Johanne Heggeriset

Developing Speaking Skills through Oral Activities in the EFL Classroom

Undergraduate Thesis in Primary and Lower Secondary Teacher Education for Years 5-10
MGLU3504
English 2 module 2
6th semester
May 2022

NTNU
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Abstract

English is taught as a foreign language in Norwegian classrooms. The teachers have to take the English subject curriculum into consideration when teaching the language, apart from that, they are free to choose whatever teaching practice they prefer. This research investigates how teachers facilitate development of speaking skills in lower secondary schools. Sociocultural theory, the EFL classroom, the English subject curriculum, as well as the core curriculum were relevant theory and documents to take within consideration in this research. Through a qualitative method, I interviewed three lower secondary English teachers. The conducted data was coded, and put into three categories: prepared speech, spontaneous speech and speaking anxiety. The teachers distinguished between activities that facilitated prepared speech and spontaneous speech. On one hand, working with texts, reading aloud and presentations facilitated prepared speech. On the other hand, classroom conversations, group discussions and games facilitated spontaneous speech. The classroom environment was important for the extent of speaking anxiety among the students. Speaking anxiety was viewed as a challenge in the development of speaking skills. Through a variety of speaking activities, the teachers' goal was that the students would be able to pass a possible oral exam in 10th grade.

Table of contents

1.0 Introduction

The scope of the English subject in Norwegian schools has changed during the last fifty years. In 1969, English became an obligatory subject for all students in Norwegian schools. During the 70s the students had 114 hours of English each year, in lower secondary school (Ministry of Church and Education, 1974). Today, the number of English lessons during a schooled year, has almost duplicated to 222 hours (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2019a). These statistics go hand in hand with the fact that the world becomes more and more globalized, and the need for a lingua franca increases. "No other region has been more affected by the rise of English than Europe" (Graddol, 1997, referred in Galloway & Rose, 2015, p. 126). The national curriculum in Norway comply with this statement, as English has become an obligatory subject in school.

Many learning theories taught in universities today date back to the 70s, 80s and 90s, like Vygotsky's and Swain's (Tishakov, 2020, p. 111). Therefore, it is interesting to see how teachers teach speaking skills in English today. The English teachers do not have to follow a set practice when teaching, as long as they help their students reach the competence aims in the English subject curriculum, they are good. In addition, the teachers need to have the core curriculum, including values and principles for elementary and lower secondary education, at the back of their head at all times (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2017). The freedom of teaching methods also makes it interesting to see which practices the teachers take advantage of when it comes to speaking skills. Personally, as a soon-to-be English teacher, it makes it even more interesting for me to study the different methods teachers use.

One aim for this study is to contribute to show the variety of how the English language can be taught as a foreign language. A 20-page study is way too small to show the whole picture, however it is a small contribution to show parts of it. In this text I will examine factors that contribute to development of speaking skills. Then, I will discuss the different practices the teachers use when teaching speaking skills. For my thesis, I have chosen the following thesis statement:

How do lower secondary teachers facilitate development of speaking skills in the EFL classroom?

To answer this question, I have collected data from teachers while in teaching practice regarding the teachers' practice towards speaking skills. I have used this information to

discuss the methods that the teachers use, through the lens of relevant theory. The text is organized as following; first I look into relevant theoretical framework as the curriculum and the Common European Framework of References for Languages, also the development of speaking skills and foreign language learning. Then, I present details of the method I chose to conduct data. The data material will be presented as results. In the discussion, I will try to use the data material and relevant theory to answer my thesis statement. Finally, I will present an answer to the thesis statement and a summary of the study in the conclusion.

2.0 Theoretical framework

2.1 Developing speaking skills

Oral communication involves both listening and speaking (Tishakov, 2020, p. 106). One needs both exposure to the language and to practice speaking in order to develop good oral skills. Speaking is a productive language skill, which means that one creates language output (Tishakov, 2020, p. 108). There are many different descriptions and definitions of what speaking skills are. Chaney (1998, referred in Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019, p. 201) defines it as; speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts". While Burns & Joys (1997, referred in Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019, p. 201) defines speaking as "a reactive process of a structured meaning that includes receiving and producing and sharing information". Even though there are different definitions of the term, all perspectives see speaking as a part of the learners' daily lives, as they both receive and produce speech. Using the language gradually more accurately in communication in both formal and informal situations is a part of developing oral skills (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2019a). In addition, it includes to communicate on different topics, and with a variety of receivers with varying linguistic backgrounds.

2.2 The English subject curriculum

The curriculum defines oral skills as on out of five basic skills. In the English subject, oral skills "refers to creating meaning through listening, talking and engaging in conversation" (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2019a). Communication is a core element of the English subject curriculum (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2019a). The curriculum focuses on the communicative use of English in a variety of situations. English is one of the subjects 10th grade students can have as the oral exam. The English oral exam includes one presentation part, and one question part (Norwegian

Directorate of Education and Training, 2019a). The English subject "gives students a basis to communicate with others locally and globally, regardless of cultural or linguistic background" (Tishakov, 2020, p. 105). The students should acquire the English language is various forms, such as to converse, to describe, to discuss, to express oneself and so on (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2019a). In addition, the students should acquire strategies for communication, and be able to choose an appropriate strategy adapted for different situations. The English lessons should give the students opportunities to converse in authentic and practical situations (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2021). The students need oral skills to avoid communication breakdowns for unformal and spontaneous conversations about different topics. In addition, they need oral skills for prepared and more formal situations, for instance, a presentation. Oral presentations can either be presented live or it can be recorded with the help of digital tools. To record a presentation instead of presenting it live is a method that seem to help students who find it hard to speak English in the classroom (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2021).

Fluency, pronunciation and intonation are central aspects in oral communication (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2021). To avoid communication breakdowns, some language items can be taught in isolation (Skulstad, 2020, 111). When teaching language items in isolation, out of context, there is a lack of authenticity. In authentic communication spoken language usually forms part of a dialogue (Skulstad, 2020, p. 99). However, teaching part-skills may be a necessary first step, moving towards speaking more freely.

2.3 Spoken production and spoken interaction

The Council of Europe has made a framework called Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment, often shortened CEFR. It is an international standard for describing language ability on a six-point scale, and "provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe" (Council of Europe, 2001). It is beneficial to have a common basis, because teachers with different language backgrounds can cooperate, and it facilitate transparency in testing and the comparability of certifications (Council of Europe, 2001).

The English subject curriculum for foreign language learning has a clear connection to the CEFR (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2019b). The framework distinguishes four different elements of language activities. These are reception, production,

interaction and mediation. "Each of these types of activity is possible in relation to texts in oral or written form, or both" (Council of Europe, 2001). Productive activities have an important function in many academic and professional fields. An example of a productive activity is oral presentations. In addition, spoken production can simply be reading aloud. Reading a story, a novel or an article can provide the learner with new vocabulary (Tishakov, 2020, p. 116). Productive activities involve monologue communication. On the other hand, interaction activities require at least two individuals participate in an oral and/or written dialogue, during these activities production and reception alternate between the participants (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 14). The term *interaction* signals the important relationship rather than the focus of listening and speaking as two separate skills (Skulstad, 2020, p. 103).

The six-point scale, also known as the Common reference Levels, describes the progressive mastery of the targeted, foreign language. There are three tables used to introduce the Common Reference Levels (Council of Europe, 2001). The levels range from A1 to C2. Many students reach level B1 during their years at lower secondary school (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2021). One of the three tables are the self-assessment grid. This table is intended to help learners to profile their main language skills. In addition, it helps learners to self-assess their level of proficiency (Council of Europe, 2001). The self-assessment grid describes level B1 as follow:

Spoken interaction
I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).

Spoken production
I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.

(Council of Europe, 2001, p. 26)

When it comes to speaking skills, the framework distinguishes spoken interaction from spoken production. Both spoken production and spoken interaction are practiced in the

EFL classroom. Speaking takes place in real time, and spoken interaction is rule-governed to a certain extent (Skulstad, 2020, p.100). Spoken production gives the speaker the opportunity to prepare. The speaker does not produce speech based on the input he/she receives. In other words, he/she does not produce speech because of an interaction, or something that is perceived. Spoken production can be understood as prepared speech, because the speaker can prepare him-/herself, and this term will be used from now on. In addition, spoken interaction can be understood as spontaneous speech, because there is no time for preparation. Prepared speech and spontaneous speech will be used as terms to describe these types of speech from now on.

2.4 The classroom environment in the EFL classroom

When teaching and working with EFL learners, a positive and encouraging atmosphere should be a priority, and will help the students towards learning oral skills (Tishakov, 2020, p. 111). In each lesson the teacher should provide all students with a low-risk situation where they get to practice speaking. These situations should include variety of themes and topics (Tishakov, 2020, p. 110). Speaking English can be a frightening task for many learners, due to the demand to perform and produce. The students take a risk when creating oral texts and this risk can be overwhelming. Tishakov emphasizes the feeling of being overwhelmed and taking a risk increases "especially if the speaking is done in front of a number of people, with little or no preparation, or in a high-stakes situation" (2020, p. 109). The term *foreign language anxiety* was introduced in the 1980s, and it was described as similar to stage fright and test anxiety (Horwitz, 2010, p. 154). Several studies reported that speaking anxiety negatively influenced the process of foreign language learning, and students with speaking anxiety tended to have low self-concepts as language learners (Horwitz, 2001, p. 121). Speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom can therefore be a realistic challenge teachers may encounter.

To help the students, the teacher should create a classroom environment that allows for safe, supportive practice (Tishakov, 2020, p. 109). The classroom environment should also build the students' confidence in trying out language and help students to find ways of overcoming difficulties. In order to do so, the use of low-stress, low-risk speaking activities, providing pre-speaking preparation and support, allowing time to practice, and providing supportive, constructive feedback on speaking activities, can be fruitful measures (Tishakov, 2020, p. 109). Horwitz (2001, p. 119) presents results from several studies who shows that

teacher support and a supportive classroom environment may decrease student anxiety levels. Teacher support is defined as the help and the friendship the teacher shows towards students.

Working in groups and be given time to think can be beneficial for the learning process, and for student participation, as "individual work with exercises, listening to the teacher or reading does not develop reflection and understanding in the same way that participating in a working community does, where negotiation about meaning occurs through conversation" (Burner, Carlsen, Kverndokken, 2019, p. 27). During a conversation which involves the whole class, the students must be allowed time to think, in order to formulate thoughtful responses. One fundamental aim with these types of conversations is to create understanding and learning, as a result of the exchange of thoughts and ideas. In order to trigger a good, focused conversation, the conversation should, to some extent, deal with topics that the students find interesting. Admittedly, because then the students wish to express themselves (Burner et al., 2019, p. 27). The teacher, favorable, should be able to initiate teaching and exercise in engaging ways. On a regular basis, only a few students in an EFL class tend to answer the teacher's questions, as the others remain as passive listeners (Burner et al., 2019, p. 28). However, a varied repertoire of questions is important. As well as students' tendencies to give brief answers should be challenged with follow-up questions, and encouraged to elaborate. In addition, they should experience their contributions as meaningful (Burner et al., 2019, p. 29). The typical aim of a classroom conversation is to develop subject-related learning and deep understanding. The importance of learning through conversations is something Vygotsky agreed with.

2.5 Learning theories

According to elements in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, expressing oneself in collaboration with others holds a central place in learning (Tishakov, 2020, p. 110). In a dialogue, the students express their understanding of a topic or concept and work towards ideas about it. "When participating in activities where we express our thoughts to others, we allow ideas to come to fruition, by making them explicit in speaking aloud" (Tishakov, 2020, p. 110). The students take in what the others say, and in dialogue with them, their ideas and thoughts further develop and grow. In a language classroom, students learn about language through using language. In addition, they learn through experiencing language input and speaking about their understanding of language structure and forms (Tishakov, 2020, p. 110). The teacher provides the students with the opportunities to learn English when he/she gives the learners the chance to discuss language forms, uses and meanings. When speaking about

the English language, the students can improve both their speaking skills and the understanding of the structure and forms (Tishakov, 2020, p. 110).

Merrill Swain is the linguist behind the comprehensible output hypothesis. Swain's hypothesis emphasizes the importance of speaking with others as a part of learning a foreign language (Swain, 1995, referred in Tishakov, 2020, p. 111). When speaking in English the students go through a process that creates rich and demanding learning, deeper than using receptive skills alone, such as listening. In other words, the act of communication is a cognitive learning experience, as the students can identify a gap in their own knowledge when they encounter a problem in trying to produce a second language (Swain, 1995, referred in Tishakov, 2020, p. 111). However, a more recent study by Swain (2013), argues that the learners also need feedback, when learning a language. The ideas the hypothesis presents have greatly influenced language classrooms when it comes to producing language "which is relevant and useful to the [students'] language development" (Tishakov, 2020, p. 111).

3.0 Methodology

This section will explain what method I have chosen to conduct data material for my study. In addition, it describes the participants and the process of conducting data. Lastly, this section present research ethics and the study's validity.

3.1 Qualitative interview

In order to answer my thesis statement in the best possible way, I have chosen to complete three individual interviews. The primary goal of this study was to see how teachers work with the students' speaking skills, with a specific focus on their speaking skills. I chose to do semi-structured interviews, because I wanted to talk with English teachers who work with the students, and it gives the participants the ability to go in depth with their answers (Tjora, 2020, p. 114). The qualitative interviews were conducted with EFL teachers in order to look into the thesis statement: *How do lower secondary teachers facilitate development of speaking skills in the EFL classroom?*

A semi-structured interview includes both open and closed questions. The goal with an interview like this, is to create a conversation where both the interviewer and the participant can freely go off track and ask follow-up questions (Tjora, 2020, p. 114). Semi-structured interviews are usually preferred when one wants to study opinions, attitudes and experiences, which fit my study perfect. A semi-structured interview will give subjective answers (Tjora,

2020, p. 115). Therefore, it fits my type of study, because I wanted to study the differences in the teachers' experiences and how they reflect over these.

3.2 Participants

I interviewed three English teachers at a lower secondary school in Trøndelag. The quality of a semi-structured interview relies on the mutual reliance between the interviewer and the participant (Tjora, 2020, p. 116). To achieve this mutual reliance with my participants, I chose three teachers I have worked with in my teaching practice. The teachers were responsible for all of the 8th graders' English lessons at the school. All of the participants had taught English to the age group for more than five years.

3.3 Data collection

During the interview there were three people in the room, the interviewer, the participant and a secretary who took notes of the whole conversation. The secretary helped the interview to be even more authentic, because the interviewer did not have to take notes, and could fully focus on the conversation. The interviews were all conducted in Norwegian, since Norwegian was the mother tongue of all the involved parts, and the secretary found it easier to take notes in Norwegian. I told the participant that the interview would take up to 45 minutes, which gave us enough time for the conduction. It is important to have ample time during a semi-structured interview, because the participants will not rush through their answers, but can relax and truly go in depth with his/her answers (Tjora, 2020, p. 113). It is beneficial for the conducted data that the interviewer has the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, because then the participant can elaborate their answers and reflections upon specific questions. Please see appendix 1 for the interview guide.

3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis is "the process of making sense out of the data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 175). The process involves consolidating, reducing and interpreting the data material (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). In order to analyze the data collected from the qualitative interviews all of the data was coded. First, I read all of the data material. Second, I coded the data by finding answers that talked about and/or mentioned the same topics and put those answers into the same code. All codes were recognized no matter if they were relevant for the study or not. Third, I compared the codes to the thesis statement and with each other. Some codes were categorized in the same category, because they were similar. The categories that were most relevant and interesting for this study were spontaneous speech, prepared speech and speaking

anxiety. Finally, the codes were discussed through the lens of theory. Data extracts that will be presented in the findings were translated by me.

3.5 Research ethics and credibility

Studies shall be organized and conducted in a justifiable way, research ethics is a tool to help with this process (Norwegian National Research Ethical Committee, 2021). The participants were informed both in written and oral form about the current study, how the data would be stored and what the data would be used for. They consented to participation by saying that they agreed with the terms, and that they would still like to participate. The interviews were not recorded, and their identities were kept private through pseudonyms (Norwegian National Research Ethical Committee, 2021). These measures were made to protect the participants' privacy.

It is important to evaluate the validity of qualitative study (Johannessen, 2016, p. 223). Since there has only been conducted data material from three English teachers, one could argue that the results might not be representative for all English teachers in Norway. Hence the low representation, the validity is threatened as it might not be applicable in other settings (Johannessen, 2016, p. 233). In addition, there is little empirical and available study on this topic performed in Norway. Therefore, I am not able to compare the current study's methodology and validity to other studies. The low validity must be taken into consideration when evaluating the results from the interviews.

4.0 Results

After analyzing the data material, I found three categories which form my main findings. The categories will be presented separately. To keep it easier for the reader to understand who said what, I have given the participants the pseudonyms Anna, Marcus and Sara.

4.1 Prepared speech

Prepared speech is mentioned by all of the three teachers, as a method to ensure oral activity in the classroom. Each of the teachers list several prepared speech activities they like to use. Reading aloud, presentations and pronunciation drills are a few of the activities mentioned. Anna said she "does not like to use a lot of presentations in 8th grade, [however] a goal is for the students to be able to pass the possible oral exam in 10th grade". In addition, Anna likes to use prepared speech activities based on the students written material. "In example, the students will write a text about their house, then we will use this text to read

aloud to each other and pay attention to the syntax. The students should pay attention to the flow of the text". In other words, she used prepared speech to improve written material.

In contrast, Marcus used written text as a method to prepare for presentations. "The texts the students continue to work with, are usually manuscripts for presentations or podcasts. The texts can either be key words or whole sentences". This method is a way to facilitate for prepared speech. In his opinion, this type of activity prepared the students towards the oral exam.

Sara, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of following up homework. "I usually give my students a text they have to read at home. In addition, there are some questions to the text that they have to answer". At school she read the text aloud with the whole class, and she went through the questions. "It is important to go through the homework I assign them, if not they may stop doing them". Sara used prepared speech activities, among other things, to ensure that the students did their homework. In example, they read the text, and shared their answers to the group or the whole class.

4.2 Spontaneous speech

Spontaneous speech was important for all of the teachers. Marcus described the importance of English, since it is a lingua franca, as follow; "It is really important to practice speaking English in authentic contexts. […]. English is a language we need to know, both through future workplaces and as an international community". To help his students to be able to succeed in the previous categories he liked to start up a classroom conversation about a specific topic. "The topic could either be the news, something the students are interested in [for instance TikTok], or an interdisciplinary topic and something they work with in another subject". He also pinpoints the fact that it is important to follow up the students' contributions and suggestions, to create an authentic conversation. "If I manage to create an authentic conversation by following up a contribution, I lower the students' threshold to join in". Sara also liked classroom conversation. However, she also stated a challenge to this type of activity; "The challenge about talking freely about a topic, is if the students reach the professional aspects of the English subject's curriculum". Therefore, she preferred that the conversation topics dealt with topics in the curriculum.

In order to facilitate for oral activity in the classroom, Anna's goal was to have at least one speaking activity each lesson. "I often use call and response. I encourage the students to answer in English. However, many students answer in Norwegian". When asked to elaborate on this, Anna said: "For me, it is more important that the students are engaged in the

conversation and stay within topic, than that they speak in English". None of the other teachers mention the same inconvenience in their classrooms.

They all mentioned games as a great way of making sure that the students created spontaneous speech. However, two out of the three teachers say they "do not use games often enough in the classroom". When asked to elaborate and reflect on why they do not use games, Marcus said: "I feel like I do not have time to focus on games during a lesson, since we only have two 60 minutes lessons each week". Sara's main argue is not based on being short on time, furthermore she said; "it can be challenging to find games that fit the whole class out of consideration for the students' English level".

4.3 Speaking anxiety

Throughout the interviews, the teachers emphasized that several of their students were feeling speaking anxiety, and that there was a huge barrier for them to speak English aloud. Marcus said: "feeling of assurance in the classroom is really important". When asked to elaborate on the statement, he said: "the curriculum does not say that the students have to have presentations and/or speak in front of the whole class. […] However, my goal is that the students have presentations in front of parts of and/or the whole class in 10th grade". Both Sara and Anna say they have the same goal for their students. To create a feeling of assurance in the classroom, Anna said she preferred having oral activities and games that created "a lot" of chaos and noise in the classroom "because then the students who are scared, can hide themselves in the chaos".

However, some students are on the other end of the scale, because they love being orally active in the classroom. Sara said: "Orally active students have a greater learning outcome than non-active students". In contrast, she also said: "a drawback of these active students is that non-active students can feel demotivated, because the oral level seems unreachable". As a method to create more oral activity in the classroom, Anna uses the IGP method, which means, first the students think individually about the topic or questions. Then, they talk to each other in groups about their thoughts. Last, they discuss it in plenary. She describes "by using this method, more and more students are willing to speak. […] there is not only a group of students who take the floor".

5.0 Discussion

The data above reveals some interesting perspectives on how speaking skills are worked with and used in class. In this chapter I want to use theory to discuss the findings

presented. The three teachers' thoughts and utterances will be discussed through the lens of relevant theory. Hopefully, their statements will contribute to explain how teachers can work with the development of the students' speaking skills. In the end, hopefully, this will provide answers to my thesis statement, *how do lower secondary teachers facilitate development of speaking skills in the EFL classroom?*

As all of the three teachers mentioned, the English subject curriculum does not require students to have presentations in front of their class. Therefore, the teachers do not strive after doing so. However, it is important to emphasize that the oral exam includes one presentation part and one question part (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2019a). Which means that it would be beneficial for the students to practice presenting, in case they have to take that exam. Furthermore, the English subject curriculum states that presentations can be a helpful way for the students to practice their speaking skills, but this can be done as recorded speech through digital tools (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2021). During a presentation the students get to practice prepared speech, as they have to present, give reasons and explain in a presentation. However, one can argue that students who neither speak in front of their class, nor present anything to their teachers, miss out on valuable practice for their oral exam, since speaking is a central part of the learning process (Tishakov, 2020, p. 110). Therefore, the teachers' goals for the students' speaking skills comply with the English subject curriculum, as the goal is that the students will be able to pass a potential English oral exam. Presentations can be one way to practice towards the oral exam, also presentations can help with the development of the students' speaking skills.

Another method to facilitate for the development of students' speaking skills are one of Anna's methods. As well as focusing on speaking skills, her method also focuses on written texts. She preferred reading texts aloud. Reading texts aloud can be beneficial when focusing on speaking skills, since the students get to practice pronouncing specific words, and enrich their vocabulary on specific topics (Tishakov, 2020, p. 116). While reading their texts aloud they could listen to the syntax, and pay attention to the flow, Anna suggested. Through this activity the students experience language input, and they can speak about their understanding of the language structure and form. This can help them to improve their written texts. Moreover, to notice errors and discuss them, can help the students to strengthen their understanding of language forms and their speaking skills (Tishakov, 2020, p. 110). Noticing errors are the same as identifying gaps, which can lead to language learning (Swain, 1995, referred in Tishakov, 2020, p. 111). Furthermore, it can be helpful for the students to read text to practice prepared speech. However, when the students read texts aloud, they are

reproducing what already have been produced in a written form. Therefore, it does not help the students to develop reflection and understanding as a conversation does (Burner et al., 2019, p. 27). Simply because when reading aloud they do not have to focus on what to say or why, rather they have to focus on how to say it. However, this method limits the students' area of focus, which can be a necessary first step towards producing language by themselves (Skulstad, 2020, p. 99).

The classroom conversation can create an arena where the students have to produce language by themselves. All of the teachers emphasized the use of classroom conversation as a beneficial way to speak about different topics, and how it could both facilitate prepared speech and spontaneous speech. The focus on specific topics in the classroom can lead to fruitful and authentic classroom conversations (Burner et al., 2019, p. 27). The students get the opportunity to practice topic specific vocabulary and to practice their speaking skills. To create an authentic conversation, Marcus enjoyed using topics that interested the students. Burner et al. (2019, p. 27) argue that dealing with topics that the students find interesting, will create a need and wish to express themselves. In addition, the classroom conversation creates an arena where the students can practice to converse, to describe, to discuss and to express themselves, which is a part of the core element in the English subject curriculum (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2021). They join the conversation with thoughts and utterances produced spontaneously. If the topic they discuss is about a text they read as homework etc., the speech they produce may be in a fine line in between spontaneous and prepared speech, depending on if the teacher asks open or closed questions. On one hand, closed questions about homework may, as Sara states, ensure that the students do their homework. In addition, closed questions about the homework may create an opportunity for insecure students to answer, because they minimize the chance of follow-up questions. In this way, insecure students can benefit from prepared speech activities, because they minimize their chances of failure, which can affect their self-concepts (Horwitz, 2001, p. 121). In addition, giving the students an opportunity to prepare themselves for the conversation may be a necessary first step towards speaking more freely (Skulstad, 2020, p. 99). On the other hand, open questions can be a rewarding arena to practice spontaneous speech. Either how, the class will benefit from an encouraging environment, since speaking in English can be a frightening task (Tishakov, 2020, p 109). Therefore, focusing the classroom conversation around topics that the students find engaging can be beneficial, since the teacher gets the opportunity to ask both open and closed questions.

On the contrary, there is a potential drawback with only using topics the students engage themselves with. Sara questioned the lack of conversations about the professional aspects of the English subject's curriculum. One can argue that it can be hard to find topics that interest the students within the topics of the competence aims. However, if the students are exposed to many different topics, they may find at least one topic interesting. The teacher also has to be aware that not everyone will find the same topic interesting. Therefore, the teacher should provide the students with a variety of topics (Burner et al., 2019, p. 28). Some topics focusing especially on the curriculum aims, while other topics have the main priority to engage the students. One can argue, from the points made above, that curriculum relevant topics that engage the students would be the best of both worlds.

Sara mentioned a drawback on the fact that the interaction took place in plenary. She claimed a challenge was how orally active students could have a negative effect on the orally passive students. First, because the passive students may have speaking anxiety, and do not dare to answer in front of the class, because they see it as a high-risk situation (Horwitz, 2010). Second, because the passive students may never dare to raise their hands if they do not get enough time. Therefore, it may be beneficial if the teacher sometimes pauses for ten seconds after raising a question, and see if more students may raise their hands after those ten seconds (Burner et al., 2019, p. 27). In this way, the teacher gives the students time to think. Anna used the IGP method as a way of giving her students time to both think, and not to worry about saying their answers aloud to the entire class. This can be a nice method to avoid both of the problems addressed above.

Anna's IGP method include discussing together with a partner or in a group. This method may ensure that all of the students speak. As Vygotsky claims, expressing oneself in collaboration holds a central place in learning (Tishakov, 2020, p. 110). The dialogue between the two participants gives them an arena to express their understanding of the question the teacher raised. When expressing thoughts to others, the student allows ideas to come to fruition (Tishakov, 2020, p. 110). In other words, participation in a dialogue creates an opportunity to develop own ideas. Also, when they take in what their partner says and utters, their own ideas may develop and grow even further. In addition, the conversation between the students can lead to a fruitful opportunity to develop their speaking skills, especially if they ask each other follow-up questions and to elaborate (Burner et al., 2019, p. 29). Moreover, asking follow-up questions can be a way to give the each other feedback, which influences the learning process (Swain, 2013). Furthermore, strengthened relationships may be another benefit from group discussion. The students get the chance to interact with others they may

not usually spend time with during recess. This can have a positive effect on the classroom environment, as more students get to know each other.

Marcus' statement about feeling assurance in the classroom goes hand in hand with the importance of a good classroom environment. A requirement for fruitful classroom conversations in the English subject, may often be a good classroom environment, where the students build confidence in trying out language and help them to find ways to overcome difficulties. The teacher should, in each lesson, provide the students with low-risk situations where they can practice their speaking skills (Tishakov, 2020, p. 110). A low-risk situation may also lower the students' speaking anxiety, as it is less similar to a stage freight situation (Horwitz, 2010). An example of a low-risk situation is, as mentioned above, closed question about the students' homework. The students can simply read aloud what they have written as answers. In Sara's example she had provided the students with pre-speaking preparation. Hopefully going through it, question by question, will ensure the students that they have the correct answer and motivate them to participate orally. Obviously, it is important that the class see incorrect answers as an opportunity to learn. If the teacher is able to establish an environment, where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities, she/he protects the students' self-esteems and self-concepts, and decrease the risk of lowering those. Speaking anxiety and low self-concepts cohere (Horwitz, 2001, p. 121), and limiting the anxiety will hopefully higher the self-concept. Still, on a regular basis, only a few students in an EFL class tend to answer questions (Burner et al., 2019, p. 27). Therefore, a good classroom environment may increase participation orally and decrease speaking anxiety, but cannot ensure that every student will speak in front of the class every lesson.

Another method to strengthen both the classroom environment and speaking skills, can be through games. All of the teachers mentioned that spontaneous speech can be practiced through games in the classroom. The three teachers all suggested games as a method to help their students practice their speaking skills. When the students engage themselves in games, they may focus on the practical goal of the game, rather than the learning objective of it. Therefore, the game can turn into a low-risk activity (Tishakov, 2020, p. 110), where games create an arena where the students are not as insecure, rather they are focused and engaged. The use of games may also create an opportunity for the students to practice choosing an appropriate communication strategy, which is a skill included in the curriculum (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2019b). Depending on the rules of the game, the students should choose certain strategies. For instance; if the goal of the game is to draw what the teammate is describing, then pronunciation mistakes may not be a breakdown. However,

messing up the different prepositions may have consequences. Hopefully, the more the students are exposed to different situations where they have to choose a communication strategy, the greater are the chances that they become better at it. Based on personal experience, I agree that students often think that games are a fun way to work with language, and it may also have a positive effect at the classroom environment.

6.0 Conclusion

To examine the thesis statement; "*How do lower secondary teachers facilitate development of speaking skills in the EFL classroom?*", I have interviewed three English teachers. I have discussed the data material through the lens of relevant theory. In this last section I will comment on the conclusion of the current study, as well as limitations and further research.

The current study has presented a number of different methods three teachers use when they facilitate for the development of speaking skills. The teachers used both activities that created an arena where the students got to practiced prepared speech and spontaneous speech. There was a more complexed dividing line between these two than I first thought starting the study. Prepared speech activities the teachers used were presentations, in front of the class and/or recorded. Repeating homework and asking questions to the tasks were also a method used and mentioned by some of the teachers. This activity opened up for both prepared and spontaneous speech, based on the questions raised by the teacher. Reading aloud was also a method conducted by the teachers. Reading can be a way to practice pronunciation and learning new vocabulary. However, it does not help the students to develop the ability to use language locally and globally, as it is simply just reproducing what is already produced. Still, it can be a necessary first step to help the students to produce language by themselves. As reproducing gives one less element of output production the students have to think about.

To focus on a specific topic, was mentioned by all of the teachers as a way to keep a conversation engaging and lasting. However, if the conversation was conducted in plenary, a critical aspect could be the classroom environment. Good relationships may encourage all students to participate. Providing the students with low risk speaking activities such as group discussions were also important. Absorbing games were concluded as an effective way for the students to practice spontaneous speech. The classroom environment can be a major factor to the extent of speaking anxiety between the students. Speaking can be a frightening task for many; therefore it is even more important that the teacher provide the students with low risk activities.

Undoubtedly, a goal for the teachers, through the lens of the curriculum, were to make sure that their students would have the ability to pass a possible oral exam in 10th grade. They facilitated for development of speaking skills through both prepared speech and spontaneous speech activities. Prepared speech would help the students to present at their oral exam, while spontaneous speech would help the students to answer questions from the examiner.

The current study was not conducted without limitations. Interviewing only three teachers, will unlikely give results that can resemble the rest of the teachers in Norway. One way to increase the validity of the study, would have been to interview more teachers from different schools in Norway. Unfortunately, limitations on size and time considering the current study, made it difficult to conduct the current study without limitations. However, those limitations could be further examined in a master's thesis. The current study is only a drop in the ocean that shows that language learning acquisition can be difficult. Students prefer to learn through different methods. The teacher has to juggle with the students' preferences, the curriculum content and time limits. Further, it would be interesting to study the efficiency of speaking skills development through different methods, as well as the students' perspectives on those methods. In addition, further research could examine what would happen if teachers stopped using a variety of methods, and started using only a few. Maybe less variety of methods can influence the extent of students' speaking anxiety and the efficiency of language learning development.

7.0 Bibliography

Burner, T., Carlsen, C., & Kverndokken, K. (2019). *Communicative competence in the English classroom*. In T. Burner, C. Carlsen, & K. Kverndokken (Eds.), *101 Ways to Work with Communicative Skills* (1st ed., p. 15-35). Fagbokforlaget.

Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Strasbourg: Modern Languages Division.

Galloway, N., & Rose, H. (2015). Introducing Global Englishes. Taylor & Francis Group.

Hortwitz, E. (2010) Foreign and second language anxiety. *Language Teaching*, *43*(2), 154-167.

Horwitz, E. (2001) Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 21*, 112-126.

Johannessen, A., Tufte, P. A., & Christoffersen, L. (2016). *Introduksjon til Samfunnsvitenskapelig metode* (5th ed.). Abstrakt.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative Research*: *A Guide to Design and Implementation*. John Wiley & Sons

Ministry of Church and Education. (1974). *Mønsterplan for grunnskolen*. Ascheoug.

Namaziandost, E., & Nasri, M. (2019). The Impact of Social Media on EFL Learners' Speaking Skill: A Survey Study Involving EFL Teachers and Students. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, *6* (3), 199-215.

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2021). *Kunnskapsgrunnlag i engelsk*. https://www.udir.no/kvalitet-og-kompetanse/laremidler/kvalitetskriterier-for-laremidler/kunnskapsgrunnlag-kvalitetskriterium-engelsk/laremiddel-i-engelskfaget/kjerneelementa-i-engelskfaget/#

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. (2017). *Core curriculum – values and principles for primary and secondary education*. https://www.udir.no/lk20/overordnet-del?kode=eng01-04&lang=nob

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. (2019a). *Curriculum in English*. https://udir.no/lk20/eng01-04

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. (2019b). *Rammeverk for språk*. https://www.udir.no/laring-og-trivsel/rammeverk/rammeverk-for-sprak/

Norwegian National Research Ethical Committee. (2021, 16th December). *Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law, Humanities and Theology*. National Committees for Research Ethics in Norway.

Skulstad, A. S. (2020). *Developing Oral Skills*. In A.-B. Fennern & A. S. Skulstad (Eds.),
Teaching English in the 21st Century: Central Issues in English Didactics (2nd ed., p.
95-116). Fagbokforlaget.

Swain, M. (2013). The inseparability of cognition and emotion in second language learning.
Language Teaching, *46*(2), 195-207.

Tishakov, T. (2020). Teaching oral skills: speaking and listening. In C. Carlsen, M. Dypedahl
& S. H. Iversen (Eds.), *Teaching and Learning English* (2nd ed., p. 100-121). Oslo:
Cappelen Damm AS.

Appendix 1

Interview guide

1. Which grade do you teach English?
2. On a scale from 1 to 5, (where 1 is not important and 5 is very important), how important would you say speaking activities are in the EFL classroom?
3. Do you use speaking activities in your classroom?
    a. How?
    b. How much time do you use on speaking activities a week, compared to other activities?
4. How do you usually facilitate your lessons to improve oral skills?
    a. What are your experiences with the activities you choose?
5. Do speaking activities activity in your lessons usually facilitate prepared or spontaneous speech?
    a. Why?
    b. How?
6. Can you give me some examples of speaking activities you use, that facilitate prepared speech?
7. Can you give me some examples of speaking activities you use, that facilitate spontaneous speech?