranse/lek, presentasjon, tema?