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Building bridges between informal and formal English learning

Å bygge broer mellom uformell og formell engelsklæring

Academic thesis

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## Abstract

Students' consumption and production of significant amounts of English language through the engagement with digital activities and interests that are situated outside of school is a concept that has garnered significant scientific attention over the last 15 years. In a Norwegian context, the introduction of the new curriculum, LK20, has given teachers a larger responsibility to ensure that students' oral skills are developed through informal communication settings, which is closely related to students' engagement with digital activities. With this as a backdrop, the purpose of this study is to investigate how Norwegian teachers work with making English instruction at school, more relatable to how students engage with out-of-school interests in English. Therefore, the research questions of this thesis are: *What are EFL teachers' beliefs and experiences about using bridging activities to develop oral skills? How can bridging activities be motivating for students?*

The data was collected through semi-structured, qualitative interviews with two English teachers who teach 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students, respectively. The theoretical framework related to the theme of this study is presented, and provides relevant theory on terminology, how oral skills are defined and developed, how teachers can bridge the gap between informal and formal learning of English, authenticity in English teaching, and how authenticity can facilitate motivation in students.

The results and findings display the participants' thorough awareness of their students' engagement with digital English interests outside of school, and that several of the teaching materials and activities that they use in English instruction has the potential to bridge the gap between informal and formal learning of English, while also being suitable for the development of different oral skills. Nevertheless, the reflections of the participants indicate the necessity for more specified and direct knowledge of how to purposefully integrate student IDLE interests in English into the English classroom.

Keywords: Oral skills, informal learning, authentic learning, teacher experiences, out-of-school use of English

## **Sammendrag**

Elevers inntak og bruk av betydelige mengder Engelskspråk gjennom digitale aktiviteter og interesser som foregår utenfor skolen er et konsept som har fått stor oppmerksomhet innen forskning i de siste 15 årene. I en Norsk kontekst har introduksjonen av det nye læreplanverket, LK20, gitt lærere mer ansvar for å sikre at elevers muntlige ferdigheter blir utviklet gjennom uformelle kommunikasjonssituasjoner, som knyttes tett opp mot elevers engasjement med digitale aktiviteter. Med dette som bakgrunn er målet med denne oppgaven å undersøke hvordan norske lærere jobber med å gjøre engelsklæring på skolen mer relaterbart for elevers bruk av Engelsk som foregår utenfor skolen. Dermed blir problemstillingene: Hva er engelsklæreres meninger og erfaringer med «aktiviteter som bygger broer» for å utvikle muntlige ferdigheter? Hvordan kan disse aktivitetene være motiverende for elever?

Datainnsamlingen ble gjennomført ved bruk av semi-strukturerte, kvalitative intervjuer med to engelsklærere som underviser 6. og 8. klasseelever. Det teoretiske rammeverket til oppgaven blir presentert og gir relevant teori om terminologi, muntlige ferdigheters definisjon og utvikling, hvordan lærere bygger broer mellom uformell og formell engelsklæring, autentisitet i engelsklæring og hvordan autentisitet kan legge til rette for motivasjon hos elever.

Resultatene og funnene viste at deltakerene hadde gjennomgående bevissthet om elevene sitt engasjement med digitale engelskinteresser utenfor skolen, og at de bruker flere læringsmaterialer og aktiviteter som har potensialet til å bygge bro mellom uformell og formell engelsklæring, som samtidig er passende for å utvikle ulike muntlige ferdigheter. Likevel viser refleksjonene til deltakerene at det kan være nødvendighet for mer spesifisert og direkte kunnskap om hvordan man integrerer elevers digitale engelskinteresser i klasserommet på en hensiktsmessig måte.

Nøkkelord: Muntlige ferdigheter, uformell læring, autentisk læring, lærererfaringer, engelskbruk utenfor skolen

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last 20 years, the leisure activities that young students spend time on at home have been subjected to fundamental change with the emergence and increasing availability of the internet, personal computers, smartphones, streaming services, social media, and gaming. The English language has arguably been further developed as a global language as a consequence of the internet and has become a common means of communication for a great number of countries in which English exists as both native and foreign language. In European terms, one of the most significant effects of the English language is how the internet, pop culture, entertainment and different media are almost exclusively mediated through the use of English (Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, & Pitzl, 2006, p. 5), which has also proven to be tremendously impactful for young students' engagement with English. This effect is undoubtedly present in the current media usage of youth in Norway. According to The Norwegian Media Authority (2022a, 2022b), 90% of Norwegian youth between ages 9 and 18 are present on social media platforms and 76% of the same age group report playing video games. Interestingly, because of the significant presence of English in video games, 3 out of 4 youths who play video games also report that playing video games increased their English language proficiency (The Norwegian Media Authority, 2022b). The question then concerns Norwegian teachers and what they do to take advantage of this unmistakable resource for English learning? The answer, according to Sundqvist and Olin-Scheller (2013, p. 329) seems to be that teachers, at least in a Swedish setting, have difficulties with utilizing their students' use of English outside of school, and as a result, students experience demotivation by the lack of correspondence between their engagement with English through their leisure activities and how they engage with English at school. With focus on the development of oral skills in English, the national curriculum in English states that oral skills should be developed, in part, by communication in informal situations (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020). How does a teacher then facilitate an informal communicative situation when most of the English language learning that takes place within the classroom is considered to be formal? According to Henry (2013), this can create a language learning environment, in which students fail to recognize the value of English learning at school, because of the lack of authenticity compared to informal communicative situations that they experience themselves through their extensive engagement with at-home use of the English language.

What appears interesting about these ideas to me, is in the intersection between the concept of making English learning at school more related to how students learn English at home, and how teachers can work to improve oral skills and motivation in English. Thus, my research question is:

*What are EFL teachers' beliefs and experiences about using bridging activities to develop oral skills? How can bridging activities be motivating for students?*

## **1.1 Background and explanation of terms**

Some of the reoccurring terms that will be used throughout this thesis need to be explained before further reflections about them are made. First and foremost, the term “bridging activities” is present in the research conducted by Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) in which they present a “bridging activities model” centered around bringing different texts that are present online into the classroom. Though this term is identical to the one I use in the research question, I have decided to define “bridging activities” differently, as the methods or activities an English teacher uses that have the potential to bridge the gap between English learning that takes place inside and outside the school. English learning outside the school, in this study, will be using the term “informal learning” and will cover different activities and interests in English that students engage with in their free time.

To provide further educational context, Thorne and Reinhardt (2008, p. 562) claim that foreign language teaching and its normative teaching methods are not entrenched in how students and young people actually use language in today's society. Therefore, this study might provide additional information on whether this idea is still present in a Norwegian teacher context. If it is, a possible explanation might be the implementation of the current curriculum in Norway, which only happened relatively recently. Reflections about what the possible implications of the current and former curriculum might be for this thesis will be presented in the following section.

## **1.2 Curriculum**

The main focus of this thesis in relation to the national curriculum will be connected to the oral skills section of the English curriculum. With the implementation of the relatively new curriculum, LK20, there are some changes between the former and current curriculum that could be relevant to this thesis. In the former curriculum, LK06, the oral skills section of the English



curriculum had less focus on the communicative part of developing oral skills, and further stated that the development of oral skills required students to “...use spoken language gradually more accurately and with more nuance in conversations...” (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006). This is where one of the most significant differences between the current and former curriculums are present, mainly considering that the LK06 does not mention what type of conversations that a student should become proficient in. In contrast, the LK20 clearly states that the development of oral skills requires a student to “...communicate on different topics in formal and informal situations...” (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020). By looking at the statistical facts of young peoples’ engagement with out-of-school activities and those activities’ interconnected relationship with the English language, one can expect that a significant portion of Norwegian students’ English engagement is of the informal kind. This thesis will also consider several other parts of the oral skills section of the LK20, such as how teachers’ learning methods might have impacted listening and talking, and students’ engagement in conversation.

### **1.3 Aims of the study**

Previous research on the use of students’ English interests has demonstrated that some teachers have experienced difficulties with implementing students’ informal English interests in their classrooms (Sundqvist & Olin-Scheller, 2013). With this as a backdrop, one of the aims of this thesis is to gain further understanding of how teachers have been successful in the work to implement student interests in English teaching. Moreover, one of the aims is also to ask the participants what the challenges are with implementing student interests in English, if it becomes evident that their implementation of student interests in English is to a lesser degree.

### **1.4 Limitations of the study**

There are possible limitations of the research that has been conducted in this study. The methodological limitations of the study can be related to the data collection method. Because I conducted qualitative interviews that required the participants to provide self-reported data, it can make it difficult to verify their answers. A possible solution would have been to conduct additional data collection methods, such as an observation of the participants’ practice to confirm what they reportedly said they did.

## **1.5 Structure of thesis**

The thesis consists of a total of six chapters. After the initial introductory chapter, the theoretical background will be presented, which includes terminology relevant to this area of research. In the third chapter, an explanation and justification of the choices regarding the research method that was used to collect data will be declared. Then, in the fourth chapter, the results and findings will be reported, and the fifth chapter will provide a discussion of the results. Finally, the sixth chapter will provide conclusive thoughts and reflections about the thesis, the research questions will be answered and suggestions for further research.

## **2. Theoretical background**

This chapter will provide an overview of the terminology that is relevant for the concept of students using English outside of school. Additionally, it will present research regarding oral skill development through the use of out-of-school English. An explanation will also be provided regarding the difference between informal and formal learning of English. Finally, authentic language learning will be presented and how it relates to out-of-school English, and how a lack of authenticity can affect a students' motivation to learn English.

### **2.1 Extramural English, OILE and IDLE**

The different terminology that exists in the realm of students using English outside of school has many different origins and descriptions and can be difficult to navigate with its many abbreviations and seemingly similar meanings. I will explain the meaning behind each of these and clarify their relevance to this research project.

Extramural English, henceforth referred to as “EE”, is a term coined by Swedish researcher, Pia Sundqvist. She introduced the term and wrote a comprehensive study on how Swedish 9<sup>th</sup> graders used English outside the walls of the classroom, and the subsequent effects on their oral proficiency and vocabulary (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 1). EE is defined as both input and output of English and thus covers a vast array of activities that a person can partake in. This definition does not require that a person has a specific intent to learn English, and it also does not require them to engage with English through totally random or unintended encounters. Sundqvist (2009, p. 25) reiterates that the important part of EE is that the engagement with English is situated outside of the English classroom, and that an EE activity can be as diverse as listening to a song that happens to be in English or reading a fantasy novel in English. Additionally, engagement with EE is often characterized by the language learners' personal motivation to do so, which can be due to many different factors, such as a personal wish to improve their English language proficiency or for entertainment purposes (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 26).

Online informal learning of English, hereby referred to as “OILE” is a term with roots in France, from researcher Geoffrey Sockett (2013). His studies have, among other subjects, investigated the online habits of French university students and how their consumption and engagement with

various media affected their language learning and development (Sockett, 2013, p. 49). The term OILE is considered to be under the umbrella of terms such as EE or out-of-class language learning, which cover many different types of English engagement outside of school. Toffoli and Sockett (2015) refers to of out-of-class language learning as a “deliberate attempt to improve one’s English”, which is comparable to the EE term. The main difference, in this instance, is that language learning in OILE is often incidental, and that students who partake in online activities do so because of entertainment or recreational purposes and not to deliberately learn language (Toffoli & Sockett, 2015, p. 8), which can be the case with the broader term of EE. One of the aims of OILE is also to better understand the intricacies of language learning that is situated away from formal classroom instruction, and how the online materials that can be used for language learning might change how language is learned as a consequence of how accessible such materials are (Toffoli & Sockett, 2015, p. 7).

Toffoli and Sockett (2015, p. 11) have also researched university teachers’ perceptions and opinions about their students’ engagement with OILE and found a general lack of awareness of how many of their students engaged with OILE. Although several of the teachers in the study underestimate how much their students engage with OILE, there is a majority of them who see this engagement as positive towards the development of their students’ language skills (Toffoli & Sockett, 2015, p. 13). Among the more relevant findings of the study Toffoli and Sockett (2015) conducted is how OILE influenced the teaching practice of the teachers. Half of these teachers report that their teaching practices were influenced by students’ engagement with OILE and exemplify this by their use of students’ favorite television series in their classes. They also found that some teachers wanted to change their teaching practice to raise motivation and provide relevant teaching materials, and some did not report any modifications to their teaching practice because they did not perceive OILE as relevant or that they were concerned about being the only teacher at their workplace to employ such unorthodox learning methods (Toffoli & Sockett, 2015, p. 14). Lastly, the study suggests that there is a discrepancy between the usefulness of OILE and how it can be used in formal education. It is argued that activities in OILE are positive for language learning and provide authentic, real-world knowledge of English. However, there can be challenges with adapting these activities so that they are both appropriate for classroom teaching and suitable for how English is learned through the standardized curriculum, which is often different from how English is learned outside of school (Toffoli & Sockett, 2015, p. 17).

Informal digital learning of English, hereafter referred to as “IDLE”, is a term that has been mainly situated in an Asian context and thoroughly researched by Dressman and Lee (2021), Lee (2020), and Lee and Sylvén (2020). IDLE as a phenomenon has emerged from the concept of computer assisted language learning, and then divided into IDLE in extracurricular and IDLE in extramural contexts. IDLE in an extramural context is defined as a second language learner and their digital engagement with English and its autonomous nature, where the learner engagement with English is not connected to formal language learning, such as how one engages with English at school (Lee, 2020, p. 49). Lee (2020, p. 49) states that IDLE in an extracurricular context has more to do with how a teacher can structure homework as an English activity outside of school and is therefore not as relevant to what has been researched in my thesis.

Dressman and Lee (2021, p. 182) have also investigated the effects and implications of IDLE for South-Korean and Moroccan university students and found positive effects in terms of language learning for students of both countries. However, they stated that the primary goal of the paper was not to provide further evidence for the efficacy of IDLE, as previous researchers already had extensively documented, but rather to suggest solutions for improvement of formal classroom practice through the implementation of IDLE activities (Dressman & Lee, 2021, pp. 181-182). Further, they discuss the challenges of implementing IDLE in a classroom, where they refer to the inefficient nature of which English is learned through IDLE. An activity in such cases can be surfing the web, watching a movie, or playing video games which is something many young students often spend several hours engaging with. In contrast to how much time is afforded to an English teacher, in many cases not more than an hour at a time, there could be challenges with creating sufficient space in a lesson to be able to include something related to IDLE (Dressman & Lee, 2021, p. 183). They also raise the question about whether the content of the activities that students engage with outside of school is appropriate for a classroom context. This is exemplified with videos from social media which can include profanity and non-suitable topics which can be in conflict with behavioral rules of a school. Because content such as this can be what young students view as attractive or appealing, a challenge could emerge where “watering-down” such content by removing any profanity or controversial topics would also remove what was initially appealing about the IDLE activity or content (Dressman & Lee, 2021, pp. 183-184).

Before the theoretical background continues further, I want to clarify which of these terms will be used throughout the thesis. IDLE is the term that will be used most because I see it as the term

that is most relevant. This is in consideration of the fact that informal learning of English can happen in many digital environments which do not require a learner to be online, like OILE suggest. An example of this could be an offline, single player video game.

### **2.1.1 Socio-cultural differences**

This literature review covers studies and research from many parts of the world, and though it is valuable to review research perspectives from different socio-cultural context, such as Asian, European, and Scandinavian, there still exist some differences in the way many students who have been researched throughout the papers in this literature review, more notably how they learn language. In an attempt to provide a comparison between the culturally dependent research of South-Korea and Sweden, Lee and Sylvén (2020) have co-operated to compare how IDLE can affect South-Korean and Swedish secondary school students' willingness to communicate in English. In their study, they aimed to create a clearer comparison by homogenizing sampling, definition of terms, measurement method, and which level of proficiency was measured (Lee & Sylvén, 2020, p. 1281). What they found was that willingness to communicate in English was predicted by different types of engagement with IDLE. South-Korean students were more likely to be willing to communicate if they had engagement with several different IDLE activities that made them utilize different English language skills, such as speaking, listening, or reading. In comparison, Swedish students' willingness to communicate was only predicted by the general frequency of which they engaged with IDLE, where increased levels of IDLE engagement resulted in increased willingness to communicate (Lee & Sylvén, 2020, p. 1289). This is an important point to consider, in terms of my research project and how it is situated in a context that is culturally similar to how Swedish students learn language, and also, whether Norwegian teachers experience a similar connection between their students' frequency of IDLE and their willingness to communicate.

## **2.2 Oral skills and its development**

This section will present research about the correlation that exists between students' amount of engagement with out-of-school English and their oral skills in English. This research is included to display what types of IDLE engagement, such as gaming, watching movies, or listening to music, is useful towards the development of different oral skills.

### **2.2.1 Defining oral skills**

Oral skills are one of four basic skills that are clearly defined in the Norwegian school curriculum, which is developed through all stages of primary, lower- and upper-secondary school. In the national curriculum, oral skills are defined as "... creating meaning through listening, talking and engaging in conversation" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020).

A more detailed classification of oral skills or as many researchers name it, oral proficiency, can be further labeled as a learners' capacity to communicate through meaning making by using both active listening and speaking (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 40). Oral proficiency is certainly a concept that covers more than just speaking and listening in a confined, homogeneous language space, unaffected by the many distractions, misunderstandings, and errors of actual language use, as Chomsky (1965) described it. In this instance, Whyte (2019, pp. 4-5) attributes sociolinguistic competences to communicative ability, exemplified by knowledge of different sociolinguistic rules, such as how a speaker might address another individual, or how a sentence can be produced and understood in different communicative situations.

### **2.2.2 Developing oral skills through out-of-school English**

The development of general language proficiency through the engagement with out-of-school English has been previously studied by several researchers. How oral proficiency increases with the use of out-of-school English is an area of research where Sundqvist (2009) studied Swedish 9<sup>th</sup> graders. Through several oral proficiency tests, she found that there was a significant correlation between how much a student engages with EE and their level of oral proficiency (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 141). The tests that were conducted divided the sampled participants into five groups in accordance with how much time they spent on EE, where group 1 had the lowest amount of time spent on EE and group 5 had the highest amount of time spent on EE. It showed that oral proficiency did not differ to a large extent for groups 2-5, however the oral proficiency was significantly lower for group 1, which had the lowest amount of engagement with EE (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 145).

Kuppens (2010) has also tested engagement with out-of-school English and oral proficiency, more specifically how Dutch 6<sup>th</sup> grade students perform in an oral translation task. The participating students who watched subtitled television series, listened to music, and played video

games in English were found to have better success with orally translating sentences from English to their mother tongue and vice versa (Kuppens, 2010, p. 74).

In the study of South-Korean and Swedish secondary students' engagement with IDLE, there were findings that suggested more engagement with IDLE activities were helpful towards the students' willingness to communicate in the English classroom (Lee & Sylvén, 2020, p. 1290). This can be related to one of the aims of the Norwegian curriculum, which defines the development of oral skills as students "engaging in conversation" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020).

What is further mentioned in the Norwegian national curriculum is that a student should be able to communicate by "...choosing suitable strategies" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020).

Development of this basic skill can be linked to Lee (2020, p. 48) and his study, where he presents an implication of the globalization of the English language, where EFL-learners most likely will find themselves in situations in which they will engage with English speakers from different countries and their related accents. In this research he studied South-Korean university students and how their perception of other varieties of English, as in other accents of English from other non-native speaker countries, changed through engagement with IDLE. Furthermore, he wanted to investigate whether the students' engagement with IDLE increased their cross-cultural communication strategies (Lee, 2020, p. 50). The findings showed that higher engagement with IDLE activities, such as watching movies in English or connecting with foreign interlocutors through social media or video games, made students employ cross-cultural communication strategies more often and that they perceived their ability to do so as better (Lee, 2020, p. 57).

### **2.3 Bridging the gap between formal and informal learning**

Students' use of out-of-school English is viewed by many researchers as a useful resource for language learning, and that interests such as watching TV-series or playing video games should be acknowledged by teachers. However, one can argue that teachers can find themselves in a disadvantageous position if their students are unable to perceive the significance of a particular subject (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 92). Therefore, teachers not only need to provide support for students' interests but also implement teaching practice that is suitable for students' cognitive level to ensure that students remain motivated and inspired to learn (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).



Digital interests in English in an out-of-school setting can also be related to computer assisted language learning, or by its abbreviation, CALL. Using computers to assist language learning is not a new concept, and its meaning has changed significantly over the past decades in terms of the internet being what connects language learners with English, and not the computer itself. However, it is important for teachers to realize that the internet can be a valuable resource to connect their students with other English speakers and to learn about their cultures (Chapelle, 2008, p. 586). This is also relevant for the basic skills section of the Norwegian curriculum, which also mentions that students should be able to communicate with "... a variety of receivers with varying linguistic backgrounds" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020). As a consequence of increasing digital resources available for teaching, there might be even more educational possibilities unique to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, because the newer generation of children in many ways are shaped by their digitally habituated upbringing, a precarious situation could present itself. Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) have highlighted the fact that the tremendous number of communicative L2 environments that teens engage with and because those environments are the primary source of communicative engagement for many students, one of the goals of formal second language education should be to familiarize students with different communicative environments that are present online (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008, p. 560). Nevertheless, an inherent issue with the digital landscape that children engage with today is that the different formats and platforms where language is mediated are constantly changing, which could prove challenging for teachers in the selection of teaching material and if what is taught is even relevant for students (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008, p. 562). Therefore, the bridging activity model introduced by Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) suggests that students should be participating more in the selection of the teaching material that is brought into the classroom to ensure relevancy for students, continuous engagement with the English language on the internet and learn how it can be a resource for metalinguistic awareness, and finally to make classroom learning more in line with their experiences outside of school (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008, p. 566). The presented model mainly suggests that students contribute by bringing in internet-mediated texts, such as news articles, blog, or social media posts that they have personal experience with. However, Thorne and Reinhardt (2008, p. 567) conclude their paper by suggesting that the bridging activities model only provide a brief example of what could be done to incorporate students' digital competence, and that more can be done to further integrate and take advantage of the

multitude of digital communication practices that many students engage with. Despite the fact that Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) present a model that is aimed at students with advanced foreign language proficiency, the concept of bridging activities can still be relevant for lower school grades as long as these activities are sufficiently scaffolded for younger students.

Dressman and Lee (2021) have also suggested some strategies related to IDLE that can be beneficial in order to integrate students' digital interests into the English classroom. As previously mentioned, they argue that there can be challenges with bringing IDLE activities into the classroom because of their explicit and often uncensored nature (Dressman & Lee, 2021, p. 183). Nonetheless, they suggest that such activities do not lose their appeal to younger students just because a classroom version might be less coarse than what they are accustomed to, and that such activities can be customized to fit classroom instruction without giving up what students perceive as interesting about the activity (Dressman & Lee, 2021, p. 184).

Their suggestions include vlogging and podcasting, where vlogging consists of a content creator recording their daily lives or podcast where an authentic conversation about a given topic is recorded with the use of audio or video. These are activities that many students are familiar with, which typically involve vloggers and content creators who come from various cultures and linguistically diverse backgrounds, who then share their experiences with living in other countries by posting videos to social media platforms, such as YouTube, or TikTok. Watching videos like these can be scaffolded for younger students through captions and subtitles that are occasionally available, as well as comment sections that allow students to engage with English speaking communities through written responses (Dressman & Lee, 2021, p. 184). The video hosting site YouTube is also a significant resource that can be used for both leisure and formal classroom learning. Not only does YouTube contain a vast library of videos in English that can be beneficial for language learning, but it also offers creative output by way of online video editing opportunities that can be used by teachers as well as students to make vlogs or other videos (Dressman & Lee, 2021, p. 185). Lastly, it is suggested that teachers engage in ethnographic research about their own students to discover the extent and nature of which they engage with IDLE activities. Based on their research it is likely that students have many different ways of engaging with IDLE activities and that the way they learn English outside of the classroom can be quite diverse. The aim of collecting information about students' online habits would then be to catalogue the digital resources that they use, assess how they are used, if students produce

personal strategies for learning, if these activities can assist formal classroom learning, and ultimately to better understand how the students learn English (Dressman & Lee, 2021, p. 186)

### **2.3.1 Authentic language learning**

Another important point of interest related to learning that is situated outside of school is authentic language learning, which can include authentic learning experiences, materials, or activities. To further examine the concept of authenticity in learning, a clear distinction must be made between what is considered “authentic” in a learning context and what is not. An example of an authentic language learning experience could be watching, listening, or engaging in a real-life conversation, where real language is used, either written or spoken, to communicate a message between interlocutors, for example, a tourist asking for directions and the subsequent explanation by the other person (Gilmore, 2011, p. 791). Other authentic English learning resources could be to watch films, or TV shows, listen to music, play video games and to browse internet websites (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2014, p. 4). What is not considered authentic in a language learning context could be to read or listen to a constructed dialogue from a textbook, or an audio file where students listen to a constructed conversation that is not generated in a real or spontaneous situation (Gilmore, 2011, p. 791). What was investigated in his study, Gilmore (2011) researched how the development of communicative competence was affected when Japanese learners of English were subjected to authentic teaching materials, compared to those who were subjected to more traditional teaching materials, such as textbooks. What he found was that authentic teaching materials were more effective to develop several communicative competences, through tests that looked at listening, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, oral interviews, and role-plays (Gilmore, 2011, p. 810).

According to Mantei and Kervin (2009), authentic learning experiences are facilitated through literacy practices and literacy events. Such literacy events can be participation in a specific community which requires the participant to engage in either reading, writing, speaking, or listening, depending on the type of community that one engages in (Mantei & Kervin, 2009, p. 4). To exemplify, it can be natural to assume that a student who watches a specific YouTube content creator will engage in a community by way of listening to the creator and by reading or writing comments to discuss the content that has been watched, as opposed to a student who engages in a videogame community where speaking and listening through social gameplay will be more

relevant for that type of literacy event. In their research about Australian teachers and how they bring authentic literacy experiences into the classroom, Mantei and Kervin (2009) interviewed four teachers about how they define and design authentic learning experiences, and how their knowledge might help other teachers implement authentic learning in their own teaching practice. What they found was four principles of implementing authentic learning experience, which focused on:

1. Teacher expertise and their strengths to create tasks and learning experiences that provide understanding of the communities that students participate in.
2. Teacher displaying awareness of the literacy practices and events that learners engage in and how they allocate time and effort to explore these communities.
3. Authentic learning must take the social aspect of literacy practices into consideration and how students use of language needs to be flexible in its application because language use is situationally dependent.
4. Teachers utilize the authentic learning resources they have at their disposal and show adaptability to ensure that the communities that their students engage with is what is being brought into the classroom.

## **2.4 Motivated English language learners**

As mentioned in the previous subsection, there are many ways in which a teacher can utilize students' out-of-school interests by providing authentic opportunities to learn language. However many possibilities might exist, there is still evidence that teachers find it challenging to utilize their students' out-of-school interests to promote an approach to English language learning that is consistent with how language is learned in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Olsson, 2011). Therefore, activities in a classroom should take advantage of interests that have personal meaning for students, which can provide a language learning experience that is connected to their identity (Henry, Korp, Sundqvist, & Thorsen, 2018, p. 247). A lack of this could result in a lack of authenticity in the language learning experience within a school. As Henry (2013) suggests, students perceive the English they are taught in school to lack relevancy in relation to how they engage with English at home, which typically involves digital leisure activities. When formal English instruction then heavily focuses on textbook teaching, or other traditional forms of English language learning are taught, such as grammar, vocabulary, reception, and production, students can experience a

significant gap between what they perceive to be authentic and meaningful engagement with English, not least when they are self-aware of the significant contribution that out-of-school English has to the development of their language skills (Henry, 2013, p. 139). In response to students experiencing this authenticity gap, Sundqvist and Olin-Scheller (2013, p. 334) conducted a survey among Swedish teachers who participated in a government issued program that was meant to increase teachers ability to:

1. Involve learners in their language learning process;
2. Bridge the gap between learning English outside of school and in school;
3. Increase their use of information and communications technology in language teaching;
4. Plan tasks that enhance their learners' motivation for learning language

Furthermore, they questioned whether the teachers had changed their teaching practice as a result of participating in this program. The survey showed that more teachers made the experiences of their students as the starting point when planning their English classes, and even more stated that the use of internet in the classroom became more frequent and was used to do more than just locate and extract information (Sundqvist & Olin-Scheller, 2013, p. 335). Moreover, the study demonstrated that the program increased teachers' ability to accommodate students, regardless of how much or how little they engaged with English outside of school. This was due to teachers being more comfortable and more knowledgeable with the internet and its many resources for language learning (Sundqvist & Olin-Scheller, 2013, pp. 335-336). Sundqvist and Olin-Scheller (2013) also suggested that employing strategies to bring the out-of-school English that students engage with into the classroom can have significant motivational benefits in order to validate students' sense of ideal self and make it more in line with their actual self. This notion is based on "The L2 Motivational Self System" laid out by Dörnyei (2011) which suggests that a student will maintain two views of themselves in relation to their academic aspirations. These consist of the 'ideal self' which contains their personal hopes, desires, and ambitions, and the 'ought self' which contains attributes or qualities that others think they should possess. Therefore, the ideal self represents what the student actually wants to achieve for themselves, while the ought self represents the vision of other individuals, like family, teachers, or friends and what they think the student should achieve. As a result, a student sense of ideal self can be a much more influential source of motivation, because their personal aspirations are internalized (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 82).

### **3. Method**

The purpose of this section is to present and explain my decisions related to the method of choice and why it is an appropriate method to utilize for my research. Furthermore, I will justify my selection and choice of available participants. Lastly, there will be an explanation of challenges regarding the choice of method and reflections considering the informants and data collection.

#### **3.1 Methodological approach**

The goal of the conducted interviews is to gain understanding of teachers' beliefs and experiences with students' extramural English interests and how activities used in the classroom can make English instruction closer to the students' authentic use of English outside of school. Therefore, it is useful to employ interviews in order to gather specific information about the teachers' classroom practice and how it relates to their opinions surrounding extramural English. I looked into previous research by Sundqvist (2009) regarding extramural English and its findings about increased language proficiency skills in accordance with significant engagement with extramural English, and therefore, dedicated some questions to gain awareness of how they worked with oral skill development and whether activities they employed could be beneficial to said development. Because I aim to receive multiple different views and opinions about the subject, an open methodological design was chosen.

#### **3.2 Methodological design**

To understand and receive the appropriate information about the research subject, I chose to design this research with a qualitative approach in mind. A qualitative approach to research is characterized by its intended purpose to gather experiences and opinions which are not usually measurable or quantifiable as opposed to the quantitative approach (Dalland, 2018, p. 52). This allows the participants of a study to openly express their own opinions and experiences, again compared to a quantitative study, in which a participant is asked close-ended questions that are not suited to gather data on a participants' personal views (Christoffersen & Johannesen, 2012, p. 17).

I am going to employ a qualitative interview method to examine my research question. A successful qualitative interview requires the establishment of a relaxed and open interview setting

where informants have the opportunity to share their personal views and opinions with ample breathing room and without unnecessary interruptions (Tjora, 2012, p. 110). Personal experiences and know-how are areas of potential research, which means that the researcher attempts to interpret the informants' worldview and be open and understanding to their perspectives and reflections. Reflections regarding these personal views are dependent on the participating informant and cannot be easily predicted beforehand (Tjora, 2012, p. 105). Therefore, the potential reflections that might be brought up by the informant could be of interest, even though the questions I ask might collect unexpected answers from the informant that were not intended to be gathered.

According to Tjora (2012, p. 104), the qualitative interview is one of the methods most frequently used for data collection in qualitative research and allows the informants to express themselves in an unconcealed manner. By utilizing an interview guide with a number of open-ended questions, the collected data is ensured to be diverse and varied. In the research that I conducted this includes, among several topics, the participants' attitude towards students' online based activities, how they use these interests in English teaching and how they work with oral skills in English teaching. Reflections such as these allow me to further examine the participants' world view and to uncover the implications and intricacies of their practice, which is one of the advantages of using the qualitative interview (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2016, p. 61). With the purpose of this research being to gain insight into what the informants believe about the topic of extramural English and how their English teaching practice is affected by student interests, the qualitative interview appears to be a fitting method.

### **3.3 Participants**

#### **3.3.1 Participant description**

The two teachers who decided to participate in this research project both work within the Norwegian school system and teach in accordance with the national curriculum LK20. The first participant currently works with 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, and the second participant currently works with 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Both of them teach English in their respective grades, and for the sake of making the participants as anonymous as possible, they will be referred to as "Participant 1" and "Participant 2". They will also be referred to using the third-person, gender neutral term "they" to

ensure that their gender is anonymized, as is recommended by the American Psychological Association (2019).

### **3.3.2 Selection of participants**

A researcher's choice of participants in a qualitative study is of great importance in terms of the quality of the collected data material (Christoffersen & Johannesen, 2012, p. 49). Therefore, the participants who are included in a study must be closely assessed to ensure that they can provide sufficient and relevant data for the research project. I have searched for participants for this study by using my own personal network of fellow students, teachers and others who are employed within the educational sector. After my application to conduct interviews was approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (Sikt), several invitations were sent to potential participants. The two participants I initially chose to include in this study agreed to participate shortly after the invitations were sent. However, after the first interview was conducted, the other participant decided to withdraw from the upcoming, second interview, which meant I had to restart my search to locate a new participant.

The recruitment for my research has followed a strategic selection, which means that the researcher is looking for specific participants who are certain to be able to provide relevant reflections around the subject at hand (Dalland, 2018, p. 74; Tjora, 2012, p. 145). The criteria that remained unchanged throughout the recruitment period were teachers who, first and foremost, had previous and current experience with teaching English and were open to sharing their experiences related to the questions from the interview guide. I also wanted teachers who were employed at different schools to ensure that they had not previously co-operated in terms of English teaching, and thus also ensuring that their experiences or teaching practice were somewhat diversified. Originally, I planned to only include English teachers working from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> grade, but I found difficulties with locating a new participant after one of the original participants withdrew, which is why I chose to widen my criteria slightly and include an English teacher who is currently teaching 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

This research project has a relatively small selection of participants, and it is therefore relevant to provide some reflection on how many participants a researcher should include when conducting qualitative research. Because most research and almost every interview is different, there is often



not a single answer to how many participants one should include in a qualitative research project. Managing to gather a sufficient number of participants can be challenging, time-consuming, and researchers can also be turned down by many potential participants. As a general rule, one is often considered finished with the interview process when fewer and fewer new perspectives are shared by the participants (Tjora, 2012, p. 158). An appropriate number of participants is contingent on what type of research is being conducted. Some claim that around 10 participants could be sufficient for a qualitative study (Christoffersen & Johannesen, 2012, p. 50), while others argue that a number between one and three could be just as useful to provide depth to a qualitative study (Dalland, 2018, p. 76). My study is of a smaller size and there are both weaknesses and advantages by conducting a smaller study. A smaller selection of participants may prove to be challenging if a researcher is attempting to provide any comparison between the participants, and conversely, a larger selection may generate a study that is too large and too time-consuming for the researcher to be able to produce any in-depth analysis of the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021, p. 148). An argument in favour of a smaller interview study is that it allows the researcher to be more thorough in their research and to further facilitate more comprehensive analysis of the results. Additionally, a student researcher might not have enough available time to complete a study with numerous interviews. Lastly, that a qualitative interview study still has the potential to add notable contributions to a field of research regarding society as a whole, because every individual experience can account for cultural and societal perception that might be relevant for academic research, without alleging that the findings are generalizable (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021, p. 149).

### **3.4 Interview process**

Qualitative interviews are considered to be a flexible method to apply to research in order to get informants to provide detailed descriptions of their experiences and views (Christoffersen & Johannesen, 2012, p. 78). This research project is based on two semi-structured interviews, both of which were conducted at the respective schools where each participant worked. This decision was made in agreement with the participants' own wishes and because of the importance of interviewing a participant in an environment where they feel comfortable and connected to the subject matter of the interview (Tjora, 2012, p. 120). There was, however, a risk that I failed to consider in the second interview conducted, where the participant proposed that the interview

take place in the teachers' lounge which was vacant at the early time of day. As Christoffersen and Johannesen (2012, p. 82) claim, an interview being conducted at the workplace of a participant can jeopardize the stability of an interview by the threat of interruption or disturbance by other co-workers, which is exactly what happened. The interruption was otherwise minor, and the interview continued without further distraction.

Each of the respective interviews lasted for 30 and 26 minutes, which was about the time that was estimated to complete all the questions of the interview guide. Some natural variations in the time spent on the interviews occurred in the number of digressions and length of each participants' reflections. The interview guide consisted of 15 questions, not counting the follow-up questions that were asked. In retrospect, I see that there was a lack of introductory questions in the interview guide, which could have made the participants lack the necessary relation and trustworthiness towards me as the interviewer (Christoffersen & Johannesen, 2012, p. 80). However, I do not think that this was the case for my interviews because both of the participants already knew me before-hand. I also made an effort to ensure that each interview would be completed in person with each participant. Although the use of Microsoft Teams or Zoom was tempting in order to minimize the total time spent on the interviews, I opted to meet with each participant in person to build further relation to them and to avoid missing out on potential body language or facial expressions, which is important to interpret and understand the meaning behind their reflections (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2016, p. 68). Both of the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, which could make for some challenges when analyzing the results because of translation and subsequent difference in how some results appear different when the language is translated. This was done because it was the wish of each participant, with one being more comfortable with speaking freely in Norwegian and the other being unsure if they would be familiar with some of the "scientific English terminology" that could be brought up related to the research subject.

In the preliminary stages of the interview planning, I considered how the questions would provide appropriate data to answer my research question, and I feel somewhat satisfied with the collected data while also acknowledging that the quality of the thesis as a whole could be improved had I managed to include a third participant and thus bring more depth to the thesis.

### **3.4.1 Transcription and data collection tool**

The tool a researcher uses to collect data has a lot to do with the method of choice. By using an audio recording of the interview, the researcher can be reassured that the nuances and details of the interview will be captured, while focusing more on follow-up questions and sound communication throughout the interview (Tjora, 2012, p. 137). The interviews were recorded using the mobile application “Nettskjema-Diktafon”, developed by University of Oslo, which is a software approved by OsloMet to use for collecting data. The data is then sent directly to Nettskjema, where it is stored, and password protected.

It is vital for a safe and open interview that a participant is comfortable with the setting of the interview. According to Tjora (2012, p. 138), the presence of a recording device can be a source of skepticism for a participant and potentially make them hesitant to fully share their thoughts and experiences. In such cases, it is essential to reassure the interviewees of their rights as participants, and that they have insight in results based on their answers and that personal information about them is stored in a secure manner.

To transcribe is to change a form to another, and in this context, it is about changing spoken language to written language (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021, p. 204). In the changing of this language, it is important to recognize what is lost in the process, such as non-verbal communication, humor, facial expressions or vocal range (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021, p. 205). In order to amend for these losses, I decided to include most of the spoken language recorded. What I did not include in the transcription are pauses, sighs or hesitations, because of the nature of this research and that it focuses on the meaning of the participants’ reflections and not on any grammatical or conversational analytics (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021, p. 209).

### **3.4.2 Data management**

Once the transcriptions of the interviews were completed, I was left with approximately 7000 words and 14 pages of unprocessed data material. The data was repeatedly read through, and the relevant and meaningful words, statements and sentences were marked in order to categorize them later on. Categorizing data material from interviews is one of the more common methods of data analysis that exists today (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021, p. 226). Some of the statements and sentences that were lengthy and unstructured when transcribed from speech to text were

condensed so they could be easier to read and also to simplify the categorization of each statement (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021, p. 228).

### **3.5 Methodological challenges and weaknesses**

In the interest of gathering thoughts and experiences from individuals, qualitative interviews have been a proven and effective method to do so (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2016, p. 65). Nonetheless, there is an inherent weakness by utilizing this method to collect data. A main point of concern for a researcher is the uncertainty of the information a teacher provides, and if it coincides with their real-world practice. What could have strengthened this research project could have been to combine different data collection methods, for example, observation and interviews, to get a clearer view of what teachers say they do and what they actually do. This could have proven valuable to gain further understanding of how their teaching practice functions (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2016, p. 82).

For a qualitative interview to work for its intended purpose, a researcher must select participants who will share thoughts and experiences in a reflective manner about the subject at hand (Tjora, 2012, p. 145). In the realm of research interviews, there are several different methods one can use to collect data from said participants, each with their respective advantages and disadvantages. I have conducted all of the interviews individually, in the hopes that each participant can express themselves without the concern of how their opinions about teaching might appear to other colleagues. What cannot be ignored when deciding what method to use, is the potential for other interview methods and how they might have provided valuable results for this research. For instance, interviews conducted with several participants in a group setting could have provided more data with greater efficiency, and additionally, also provided more unexpected answers and data through spontaneous interactions between participants who all work within the same field (Tjora, 2012, p. 123). This method was considered for the research project; however, the individual interview was chosen with concern about the intricacies of scheduling a group interview, which would have required all participants to find time and space that was available to them at the same time.

An important part of selecting the data collection method for any researcher is to make some considerations with respect to participants and how accessible they may or may not be, and any

potential criteria that have to be met in order for them to participate in the study. Gathering a sufficient number of participants can be a challenge for researchers, and with regards to their right to withdraw from a study at any time, a “plan B” is a measure that a researcher might be forced to utilize (Tjora, 2012, p. 156). My own search for participants has, in hindsight, been a difficult task that I might have underestimated in terms of how time-consuming it ultimately was. This troublesome effort then raises the question if an alternative method should have been chosen, in order to streamline the data collection. Nonetheless, I would argue that the method of choice is the most suited in the pursuit to collect the desired information regarding the overall theme and purpose of this research.

### **3.6 Reliability and validity**

In the field of scientific research, there are some requirements and rules a researcher must take into consideration when evaluating their own research. This is built on the notion that a scientific research method will provide trustworthy information, which is related to how reliable collected data material is (Dalland, 2018, p. 40). Reliability in relation to a qualitative interview questions the trustworthiness of the results of the study but also if they are consistent and if they could be reproduced with a different researcher asking the same questions, which could be apparent had a participant altered their answers in an interview with a different researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021, p. 276). An important aspect of reliability within qualitative research is to acknowledge that a researcher often possesses a certain degree of involvement or connection to the theme of the research, which often makes a researcher subjective in their studies (Tjora, 2012, p. 203). Tjora (2012) further claims that a researcher’s knowledge within a field of research, and thus lack of complete neutrality does not constitute the weakness of a study. On the contrary, a researcher’s knowledge can be a considerable resource, as long as their stance and how it might influence the research is thoroughly explained. There are several challenges with assessing the reliability and quality of a research project, and to define explicitly what constitutes a well-executed study can be difficult. Therefore, it is crucial for a researcher to be transparent and to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the method, and how the process of choosing a research method has been done in a forthright manner (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2016, p. 126). Over the course of this chapter, I have attempted to display such transparency by explaining my choice of method and participants,

how the research process has developed and by describing my challenges. This is something I consider upholding the reliability of this study.

The validity of a conducted research project encompasses several parts of said project. Validity can refer to whether the method of choice is suited to research what is intended to be researched, and in a broader term, if what is being researched is what is actually intended to be researched (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021, p. 276). In a more specific sense, a researcher could ask themselves if the questions they have posed to a participant have the potential to provide any relevant information to help them answer their research question. It is also important for a researcher to understand validity as a process that should be continuously assessed and revisited. One should strive to review this process throughout an interview development, from the earliest planning stages, to the interview itself and to a completed analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021, p. 278). In consideration with this process, I aimed to build an overarching understanding of extramural English and related studies and theories within the field, which was done to allow myself to provide relevant questions that would amass data that would help to answer the research question.

As previously mentioned, a combination of data collection methods, such as observation in conjunction with interviews, could have been a strengthening factor in this study. This could also have translated to a stronger reliability of the study, to ensure the answers that I have obtained coincide with teachers' real-world practice.

### **3.7 Research ethics**

The ethics of a research project is a multi-layered thought process that has to be kept in mind at all stages of a research project. This applies to the preliminary planning, choice of research question, choice of method, how results are used, and not least the safekeeping of personal information and responsibility to protect informants from the potential harm or burden of participating in the research project (Dalland, 2018, p. 236). Once the early planning of a research project has begun, a researcher must consider how their research can benefit the already existing research or society in general. In terms of this research project being entrenched in the educational field, in all likelihood, makes it a study valuable to myself as an educator and the possibility that it might increase my educational expertise (Dalland, 2018, p. 238). However, because the development of a research project within the field of humanities should serve both

human and scientific interests, one could argue that a research project such as this one can improve knowledge about human behavior as well as increase a person's understanding of their own practice (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021, p. 96).

There is also a collection of guidelines created by The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees where they present considerations that a researcher should take into account during a research project (NESH, 2021). According to Christoffersen and Johannesen (2012), these can be summarized into three considerations, which are an informant's right to autonomy, the duty of the researcher to respect an informant's privacy, and the researcher's responsibility to avoid harm.

An informant's right to autonomy covers their right to be able to have control of their own participation in a research project and to reserve the right to withdraw from the project at any time without the need to provide any reason for doing so (Christoffersen & Johannesen, 2012, p. 41). This also requires them to give their informed and voluntary consent to participate in the research study, which means that the participant has fully understood what it means for them to participate, such as what and how personal information will be collected and stored and that they are further informed about their rights as participants (Dalland, 2018, p. 240). Both of my participants were provided with a form that contained information about my research project, their rights as participants and what data would be collected during the interview. To ensure that they were undoubtedly well-informed about their rights, said rights were repeated to them in the introduction and aftermath of the interview. A copy of the consent and information form can be found in the Appendix (see Appendix 1).

The duty of the researcher to respect an informant's privacy encompasses their right to be certain that their shared information will be kept confidential and that this information can and will not be used to identify them (Christoffersen & Johannesen, 2012, p. 42). One should also make sure that an informant views participation in a research project as something that can be of beneficence, which means that the potential advantages of participating outweigh the possible risks or disadvantages (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021, p. 107). I have made it my objective to repeatedly assure my participants that I only asked them about their thoughts and experiences, and not about personal information. I did remind them that the only personal and identifiable source of information would be the storage of their voices through the audio recordings. I also

made them aware that these recordings would be password protected and safely stored through the services provided by Nettskjema, which are approved by OsloMet.



## **4. Results and findings**

In the following chapter, the results and findings of the research interviews will be presented. The answers have been coded in connection with coding explanation of the method section. The results will then be analysed, and relevant findings will be described. The following sections will cover participants answers regarding the participant's awareness of students out-of-school use of English, the nature of their classroom teaching methods, and if they use any specific methods, materials, or activities that can be beneficial for oral skill development.

### **4.1 Teachers' awareness of students' IDLE engagement**

Both of the teachers suggested that most Norwegian students, including their own and on a general scale, has significant engagement with IDLE activities. Furthermore, both stated that a majority, but not all of their students who engage with such activities do so in English. While participant 1 claim that the number of IDLE engagements their students have is generally the same across the classroom, participant 2 says that the school that they are currently employed at houses a significant amount of students who participates in athletic activities, and that this is noticeable in how much time the students spend on IDLE activities, and that it is lesser compared to schools where participant 2 has previously been employed.

Both participants were also asked if they had any knowledge of what types of IDLE engagement their students had, where participant 1 stated that their students participated in chatting applications, such as Facebook Messenger or Snapchat, where much of the communication supposedly occurred in English. Furthermore, these students also watched several English-speaking content creators on YouTube and short-format videos from platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels. This is where the first significant difference becomes apparent when comparing participant 1's 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and participant 2's 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. According to participant 2, their students also participated in different social media platforms, but also various streaming sites, such as Netflix and Disney Plus, which is an area of IDLE engagement that was never mentioned by participant 1. The social media and short-format video sharing application TikTok is apparently an area of IDLE engagement where participant 2's students seem to receive a considerable amount of English input. While participant 1 mentioned that their students spend time on video games and use it to produce spoken English, participant 2 mentions no such activities among their students, which could point to the fact that participant 2 said that their

students generally engaged less with IDLE activities because of the amount of time they spent on athletic activities.

The participants also comment that they both try to demonstrate their interest in their students' engagement with IDLE, though by using slightly different methods. Participant 1 says that they ask their students if they are currently watching any TV-series or something on social media, because some students show vocabulary skills that exceed the current level of most of the class, further questions are then posed about whether they use subtitles or captions to learn new words. Similarly, participant 1 goes further by actively encouraging their students to use subtitles when watching streaming services, such as Netflix. This shows that both participants are engaged in how their students learn English outside of school. Participant 2 says that they do not explicitly ask their students about their IDLE activities, and that they rely more on the general familiarity and relation to the students to acquire knowledge about how they engage with English outside of school. This becomes evident after participant 2 said that the school which employs them has a strict ban on mobile phone use within the school, and that they wish their students could use their phones at recess to engage more with TikTok and other apps to increase English input, which displays this teacher's knowledge of where and how English can be learned. Participant 2 further mentions that they notice that students who use a lot of English words and phrases in different situations at school are also the same students who engage with English through IDLE activities and thus it appears that participant 2 has a clear idea of which students engage with English outside of school. Interestingly, participant 2 notices that because of the extensive time spent on athletic activities among their students, these students also possess a lower general level of English language proficiency compared to students from their previous teaching experiences, which could suggest that participant 2 is aware of the positive effects that IDLE engagement has on English language proficiency.

When asked about how engagement with IDLE activities might impact their general English language skills, both participants answered that their students show improvement in two specific areas. The first instance is an increased ability to utilize vocabulary, and students being more confident in their ability to speak and communicate. Participant 1 specified that these communication skills appeared more natural for the current students than previous students. Participant 2 specified that their students' speaking confidence was somewhat apparent in general communication in English, and that students showed minimal concern with making mistakes or

showing inaccuracies in their speech, which participant 2 attributed to a “laid-back” approach to speaking originating from their spare time use of English.

Participant 1 states that teachers need to realize that children’s increasing English proficiency cannot only be accredited to formal English education, and that the availability of English language resources, such as gaming and the internet makes students’ English exposure highly diversified compared to the last 10-15 years.

## **4.2 Teaching methods and practices to develop oral skills**

In the case of teaching methods and materials that are used in the classroom, participant 1 relies mostly on textbooks, workbooks and websites that are developed by educational publishers such as Cappelen Damm or Gyldendal, which contain materials related to reading and writing listening, although they also used online resources such as BBC’s one minute news, which is a short-format video of current news that provide listening input for students. Participant 2 has a much more different approach to what materials they use, where they state that they never use textbooks in teaching, and that they tend to adapt their teaching to what the National Curriculum requires and then relate that to what students might find interesting. This is later confirmed when participant 2 also states that they use several different excerpts from news channels, YouTube, and streaming services such as Netflix and Disney Plus. This could suggest that participant 2 has a slightly heavier usage of teaching materials that provide English input through listening. The participants were also asked if they had any specific teaching methods or activities that they utilized to work with oral skills. In this case participant 1 answered that every English class that they teach starts with a speaking activity, where students speak about a random subject for 30 seconds, which shows that participant 1 has a clear and established routine to cultivate speaking skills among their students. Participant 2 has adapted the speaking activities to be more compatible to their students, who do not possess a lot of confidence to speak in English in front of the entire class, and the activities thus focus on speaking exercises that are completed in learning groups, which lower the students’ nervousness to say something aloud. This shows that participant 2 uses activities to develop oral skills while also considering how an activity might be adapted to make sure students actually participate and produce spoken language. Participant 2 has a similar activity that participant 1 also uses. Participant 2 used a comparable activity to activate their students and make them comfortable with speaking, where the start of each class begins

with an oral exercise, such as a “would you rather” in which a student has to choose between two options in a fictional situation and explain their choices. Participant 2 states that this type of activity makes it easier for students to engage with because of the informal and non-academic nature of how they communicate in an activity such as this.

Participant 1 reports to be currently working with what they called a “language campaign”, which consist of activities that take place over several weeks where students are going to make a blog or vlog to promote speaking skills in English, where every participating student will have spoken lines. Furthermore, they are also working with a roleplaying act, where they will make a short film based on positivity and politeness in speech, which includes several spoken lines from each student. This is another indicator that participant 1 works with oral skill development and does so by utilizing different teaching methods that are varying in both complexity of the task and how much cooperation is required of the students. Participant 2 goes further into TikTok as a resource to develop oral skills through presentations. They state that oral presentation through the use of PowerPoint is a method that has been used to a significant extent for many years and they suggest that this way of presenting can be somewhat outdated, and that TikTok could be an example of how a teacher could create new ways to hold an oral presentation. In this instance, participant 2 further expresses their dissatisfaction with their school policy, which prohibits the use of mobile phones and applications such as TikTok. This clearly demonstrates that the teacher has a pronounced wish to use teaching methods that employ student interests to teach oral skills and likely would have done so if it were not for the schools’ restrictive policy towards the use of mobile phones and social media.

### **4.3 Teaching practices that can facilitate bridging activities or materials**

This section will cover the participant thoughts and reflections about their teaching practices in their English teaching and if they can be considered helpful to bridge the gap between informal and formal learning of English. The current section will also cover the authenticity of teachers’ practice and their thoughts about using activities or materials that facilitate bridging, even though they have not implemented it into their own teaching practice.

#### **4.3.1 Teaching practices**

As aforementioned, participant 1 was working and co-operating with colleagues to develop several projects in English, which among other goals, aimed to develop oral skills among

students. What was significant about these projects were the content of the activities they conducted. Participant 1 stated that one of the main objectives of the task was to make a vlog, which is highly relevant to some of the IDLE activities that participant 1's engaged in, such as the stated YouTube videos that their students watched, which could possibly include a vlog as one of the many video formats that are present on the YouTube platform.

The participants were also asked if they ever made inquiries to their students about suggestions for which learning activities they wanted to utilize in the classroom. In this case both participants answered that their students often suggested using websites such as Kahoot or Gimkit, which are made up of quizzes that employ game mechanics that allow students to earn points or currency within the game. This implies that the participants do take their students wishes into consideration if they see educational potential. Nonetheless, participant 1 further explained that their students do not provide any other suggestions related to learning activities, which they state might be because of participant 1 as well as their students do not consider that suggestions related to IDLE from students could be a possibility. This might also tie into the fact that participant 1 said that not all of her students have mobile devices, or computers to allow them to engage with many different IDLE activities. Participant 2 states several times throughout the interview that they always try to relate the content of English classes to their students' interests and that they try to take the students' personal wishes into consideration when deciding how to structure English teaching. Furthermore, participant 2 says that they account for individual wishes of students, but at the same time acknowledging that what the majority wants to do is not necessarily the ideal way to teach an entire class. This is exemplified with them saying that a student who wishes to learn English by playing video games is just as valid as a student who wishes to learn by reading English, as long as the student learning activities are situated in a context that is relevant to the English curriculum. Moreover, participant 2 has also taken suggestions from past teaching practice, where a student who had an interest in World War II also played a game about the same thing. This student was allowed to make an interdisciplinary presentation that combined social studies and English, where the student could display competence through the use of a video game. This can suggest that participant 2 is not only aware of students' IDLE interests, but also looks for specific opportunities to implement them into the classroom.

### **4.3.2 Authenticity in the participants' teaching**

This section will look at the participant answers in relation to what can be considered authentic about the materials they choose to work with in English and in opposition, which materials they work with that can be regarded as less authentic. This section is differentiated from the previous sections in that the active teaching practices the participants mentioned were described in detail and thus offers a coherent understanding of how such teaching practices were actually executed. In this section, answers in which the participants mentioned authentic materials, but not how they explicitly were used will be cited to offer deeper insight into their overall effort to bridge the gap between formal and informal learning of English.

There appear to be slight differences between the participants in relation to the authenticity of the teaching materials they use when asked about what they generally use in English classes.

Participant 1 generally seems to use several teaching materials and resources that can be considered as non-authentic, such as online educational platforms from publishers such as The British Council, Gyldendal and Cappelen Damm, regular English textbooks and workbooks with tasks, and shorter books with “interesting facts”, and a few authentic materials from BBC news. This could suggest that participant 1, generally, uses more non-authentic materials when teaching English. Participant 2 states that they have almost never used English textbooks because of a need to have ownership of their teaching materials, and mostly based English classes on the competence aims of the national curriculum in English. As a consequence, they apparently spent considerable time searching for different materials to use, such as news in English and audiovisual clips from platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, or Disney Plus, which are considered authentic. This could suggest that using fewer traditional teaching materials, such as textbooks, can lead a teacher to locate other teaching materials on the internet that are more authentic.

Participant 1 mentioned that Minecraft has previously been used in their English classes but does not specify how it was used other than when it is used, students engage in English conversation and spoke in English by using words and expressions when interacting within the game.

Furthermore, participant 1 states that they used excerpts from the animated children's movie, Encanto and audio clips from “Happy” by Pharrell in order to show the students some examples of positivity in the English language. The uses of learning materials that are helpful towards the development of listening and speaking skills, such as Minecraft, movie excerpts and song clips

could point to the fact that participant 1 uses more authentic materials when working with oral skills.

#### **4.3.2.1 Challenges with implementing authentic materials**

As previously mentioned in section 4.1 both participants had knowledge about some of the IDLE activities that their student engaged with. They both stated that they relied on their general relation to their students to gain knowledge of their IDLE activities, which certainly can be beneficial in order to uncover students' IDLE activities. However, none of them had attempted to specifically identify or categorize the activities that their students engage with. This could point to a potential lack of awareness of how important the diversity of their students' IDLE activities is. Participant 1 still mentions later in the interview that they occasionally ask their students if they are currently watching any TV-series, which could point to a moderate attempt to categorize and be up to date with their students' current IDLE activities, which can be important to possess continuous awareness of potential opportunities to implement students' IDLE interests in English teaching. The overall lack of investigation into their students' IDLE interests could be connected to the fact that there appears to be some challenges with implementing authentic materials in English teaching, where both participants provided some noteworthy thoughts about their individual challenges. Interestingly, the two participants seem to have some similar, but different experiences in terms of their apparent knowledge of IDLE activities and how they have implemented authentic materials in their English classes. Participant 1 mentions that they are not very familiar with the multitude of social media that their students engage with and has not specifically used social media other than YouTube as an authentic material in their English teaching. Rather, as previously cited, they made an activity that mimicked social media use, where students were tasked with making a vlog, and in addition, activities that featured games like Minecraft. This could suggest that a lack of familiarity with the IDLE activities that students engage with could also result in a teacher using fewer authentic materials. Similarly, participant 2, however in a more explicit manner, states that they wished they knew more about gaming because they have little to no engagement with it themselves. Furthermore, they state that they use the learning game, Gimkit, which only mimic game mechanics and do not use actual authentic gaming content in their English teaching. However, they wish they possessed more knowledge about any resources that could teach them how video games can be used in the

classroom. It is also apparent that the use of social media in their teaching, as the aforementioned way participant 2 would use TikTok, is an approach to implement authentic materials in their teaching. The lack of familiarity with authentic learning materials among the participants, as demonstrated by the examples above, suggests that increasing their knowledge of IDLE activities within gaming or social media could also increase the amount of authentic learning materials that are used in English teaching. Both participants were also vocal about some of the limitations of bringing authentic materials into the classroom and using teaching activities related to IDLE. In this case, participant 1 voiced their concern about the different types of authentic material that could be brought into the classroom and if this is appropriate for a formal school context. The cited concerns were in regard to videos in English that students watch online, or English music that they listen to, which in participant 1's view contain a considerable amount of profanity and inappropriate language. Participant 2 did not mention any concern about the content of the authentic materials, but rather on the activities themselves and how they might play out in a classroom setting. In their view, an imagined classroom activity containing the use of TikTok, or other creative activities involving the use of phones or PCs, might create substantial distraction among the students considering the application that they use also contains videos that they might be more interesting in watching than completing a task. These considerations suggest that both participants are aware of the potential challenges of using both authentic materials and IDLE activities in the classroom and put forth valid criticism of the implications of implementing these into the English classroom.



## **5. Discussion**

In this chapter the results and findings will be discussed by taking relevant theory into account. I decided to keep the sections from the results and discussion the same in order to provide clarity and consistency. Each subchapter will be contributing with reflections and arguments that will help to answer my research question: *What are EFL teachers' beliefs and experiences about using bridging activities to develop oral skills? How can bridging activities be motivating for students?*

### **5.1 Teachers' awareness of students' IDLE engagement**

The questions regarding the participants' awareness of their students' IDLE engagement were meant to shed light on whether the participants had extensive or lesser knowledge about their students' out-of-school digital interests, and because this can be viewed as a minimal requirement to be able to employ such interests in English teaching. The participants' view about students' IDLE engagement is almost exclusively positive with regard to the development of oral skills, which is consistent with previous research about university teachers' perception of the effects OILE has on English language skills (Toffoli & Sockett, 2015, p. 13). The types of IDLE engagement that both participants' students were reportedly involved with, such as watching YouTube, TikTok, Instagram reels or streaming services, participating in chatting applications, listening to music, and playing video games are all consistent with the many reported activities that other students engage with from other studies concerning 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders' use of EE, which is within relative proximity to the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students that my participants teach (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 124; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2014, p. 10). An important takeaway from Sundqvist (2009, pp. 141-143) and her study about Swedish 9<sup>th</sup> graders' oral proficiency related to EE, is that she found a significant correlation between EE and oral proficiency and that students who had low amounts of engagement with EE still significantly benefited in terms of oral proficiency from having a few hours of EE engagement every week. This could be relevant for participant 2 in this study who claimed that their students generally engaged with fewer IDLE activities. Therefore, it is important to not underestimate the positive impact that such digital activities might have on oral proficiency, however little time is being spent engaging with them. In addition to their positive outlook on IDLE activities and how they affected English language proficiency, participant 1 posed questions to their students about their habits related to watching

TV series and tried to be up to date with what the students were watching. This displays their positive attitude to the language learning context of the students, which can be a powerful motivator for students and their habits (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 210). However, an interesting point of discussion concerns both participants and the fact that neither of them engaged in any extensive investigation about the IDLE activities that their students engaged in, other than them possessing a “general overview” of their students’ digital habits. Although students’ digital interests can be convoluted in their nature, a teacher could greatly benefit from having a firm grasp of how their students engage with English by acknowledging that students’ experiences and knowledge of English is vastly diverse based on their digital habits (Toffoli & Sockett, 2015, p. 18). This could be regarded as a missed opportunity to fully understand and take advantage of how their students learn English through out-of-school activities, also considering Dressman and Lee (2021) and their suggestions about engaging in ethnographic research about students’ online habits, in which a teacher could benefit from having a collection of known IDLE activities that students engage with, and to critically evaluate if students have cultivated any learning strategies that students themselves might be unaware of and if IDLE engagement can contribute to English learning that is situated inside the classroom (Dressman & Lee, 2021, p. 186). In classes such as my participants’, where the number of students ranged from 25-30, there could be challenges with obtaining a clear overview of every IDLE activity that students potentially engage with, which is why targeted ethnography of students’ IDLE interests could be beneficial. However, it is worth noting that participant 1 did pose questions to their students about their TV-watching habits and whether they used subtitles or captions when watching. This might display some awareness in relation to the fact that there is a significant correlation between watching English TV-series or movies with subtitles and students ability to orally translate words from their mother tongue to English and vice versa (Kuppens, 2010, p. 78). Though it is unclear whether participant 1 did or did not do anything with this information to further enhance their students’ development of oral skills, there is still a potential of posing questions about how students engage with IDLE activities in order to ensure that students are aware of strategies and viewing practices that might positively impact English language development (Kuppens, 2010, p. 80)

Students’ part-time interest might be uncharted territory for many teachers, however, learning and knowing about such interests and activities can be a source of empowerment for teachers by

the way they familiarize themselves with students' interests in order to actively utilize those interests in everyday classroom teaching (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 154). A clear distinction between participants 1 and 2 became evident when participant 2 proclaimed that they did not actively encourage students to engage in IDLE activities. The encouragement of students to use the internet and other media to demonstrate how English can be learned could be a significant source of motivation for students and therefore, teachers should be aware of the benefit of such encouragement (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 56). Additionally, students could benefit, not only from encouragement, but also their teachers making them more aware of the potential of out-of-school engagement with English in terms of language learning, and that such awareness might positively impact their language development (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 154). Furthermore, making students aware of how their engagement with English can improve their English skills can also be significantly motivating for students by showing them how their IDLE engagement can develop specific attributes about their language use that the students themselves want to possess, thus confirming the students sense of ideal self (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 82).

While participant 2 does not encourage their students to engage with IDLE activities, they do show profound awareness of the effects of their students' engagement with IDLE activities when explaining why they tend not to encourage such behavior. They state that because their current students generally engage less with IDLE activities compared to their previous teaching experiences, the language of the current students are noticeable in the negative impact of their English language proficiency, and especially the students' ability and confidence to speak English in class. This shows awareness of the positive effects that engagement with EE, IDLE, or OILE can have on English language development, which has been extensively documented by other researchers (Olsson, 2011, p. 42; Sockett, 2014, p. 59; Sundqvist, 2009, p. 143).

Interestingly, it also shows that the inverse can be true, and that there could be a correlation between a lack of engagement with IDLE activities and a lack of English language proficiency. In the case of oral proficiency, this has been documented and shown that students who have little engagement with EE do not possess a high level of oral proficiency (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 142). In other words, participant 2's students could benefit from an increased amount of encouragement to engage with IDLE activity, and as a result, possibly improve their oral proficiency.

## **5.2 Teaching methods and practices to develop oral skills**

When investigating the teaching methods and practices of the participating teachers, there were some key differences that might impact the students' oral skill development. The materials that the participants utilized in their classroom were quite different, and participant 2 displayed a more considerable focus on implementing materials that could be related to students out-of-school engagement with English. Those materials included clips from news channels, YouTube, Netflix, and Disney Plus, which are materials that can utilize students' listening skills, and could be helpful to increase the English input that students receive. As previously mentioned, students who have little engagement with English outside of school can still benefit from the small amount of English input they receive (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 143). This is why participant 2's implementation of materials related to IDLE can be of great importance, especially related to their students and their low amount of IDLE engagement. If speaking exercises in English classes are paired with materials related to IDLE, the impact could prove to be significant for participant 2's students who were hesitant to speak English in class, in part because of the impact that engagement with IDLE can have on a students' willingness to communicate. This is closely related to Lee and Sylvén (2020, p. 1290) and their study, which suggests that Swedish students' willingness to communicate can be predicted by how often they spend time on IDLE activities, which, if further encouraged and facilitated by teachers, could reduce students' anxiety to orally participate in the English classroom.

Participant 1 appears to approach learning materials in their class in a different manner, and specifically related to listening skills, stated that they used listening materials from BBC and educational websites, such as "Skolen min", which contain non-authentic listening tasks and exercises. While these materials can be beneficial for the development of listening skills, an argument can be made regarding the quality of the chosen learning materials. Namely that the development of communicative competence can be dependent on what type of learning material is chosen, especially for listening skills because there can be a discrepancy between the quality of listening materials that come from non-authentic sources, such as "Skolen min" and listening materials that come from authentic sources, such as the BBC. This is based on the fact that manufactured, non-authentic listening materials tend to over-simplify the language with a slower rate of speech and exaggerated pronunciation that is inconsistent with how a natural speaker would actually use English language in a conversation (Gilmore, 2011, p. 800). Because of this,

authentic English learning materials could be helpful to increase students' development of listening comprehension because it is also slightly more difficult and, as a result, could provide a more appropriate challenge for students (Gilmore, 2011, p. 802). This observation is also verified by looking at the effects of quality input on English oral proficiency and that oral proficiency can be predicted by the amount of quality input a student is exposed to (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 98). This could also be relevant for participant 1's students and their extensive engagement with IDLE activities and could suggest that these students' development of listening skills might benefit from more authentic learning materials in the English classroom. Interestingly, both participants' use of YouTube in their teaching practice appears to overlap, although the purpose for which they use it is different. Participant 2 appears to use YouTube mainly for the development of listening skills by searching for relevant clips in English that students are also familiar with. Using such clips can also have the potential to build on students' desire to engage in a speech community that they personally relate to (Sockett, 2013, p. 59). Clips and videos from YouTube can be a significant source of English input and IDLE engagement, and Dressman and Lee (2021) point out that the people who post videos on YouTube often are proficiency English speakers, who come from diverse cultural and national origins. This can provide valuable input for students to develop their ability to communicate with English speakers from varying linguistic backgrounds, which is one of the requirements from the national curriculum (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020). Furthermore, the fact that YouTube content creators, as mentioned, are culturally and linguistically diverse is also of great benefit for students ability to "... adapt the language to the purpose, the receiver and the situation and choose suitable strategies" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020). This is because students who are exposed to more IDLE activities become more inclined to view different varieties of English as positive, and thus tend to view their own ability to use communicative strategies for intercultural communication as more positive (Lee, 2020, p. 57). Activities such as these where English teaching has an intercultural component is previously shown to have great motivational potential for students, especially when English teaching aimed to incorporate and explore different English-speaking cultures and not solely focus on native English speakers (Henry et al., 2018, p. 264). Participant 1 also uses YouTube, but the purpose of using it is different in that the platform itself is being used to post the videos from their project where students are going to make a vlog. This activity could be a resourceful method to employ students' IDLE engagement in the English

classroom, partly because this activity in many ways is scaffolded for the students ahead of time in that they most likely have watched a type of vlog in their spare time and is already aware of what the contents of a vlog should typically include and how it should appear on a screen (Dressman & Lee, 2021, p. 184). The fact that participant 1 also set requirements of how much oral output should be included in the vlog suggests that this activity can be useful towards the development of speaking skills. Additionally, Henry et al. (2018) suggest that students' extensive engagement with digital activities and other encounters with EE affect their view of how learning activities in the classroom are designed. Therefore, teachers who design an activity, such as video blogging, that is personally relevant and creatively challenging for students can be of significant motivational value (Henry et al., 2018, p. 262). Additionally, activities such as this, which is a form of role-playing, have previously been demonstrated to be a type of interactive speaking activity that exercises ability to change subjects in conversation, turn-taking, interruption, etc. When students have the opportunity to work on these skills, their interactional competence can also be increased (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 44).

An important point of consideration when assessing how oral skills can be learned by bridging the gap between formal and informal learning of English is that one must not overestimate the efficacy of using IDLE activities in English teaching. Although IDLE activities are often the types of EE activities that students spend the most of time engaging with at home, their importance related to oral skill development is still less important than students reading books (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 144). Rather, the implementation of IDLE in the classroom should be a matter of assisting and enhancing current teaching practice, instead of replacing it entirely (Dressman & Lee, 2021). As participant 2 displays, there are several IDLE activities that is included in their practice that can be considered informal, while participant 1 appears to have a more blended composition of practices, such as traditional textbook teaching, speaking activities, authentic listening materials and activities that take inspiration from students' IDLE activities.

### **5.3 Teaching practices that can facilitate bridging activities or materials**

With the completed discussion of students' IDLE engagement and how it can be used for oral skill development in the classroom, the discussion now turns to the participants thoughts and experiences about their teaching practices and whether they can be considered helpful towards

bridging the gap between informal and formal learning of English. This will give particular coverage to the authenticity of the activities and materials they utilize.

### **5.3.1 Teaching practices**

When reviewing the teaching practices that both participants employed in their English classrooms, the vlogging activity that participant 1 used might be one of the activities that has the highest potential to bridge the gap between informal and formal learning. This is because the design of the activity takes advantage of known IDLE interests that students engage with. Although this can be an indicator of participant 1 using their students' IDLE interests, participant 1 did not design the activity by integrating any particular suggestions from the students themselves, which could imply a lack of student involvement in the selection and development of the activity, as is recommended to ensure that students experience more relevancy to the activity they are taking part in (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008, p. 566). Nevertheless, activities like the vlogging task that was developed by participant 1 in conjunction with other colleagues could be an example of participant 1 using their teaching experience to, not only utilize their own expertise, but also include the expertise of their colleagues to ensure relevancy for the students (Sundqvist & Olin-Scheller, 2013, p. 334). Furthermore, participant 1 stated that their students might not realize that their suggestions are relevant in the development of activities or tasks within the English classroom. As a possible solution to a challenge such as this, Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) suggest that teachers work with student awareness regarding the many communicative communities and medias that the students engage with by collecting contributions from students that are relevant to their interests. As mentioned several times, a teachers' effort to bridge the gap between informal and formal learning of English could be decreased had they made themselves more aware of their students' digital pastime (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 34). However, an inherent challenge with becoming aware of students' IDLE interests is that the technology and media that is being used daily by students change year over year according to what may or may not be popular or appealing at the time (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008, p. 562). A question to be considered for teachers then becomes how they might effectively implement IDLE interests in the classroom when their students' IDLE interests most likely will evolve several times as they progress through the school system.

An important part of bridging the gap between informal and formal learning of English is also to realize that, as participant 2 stated, that IDLE activities are often highly individualized in relation to the vast number of IDLE activities that are present online. As a result, there could be challenges with developing bridging activities and other teaching strategies that facilitate learning for students, regardless of how much they engage with IDLE (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 33).

### **5.3.2 Authenticity in the participants' teaching**

The authenticity of the participants' teaching activities or materials is the final point of discussion and is integrated because the use of bridging activities or materials in the classroom, more often than not, will require teachers to utilize authentic activities or materials that can have personal relevance to their students' engagement with out-of-school English activities. The reason being that students' general language proficiency is often affected by their IDLE engagement, but also specifically because speaking or listening to English in a school setting can be experienced as different compared to how they speak or listen to English at home, which can be caused by a lack of authentic learning activities or materials in the classroom (Henry et al., 2018, p. 251). In the case of participant 1, their thorough use of English textbooks and educational platforms in English generally seem to have a non-authentic characteristic, which can be attributed to a multitude of possible reasons, such as a teachers' lack of either available time to spend working on the development of teaching practice with authentic materials, or a lack of fundamental knowledge about the authentic materials itself (Henry et al., 2018, p. 269). This is also consistent with what Mantei and Kervin (2009) consider to be one of the essential elements of implementing authentic learning, which is teacher awareness of English practices that students engage with. As for participant 2, who uses several authentic materials by showing clips from YouTube, Netflix or Disney Plus, there are some considerations that must be factored in. The mentioned streaming services are certainly platforms that contain an enormous number of TV-shows, which can be considered authentic in some cases. However, in this case it is necessary to critically assess which TV-series is chosen to provide authentic input for students. This can be illustrated by different genres such as sit-coms or dramas that display real-life conversations to a much greater extent than a soap-opera would (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 123). Thus, by choosing relevant examples that provide both visual and auditory stimulation for students, a teacher can also facilitate increased language awareness and communicative competence (Gilmore, 2011, p. 791).



The apparent difference in the type of learning materials that the participants used in their teaching practice could have possible pedagogical implications. Namely, the effectiveness of authentic materials in relation to increased receptive vocabulary comprehension, which can encompass reading, but more applicable to this thesis, listening. This is due to the rich and varied nature of authentic materials, which often contain vocabulary that is more diverse and therefore creates more opportunities to learn new words (Gilmore, 2011, p. 803). What is apparent about participant 1 and their implementation of authenticity in their classroom is that it seems to be facilitated through the use of activities as opposed to their somewhat limited use of authentic teaching materials. As is exemplified, their use of the activity where students are going to make a vlog is something that utilizes students' authentic engagement with English, and also displays how participant 1 shows awareness towards the social nature of the literacy practices that their students partake in, which allows their students to use their own knowledge of a communicative community to complete the activity (Mantei & Kervin, 2009, p. 13). This is further supported by participant 1 and their use of Minecraft as an activity in the classroom. Despite that, there was no further description or details about how Minecraft was actually organized as an activity, which impedes any attempt to understand how it might benefit oral skill development. Still, it does demonstrate that participant 1 created a needed counterweight to the otherwise significant use of non-authentic teaching materials by facilitating several activities that can be helpful to reduce the disparity between what the students' perceive as meaningful engagement with English and what is not (Henry, 2013, p. 138). In this case, an argument could be made that participant 1 has found an appropriate balance between the use of authentic and non-authentic teaching materials and activities and uses students IDLE interests to enhance current teaching practice instead of replacing it (Dressman & Lee, 2021, p. 186).

### **5.3.2.1 Challenges with implementing IDLE interests and authentic materials**

One of the challenges with implementing many of the students' IDLE interests, according to participant 2, was the considerable amount of profanity and similar uses of English language that were not appropriate to a formal school setting. Thorne and Reinhardt (2008, p. 565) exemplify potential literary practices that are present in online multiplayer games as "...off-topic banter, overtures of friendship, and complaints...", which might also include the verbal abuse that is often associated with online multiplayer games. Participant 2 also voiced concern about the

“gangster lifestyle that is portrayed in music” which contain graphic descriptions of violence and drug use, which some students seemed to be particularly interested in. The question then arises as to how a teacher might involve their students in the selection of learning materials as is suggested by Thorne and Reinhardt (2008), when the literacy practices associated with IDLE activities often include non-suitable language. Regardless, the presence of foul language in the classroom can still be an opportunity for students to develop further communicative competence. This can be demonstrated by teachers being open-minded towards the type of language that is normative to an IDLE community, and to embrace students out-of-school language use and teach them about what constitutes appropriate language in a formal context compared to an informal context (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 171). This argument can also be closely related to the national curriculum, which states that the development of oral skills requires a student to “...communicate on different topics in formal and informal situations...” (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020). Another issue with profanity and unsuitable language in the classroom might pertain to possible rules and regulations set in place by the school management that could prohibit such language even if it is used for learning. Therefore, one could argue that the implementation of IDLE activities or materials in the classroom requires moderation of the IDLE content. Although moderation could be viewed by students as a more placid experience compared to how they engage with IDLE at home, Dressman and Lee (2021) argue that there are many ways to simulate the appealing nature of IDLE activities without forfeiting the interesting or engaging parts of the IDLE content.

Another challenge related to the implementation of authentic materials were voiced quite clearly from participant 2 who explained that the primary reason they did not use more authentic materials or activities in the classroom related to, for example, gaming was due to their lack of knowledge about gaming and how it could be used in an educational setting. As previously mentioned, Dressman and Lee (2021) recommends engaging in ethnographic research about one’s students to become more aware of how students engage with IDLE and to consider how their engagement with IDLE might contribute to English learning within the classroom.

However, being aware of students’ IDLE activities does not constitute knowledge about IDLE activities and being knowledgeable about these activities can be challenging considering the substantial diversity of IDLE activities that might be present in a single class of 25-30 students. This is supported by Sundqvist and Olin-Scheller (2013, p. 336), who found that Swedish

teachers became more knowledgeable and comfortable about how digital resources could be used in the classroom after they had finished a training course designed to increase IT knowledge among teachers in Sweden. Furthermore, it is also consistent with one of the principles of implementing authentic learning experiences, which state that a teacher must possess some degree of expertise related to the students' interests in order to be able to facilitate more in-depth understanding of the activities that the students engage with (Mantei & Kervin, 2009, p. 13). It could seem that participant 2 uses non-authentic teaching materials such as Gimkit, which only mimics gaming mechanics because of the noted lack of gaming knowledge, which can be less motivation for students to work with (Gilmore, 2011, p. 804). What is notable about the current teaching situation for participant 2 is that they had a clear aspiration to use TikTok in their classroom to modernize the way student work with presentation, which would also utilize their IDLE interests in the classroom. Unfortunately, the school management were in disagreement about the use of mobile phones in the classroom. Moreover, this could be to the detriment of participants 2 teaching practice, and the argument can be made that they should be able to have more self-governance about their own work (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 181). This could also be an argument for the lack of awareness the school management has related to the learning potential of IDLE.

## 6. Summary and concluding remarks

In this study I have attempted to shed light on how two EFL teachers work to bridge the gap between informal and formal learning of English, how it relates to the development of oral skills, how the use of bridging activities can be motivating for students. To reiterate my thesis questions: *What are EFL teachers' beliefs and experiences about using bridging activities to develop oral skills? How can bridging activities be motivating for students?*

Through the conducted interviews the participants displayed positivity towards the effect that IDLE activities can have on their students' oral skills in English. While both participants demonstrated an underlying awareness of their students' engagement with IDLE, there was apparently no targeted effort to gain more knowledge of the exact IDLE activities that each student engaged with, which could have been a significant resource in order to implement students' digital interests into the classroom (Dressman & Lee, 2021, p. 186; Toffoli & Sockett, 2015, p. 18). In terms of the teaching practices and methods the participants use to develop oral skills, both of them displayed that their methods are diverse, and include many activities and materials that can be effective in the pursuit of implementing IDLE interests into the English classroom. Additionally, the methods that the participants employed were seemingly adapted to the respective participants' students, who had a varying number of IDLE engagements. Generally, the type of oral skill development that was facilitated based on the participants' teaching methods were mainly listening skills, followed by speaking skills and some degree of communicative competence. The participants also display integration of IDLE activities and materials in their English teaching, such as vlogging and use of audiovisual examples, which has potential to bridge the gap between informal and formal learning of English (Sundqvist & Olin-Scheller, 2013, p. 334). The concept of authenticity in English teaching is also an area of this study where the participants showed some differences, mainly in that the materials they use in their classroom teaching seemed to be separated by participant 1's use of both non-authentic and authentic materials, and participant 2's use of mainly authentic materials. The difference between the two were also evident in teaching activities, where participant 2 had difficulties with the implementation of activities that took advantage of students' IDLE engagement, which they attributed to a lack of specific knowledge of exactly how to use students' IDLE interests in a learning activity. This is possibly one of the more significant findings, and it might show that teachers can be in need of more focused expertise about students' interests in order to facilitate

authentic learning of English, which might also require specialized professional development courses for teachers to further develop their teaching competence, as was proven to be effective in Sweden (Mantei & Kervin, 2009, p. 13; Sundqvist & Olin-Scheller, 2013, p. 335). The learning activities and methods they used also had a motivating influence on the students, and the participants themselves acknowledged that using the students' IDLE interests could have a further motivating impact. However, there might be a need for the participant to display more direct encouragement of IDLE engagement, and to make students aware of how IDLE engagement can foster general language and oral proficiency.

The data collection method I chose to use in this study can be subjected to relevant criticism. One critique can be pointed to the sample size, and the fact that the thesis only covers thoughts and experiences from two participants, which inhibits any claim that this study is generalizable to the rest of the population of Norwegian EFL teachers. Moreover, the research method itself could be lacking by the fact that it only gathers reported experiences from teachers, without having any way to confirm these accounts. An additional method to provide confirmation of the participants' accounts, such as an observation of their practice, could have been beneficial.

## **6.1 Suggestions for further research**

Because of the limited scope of this research, there could be additional demand for more teacher experiences related to the integration of student interests in the English classroom. This is also recommended by Toffoli and Sockett (2015), who state that the identification of individual beliefs can be helpful to understand how teachers think in relation to information and communications technology, and if they are willing or able to implement it into their classrooms. It would also be interesting to see if the teaching materials or activities that teachers use when working with other basic skills, such as reading or writing has the same focus on the use of students' IDLE interests in the classroom, and if authentic materials and activities are present when the goal is to develop reading or writing skills.

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# Appendixes

## Appendix 1: Information and consent form

### Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

#### ***”Å bygge bro mellom formell og uformell læring av engelsk”?***

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å undersøke engelsklæreres holdninger og erfaringer når det gjelder å bygge bro mellom formell og uformell engelsklæring. I dette skrevet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

#### **Formål**

Dette forskningsprosjektet er et mastergradsstudie hvor formålet er å undersøke engelsklærere på barne- og ungdomsskoletrinn, og hvilke holdninger og erfaringer de har med å bygge bro mellom formell og uformell engelsklæring gjennom bruk av digitale verktøy. Problemstillingene til denne oppgaven er *“What are EFL teachers’ beliefs and experiences about using bridging activities to develop oral skills? How can bridging activities be motivating for students?”*

#### **Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?**

Oslo Metropolitan University og Institutt grunnskole- og faglærerutdanning er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

#### **Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?**

Du blir spurt om å delta i dette prosjektet fordi du har erfaring med engelskundervisning på barne- og ungdomsskoletrinnet, og er en av to engelsklærere som blir spurt om å være med i prosjektet.

#### **Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?**

Som deltaker i prosjektet vil du ta del i et intervju hvor en rekke spørsmål og oppfølgingsspørsmål vil bli stilt. Prosjektet tar kun for seg deltakeres holdninger og erfaringer, og vil ikke innhente personlig informasjon utover stemme som kan identifisere deltakeren. Informasjonen som innsamles vil registreres ved et lydopptak som lagres gjennom en kryptert tjeneste i samsvar med retningslinjene til Tjenesten for Sensetive Data (TSD). Opptaket vil kun brukes til dette prosjektet, og vil slettes ved slutten av prosjektet.

#### **Det er frivillig å delta**

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

#### **Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger**

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrevet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket. Deltakere vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i den endelige publikasjonen av masteroppgaven, og de eneste opplysninger som publiseres vil være at deltakere underviser i engelsk på barne eller ungdomsskoletrinnet.

#### **Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?**

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes 15. mai 2023. Etter prosjektslutt vil alt av datamateriale slettes.

### Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra OsloMet og Institutt grunnskole- og faglærerutdanning har Sikt – Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandørs personverntjenester vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

### Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Institutt grunnskole- og faglærerutdanning ved *Valeriy Tuyakov* ([valeriy.tuyakov@oslomet.no](mailto:valeriy.tuyakov@oslomet.no))
- Sondre Norum Larsen ([s334578@oslomet.no](mailto:s334578@oslomet.no)) Mobilnummer: 40018140
- Vårt personvernombud: Ingrid S. Jacobsen ([personvernombud@oslomet.no](mailto:personvernombud@oslomet.no))

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til vurderingen av prosjektet som er gjort av Sikts personverntjenester ta kontakt på:

- Epost: [personverntjenester@sikt.no](mailto:personverntjenester@sikt.no), eller telefon: 53 21 15 00.

Med vennlig hilsen

*Valeriy Tuyakov*

*Sondre Norum Larsen*

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## Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «Å bygge bro mellom formell og uformell læring av engelsk», og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

---

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

## Appendix 2: Interview guide

- Do you think your students interact with English on the internet or through digital tools when they are outside of school?
  - To which extent do you think they do this?
  - Where do you think the activities in English take place?
- Do you tend to show interest in students' online activities outside of the classroom?
  - In what way do you do this?
  - Are such interest or activities encouraged when you are with students at school?
- Have you attempted to map or get an overview of your students' online interests outside of school?
- How do you think the students' online interaction with English impact their English skills?
- What kinds of learning resources do you use in your English classes? (Explain what I mean, books, digitalized learning platforms, PowerPoint presentations, and such)
- What types of learning activities do you usually employ when working with students' oral skills? (Explain oral skills, listening, talking)
- In what way do you think English learning inside the school differs from English that is learned through everyday activities at home (for students)?
- What are your thoughts about video games as a resource for English learning?
- What are your thoughts about social media as a resource for English learning?
- How do you feel about employing students' online interests in English classroom instruction?
- Do you ever consider suggestions from students when deciding what learning activities, you use in your English classes?
- Have you tried, or do you wish to find ways of using students online out-of-school interests in English instruction?
  - Why? Why not?
  - If yes, how did you adapt learning materials that were not meant be used for education?

- If yes, what was the purpose of using students interests in English teaching?  
(Development of specific skills, as a reward)
  - If no, did you encounter any challenges with implementing students' online interests in English teaching?
- Do you think it is useful to make the English learning classroom more similar to the way students experience and interact with the English language at home?
- What are your thoughts about using authentic learning materials in English education?  
(Materials that were not intended for educational purposes)
- Do you have any considerations when you design an activity made for the development of oral skills?
  - What do these consist of?

## Appendix 3: Approval from NSD

### Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

Skriv ut

23.01.2023

**Referansenummer**

901238

**Vurderingstype**

Standard

**Dato**

23.01.2023

**Prosjekttittel**

Masteroppgave i engelsk

**Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon**

OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet / Fakultet for lærerutdanning og internasjonale studier / Institutt for grunnskole- og faglærerutdanning

**Prosjektansvarlig**

Valeriy Tuyakov

**Student**

Sondre Norum Larsen

**Prosjektperiode**

02.01.2023 - 15.05.2023

**Kategorier personopplysninger**

Alminnelige

**Lovlig grunnlag**

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 15.05.2023.

[Meldeskjema](#)

**Kommentar**

OM VURDERINGEN

Sikt har en avtale med institusjonen du forsker eller studerer ved. Denne avtalen innebærer at vi skal gi deg råd slik at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet ditt er lovlig etter personverneverket.

**UTDYPENDE OM LOVLIG GRUNNLAG**

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake. Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a.

**FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER**

Vi har vurdert at du har lovlig grunnlag til å behandle personopplysningene, men husk at det er institusjonen du er ansatt/student ved som avgjør hvilke databehandlere du kan bruke og hvordan du må lagre og sikre data i ditt prosjekt. Husk å bruke leverandører som din institusjon har avtale med (f.eks. ved skylagring, nettspørreskjema, videosamtale el.)

Personverntjenester legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1 f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

**MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER**

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til oss ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Se våre nettsider om hvilke endringer du må melde: <https://sikt.no/melde-endringer-i-meldeskjema>

**OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET**

Vi vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!