

# **MASTER'S THESIS**

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## **The Loud Silence**

*A qualitative study of Reticence in Norwegian lower secondary schools*

Academic master's thesis

30 credits assignment

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## Abstract

This thesis explores EFL students' reticence in lower secondary schools in Norway. According to previous research, there can be multiple reasons why students are hesitant to participate orally in the EFL classroom, as well as issues this may cause both teachers and students. There are different ways to explore this field of research. However, due to the scope of the thesis, this study focuses on the teachers' thoughts on the topic. The purpose of this study is to compare previous research with Norwegian lower secondary school teachers' perceptions of reasons for students' speaking reticence and what methods and strategies they use to prevent this reticence. Since most students' everyday school life is back to normal after the pandemic, this study also explores the impact Covid-19 has had on the students' oral participation. The teachers in this study emphasized that the pandemic may have affected their students to a great extent and how they are actively working on that issue. The issues regarding student reticence and Covid-19 are explored through qualitative interviews with five secondary school teachers from different schools in Norway. The results of this study show that there can be both similarities and differences in the reasons for students' reticence from Norway and previous studies from other countries. The different reasons for reticence found in this study require different areas of focus from what methods and strategies the teachers use to prevent this reticence.

Keywords: Reticence, EFL classroom, lower secondary school, interview, teaching methods and strategies

## Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven utforsker elevers muntlige tilbakeholdenhet i engelskfaget på ungdomsskolen. Det nevnes i tidligere forskning flere grunner til hvorfor elever ikke vil delta muntlig i engelskfaget, samt problemene dette kan medføre for både lærere og elever. Det finnes flere måter å undersøke dette temaet på, men grunnet oppgavens omfang er det i dette tilfellet fokusert på lærernes syn på temaet. Målet med denne oppgaven er å sammenligne tidligere forskning med norske ungdomsskolelæreres tanker om årsaker til hvorfor elevene er muntlig tilbakeholdne i engelsk, og hvilke metoder de anvender for å forhindre denne tilbakeholdenheten. Ettersom skolehverdagen til de fleste elever er tilbake til normalen etter pandemien, tar denne oppgaven også for seg påvirkningen Covid-19 har hatt på elevenes

muntlige deltakelse. Lærerne understrekte at pandemien kan ha påvirket elevene deres i stor grad, og at det er noe de jobber aktivt med for å bedre. Dette blir forsket på gjennom kvalitative intervju av fem ungdomsskolelærere fra forskjellige skoler i Norge. Resultatet fra studien viser at det kan være både likheter og forskjeller i årsaker til elevers muntlige tilbakeholdenhet fra Norge og tidligere studier fra andre land. Disse årsakene kan gi ulike fokusområder på metoder lærerne kan bruke for å forhindre denne tilbakeholdenheten.

Nøkkelord: Muntlig tilbakeholdenhet, det engelske klasserommet, ungdomsskolen, intervju, undervisningsmetoder/strategier.

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## Foreword

There are several reasons why we wanted to write about this specific topic. We wrote a smaller research paper on a similar topic during our second year at Oslo Metropolitan University. We found the topic interesting during that time, which is why, for this master's thesis, we wanted to explore it further. Additionally, we find reticence in the EFL classroom highly relevant for our future profession as teachers. This is because we have experienced reticent students through our practice periods during the education program, through work,

and through our own experience as students in school. Since the English subject in Norway focuses a lot on communication and being able to express oneself, it is unfortunate to see students who have a lot to say but do not dare to speak. Therefore, we wanted to write a thesis to get teachers' perspectives on students' reticence, and what methods and strategies they use to prevent this. We hope that their methods and strategies may become future ideas for us to use when we become teachers.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Today, English is seen as a valuable tool for oral communication across different cultures and countries (Krulatz et al., 2018, pp. 26-28). In addition, English has a unique role and status in Norway since English is officially defined as the “first or primary foreign language in Norway” (p. 27). Krulatz et al. (2018, pp. 26-28) further elaborate that frequent exposure to a language is vital for acquisition and that the English language has a significant role in Norwegian society. For many students, the English that occurs in different situations outside of school is their primary source of input, such as movies, music, and video games. Being exposed to a language works as passive learning for the students, but Anthony (2008, p. 473) states that input alone is insufficient for learning a second and foreign language. Output in English is essential for the English as a foreign language, hereby EFL, learning process. It is through output of English, that the students can produce and develop their oral and written language (Anthony, 2008, p. 472). Khaleghi (2018, pp. 162-163) states that we learn a language when we use it in real-life situations and that language acquisition and language use are complementary. Since the students are exposed to English in their spare time and get much input outside of school, the main arena for output may, for many students, be at school. Sometimes, students are unwilling to participate orally in EFL classes, resulting in an insufficient language learning process. This reticence is challenging among EFL students and teachers and can become a primary source of frustration. The teachers might feel frustrated when the students do not participate in class, whereas the students might feel frustrated because they do not dare to share all their language competence (Khaleghi, 2018, pp. 162-163). Therefore, we have decided to explore reticence amongst lower secondary students in Norway through the teachers’ perspective.

## 1.2 Context

Communicating in English is a focused aim in Norwegian schools and curricula, justified in the English subject’s curriculum. The subject’s relevance and central values state, “*Through working with the subject, the pupils shall become confident users of English so that they can use English to learn, communicate and connect with others*”. Competence aims also highlight the importance of being able to communicate in English. By the end of lower secondary school, the students should be able to

- *Use key patterns of pronunciation in communication*



- *Express oneself with fluency and coherence with a varied vocabulary and idiomatic expressions adapted to the purpose, recipient and situation*
- *Ask questions and follow up input when discussing various topics adapted to different purposes, recipients and situations* (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019a).

By looking at all these competence aims, we can see that being able to express oneself in English is of utmost importance and highly valued in Norwegian schools. However, our experience is that several Norwegian students are reticent English speakers and therefore do not dare to express themselves. It is crucial to shed light on these reticent EFL speakers. This thesis does not intend to provide any definitive solution to the problem of student reticence in the EFL classroom. Instead, this thesis seeks to contribute to the understanding of why reticence occurs in the Norwegian EFL classroom and also seeks to examine the broader implications to practice, and pedagogical strategies teachers employ when encountering student reticence in the EFL classroom.

### 1.3 Thesis

This master thesis will examine reasons for reticence in the EFL classroom, focusing on oral communication as mentioned in international research and comparing it to what Norwegian teachers state through interviews. The thesis will also examine teachers' strategies and methods to reduce their students' reticence. The teachers in our interviews mention some strategies and methods, which will be compared to other methods and strategies mentioned in previous research conducted in different countries.

The research question we have formulated to explore this topic is:

*“What does international research say about reasons for reticence, and how does this compare to Norwegian lower secondary teachers' perceptions? What methods and strategies do they think may prevent this reticence?”*

The additional research question:

*“How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected Norwegian lower secondary students' oral participation in class?”*

## 1.4 Clarification of terms

### 1.4.1 EFL, L1 and L2

In this thesis, we will use different abbreviations of terms connected to language learning. That includes *first language* (L1), *second language* (L2) and *English as a foreign language* (EFL). The term first language usually refers to the first language a person acquires, which often is the language that they have the highest linguistic competence in throughout life. The second language (L2) is the additional language one learns after one's first language. Additional languages learned at school are usually called second languages or foreign languages. When English is taught at school in a country where English is not the official language, it is common to talk about English as a foreign language (Krulatz et al., 2018, pp. 32-34).

### 1.4.2 Foreign language anxiety (foreign language speaking anxiety)

Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128) define foreign language anxiety as “self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process”. The uniqueness is described as how students are encouraged to communicate using a language they have not fully mastered yet. Based on this definition of foreign language anxiety, we do not consider the word “anxiety” in this context a medical term (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009, p. 36). Foreign language anxiety or foreign language speaking anxiety will also be abbreviated to “FLA/FLSA”.

### 1.4.3 Reticence vs Reluctance

To be reluctant is to be unwilling to do something (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022a). However, when a person is reticent, they are unwilling to speak or share their thoughts (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022b). One can therefore say “reticence” equals “speaking reluctance”. Almost all the collected research papers and studies read during our research used the term reluctance in relation to “speaking reluctance”. We decided to use these research papers and studies even though they used reluctance instead of reticence. The terms intertwine with each other since “speaking reluctance” equals the term “reticence” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022b). Therefore, we have decided that we are going to use the term

“reticence” rather than “reluctance”. We may use “reluctance” in some citations and explanations since the researchers used this term in their study.

#### *1.4.4 Oral skills*

In the Norwegian curriculum, there are several basic *skills* that students should develop throughout lower secondary. These skills include oral, writing, reading and digital skills. LK20 defines oral skills as creating meaning through listening, talking and engaging in conversation (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019b).

#### *1.4.5 Code-switching and L1 support*

Code-switching is the practice of alternating between two or more different languages. Code-switching is often used in oral situations. In the EFL classroom, it can be shown through students switching between their L1 and English or other languages within one conversation or sentence (Krulatz et al., 2018, p.138). A term that researchers prefer to use now is translanguaging, which according to García and Kleyn (2016, p. 14), refers to: “the deployment of a speaker’s full repertoire, which does not in any way correspond to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages”. In other words, translanguaging is often used in the EFL classroom, where the students can use languages, they already know as a tool in their language-learning process.

Translanguaging is an extensive practice where the teacher should make sure everyone’s L1 is represented. Code-switching is a more fitting term for oral situations and productions, where one switches languages throughout a sentence, such as Norwegian and English. Even though the term “code-switching” has gotten critique for implying that the different codes or languages inside a bilingual or multilingual student’s mind are separate, we find this term suitable for this thesis (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 138).

#### *1.4.6 Active/Passive Language*

In this thesis, our informants will use active and passive language as terms to explain students’ language proficiency. Active language is understood as the language you manage to use actively, such as when speaking or writing. Whereas passive language is the language used to understand and comprehend the language without using it actively, such as reading and listening.

#### 1.4.7 Classroom management

The definition of good classroom management is clear and realistic expectations for the class, clear rules, and positive relationships with the students (Nordahl, 2013, p. 147). Classroom management is how the teacher's work contributes to students' academic, social, and emotional learning and development. It is about managing groups as teams, managing the individual student as a part of a group, and the teacher's facilitation of learning in the student community (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

## 2.0 Previous research and theoretical framework

In this part of our master's thesis, we will explore relevant peer-reviewed literature regarding reasons for reticence and foreign language anxiety. Our research discovered that studies on Norwegian lower secondary students' reticence are minimal. Several studies conducted in Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East focus on higher grades than lower secondary, mainly University students. Therefore, we want to contribute with our master's thesis on this research topic in Norwegian lower secondary schools. Additionally, since the previous research is mainly conducted in Eastern countries, cultural differences may have an effect on the reasons for reticence. The differences that can occur in the reasons for reticence may be because of the individual countries' English education and exposure to the language. Still, it is interesting to look at the differences between these countries and Norway. The theoretical framework and previous research we will present in this section of our thesis will be used as a comparison to the results of this study.

### 2.1 Foreign language speaking anxiety

Spielberger (1983, p. 1) defines anxiety as "*a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system*".

Anxiety can be divided into trait anxiety, state anxiety and situational anxiety (Spielberger, 1983, p.1). Trait anxiety concerns concepts that endure over long periods and across situations (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 565). State anxiety is a concern for experiences rooted in a specific moment in time as it happens, and not much concern before or after the moment or whether it might occur again. Situational anxiety concerns events within a situation, where more specific events appear as situation-specific anxiety (p. 565). Foreign language speaking

anxiety is the anxiety that appears in a situation where one must speak a foreign language and is therefore considered situational anxiety (Spielberger, 1983, p. 1). Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128) describe foreign language speaking anxiety as “*a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process*”. In a school setting, this means that even though the students might have both the ability and willingness to communicate, they simply feel too anxious to speak in front of others. Therefore, the anxiety experienced in communication in English might influence the achievement of the student's educational goals (Woodrow, 2006, p. 309).

According to Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 127) foreign language anxiety consists of three interrelated performance anxieties: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication apprehension is defined by Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 127) as “*a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people*”. Fear of negative evaluation is defined as “*apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively*” (p. 128). Test anxiety is “*a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure*” to pass elements of assessment (p. 127). FLSA is essentially a negative factor in the language-learning process (Akkakoson, 2016, pp. 127-128). FLSA can interfere with learners' efforts to learn a new language and interfere with the acquisition, retention and production of the new language (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 86).

Foreign language anxiety can affect students in different ways. Wörde (2003, p. 8) mentions that some students project their nervousness days in advance of the EFL class, thus affecting their classroom performance. To illustrate, one student stated, “I just completely blank out, and everything is like a jumble in my head” (p. 8). Other students reported being petrified before and during English class. Some students reacted to their foreign language anxiety by becoming angry or losing patience in class. Another student thought he projected his anger over a former teacher onto his present teacher since the memory of FLA was latent in his brain (p. 8). The almost compulsive need to read ahead in the textbook to know what to say and when to say it was common among these participants. One student said she became aware of other students' anxiety since “people start flipping through the textbook when they

don't know the answer in case the teacher asks them" (p. 8). FLA can leave students constantly worried and tense during the lesson and seldom makes the students feel comfortable. Another effect of FLA is avoidance. Wörde (2003, p. 8) says avoidance was another common manifestation of foreign language anxiety and that oftentimes students will begin to not show up to class. There can also be incidences of students sleeping in class, drawing in their books, or simply focusing on things other than the lesson (p. 8). However, not everyone might experience this strong foreign language anxiety due to their unwillingness to participate orally in the EFL classroom. There can be differences in how students are affected by their reticence.

## 2.2 Reticence

As Anthony (2008, p. 473) states in the introduction, the input of a language is not enough to learn it properly. In agreement with this, Murad and Jalambo (2019, p. 30), who conducted a study on the reasons behind EFL students' speaking reluctance at a university in Palestine, state that the students who learn English as a foreign language do not nearly speak it enough. They write, read, and even listen to English much more than orally producing the language in formal and informal situations. As a result, the need for developing oral skills in an EFL classroom has gained importance. The lack of oral settings reflects negatively on some students (p. 30). In Murad and Jalambo's (2019, p. 30) research revolving around the main reasons behind EFL students' reluctance in speaking activities in English language classrooms, they found that a lack of oral speaking settings resulted in reticence. Murad and Jalambo explain speaking reluctance as; that some students do not speak or participate in English-speaking classrooms (p. 30). These unwilling students generally resist participating in speaking activities where they should be more orally active to develop their communication and speaking skills (Savaşçı, 2014, p. 2683).

Philips was the first to define reticence as "a personality-based anxiety disorder" (as cited in Murad & Jalambo, 2019, p. 30). McCroskey expanded this definition by combining reticence with anxiety when he stated that reticence is "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons (as cited in Murad & Jalambo, 2019, p. 30). More recently, Keaten and Kelly (2000) have defined reticence as "a communication problem with cognitive, affective, and behavioral

dimensions and is due to the belief that one is better off remaining silent than risking appearing foolish”. Changes in the understanding of reticence reflect a growing understanding that the term is more connected to the communication aspect rather than it being an anxiety disorder.

Donald (2010, p. 44) notes that an impact of reticence may be that teachers get false assumptions regarding a student’s language abilities. Since the students may be unable to use the target language in class to interact with either the teacher or the classmates because of their reticence, the teacher may assume that the student has no capability for the language or lacks the desire to improve. If a student does not participate in a discussion or verbally share their ideas, that may cause the teacher to form inaccurate views regarding the students’ abilities, which again can influence the students’ results (p. 44). Reticence also affects students’ internal factors, such as their confidence, self-esteem, and level of participation. Reticent students tend to forget previously learned material and remain passive in classroom activities more than their less reticent counterparts. A high level of reticence might cause students to be quieter and less willing to communicate in other public situations outside of school (Li & Liu, 2011, p. 963). Reticence can also influence the students’ language skills. Their language skills will cease to improve if they remain silent in situations where they should practice their oral English. Li & Liu (2011, p. 961) also mention that students’ reticence not only deprives them of sharing what they know, but it also deprives the teacher and classmates of benefiting from it. The reticent students deprive their classmates of opportunities to benefit from their knowledge, insights, and thinking in that lots of learning stems from idea and perception sharing. Often, one's contributions stimulate more and better thinking from others; everyone in a classroom is responsible for pulling their weight; all need to participate by discussing and listening to others. Therefore, the reticent problem deserves to be seriously studied, and solutions are expected by all who are concerned with teaching and learning (p. 962).

### 2.3 Reasons for reticence

### 2.3.1 Language proficiency (vocabulary and pronunciation)

Arafat Hamouda (2013, p. 24) did a study on first-year non-English university students in Saudi Arabia. He found that one of the reasons why the informants were reticent in class was because they did not know what to say during the class discussions. 54% of the informants said they get anxious when they do not understand what their teacher or peers say in class. The study's findings also revealed that knowing *what* to say is as important as knowing *how* to say it. One student in the study confirmed this statement, "I will only participate if I know what to say" (p. 23). The results from Murad and Jalambo's (2019, p. 39) study showed that the main reason for students' speaking reluctance is a lack of enough vocabulary. They observed that a lack of vocabulary makes some students talk less in the EFL classroom (p. 42).

Another study that supports speaking reluctance as a cause of a lack of enough vocabulary is the research of Chandradasa (2019, p. 137), who did a study on undergraduates in Sri Lanka. She found that pronunciation and vocabulary are issues as to why the students remain silent in the English classroom. The interviews conducted in the study revealed that the students keep quiet because they are scared of mispronouncing words. Some of the students believe that mispronouncing in class will make their friends mock them and that it will damage their reputation. Murad and Jalambo's (2019, p. 42) study also found the students' inability to pronounce some English words appropriately as a reticence-provoker. Başöz and Erten (2019, p. 13) found, in their study on EFL students' willingness to communicate in class in Turkey, that linguistic factors, pronunciation, practice and vocabulary knowledge influence their willingness to communicate. The students also lack self-confidence in these areas, which they found to be a prominent cause of the students' reticence. The most prominent reason for reticence amongst these students is vocabulary knowledge (p. 13). The students mentioned that their vocabulary is insufficient for English and that they did not have anything to contribute to the class. Furthermore, the lessons are harder to understand for students who do not have a broad vocabulary in English, and they therefore chose to remain silent instead of participating in something they do not understand (p. 13).



### *2.3.2 Fear of making mistakes/embarrassment*

One aspect found in Hamouda's (2013, p. 23) research was that EFL students' reluctance to speak English in the classroom is a problem commonly found in a foreign language context. Hamouda's research findings showed that a considerable number of students are reticent to respond to the teacher and remain silent in oral English language classrooms due to many causes. Fear of making mistakes is often cited as an influential cause of perceived reticence and passivity (p. 24). The findings in his study showed that the informants frequently expressed that they feel afraid and sometimes panic because of the fear of committing mistakes or errors in front of classmates. 55% of the students in the study expressed their anxiety about making mistakes because they think their mistakes make them feel incompetent. Moreover, over half of the informants agreed with the statement, "I am afraid of being seen as foolish if I make too many mistakes when I speak in class". They believe this will distort their image in front of their classmates. Fear of being laughed at is one of the causes that contributes to the passivity and reticence of students to participate in the class discussion. More than 41% of students said they dislike participating in class discussions because they fear being laughed at by their peers (p. 24). Savaşçı (2014, p. 2683) also argues that one of the main reasons the students participating in her study were reluctant to speak in EFL classrooms is due to fear of public failure and making mistakes. Alnahidh and Altalahab (2020, p. 55) did a study on FLA at a Saudi EFL university. They found that students are reticent to participate in oral activities when their self-confidence in their language abilities is low. This is because their own minds will make them think they are going to make mistakes before they have spoken. Başöz and Erten's (2019, pp. 1-2) study on EFL students' willingness to communicate in English at a university in Turkey showed that low self-assessment in pronunciation and fear of negative evaluation causes a lack of self-confidence and high unwillingness to speak English.

### *2.3.3 Fear of teacher error correction*

Amongst many of the reasons mentioned in Hamouda's (2013, p. 24) research, the students also mentioned that fear of being criticized and embarrassed by the teacher in front of classmates are one of the factors that contributes to their reticence in the classroom. Over half of the students prefer to remain silent rather than participate orally in the classroom to avoid the teacher's criticism or any embarrassing situations. This result agrees with Tanveer's (2007, pp. 44-45) study, which found that some students prefer to remain silent due to their

consciousness of their foreign language knowledge and avoid being called out on it. Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 130) state that teachers' authoritative, embarrassing, and humiliating attitudes towards students, mainly when they make mistakes, can severely affect learners' willingness to communicate in class. The teacher's harshness and strictness are teacher traits that many of the students in Hamouda's (2013, p. 24) study mentioned discourage their oral participation. Around 75% of the students in the study agreed on being reluctant to speak because of the teacher's harsh comments and hostile gestures. Some also said that they get more anxious and reluctant in the classroom when their teacher is rigorous and therefore feel relaxed when the teacher responds in a friendly way (p. 24). The study revealed that some students worry they have low English proficiency and cannot speak English well. They fear the teacher will get a wrong impression of them if they make mistakes, and therefore avoid talking in class. They also fear being corrected in front of the class if they make mistakes. This perception may be due to the teaching attitude and the teacher's practice (p. 25).

In Wörde's (2003, p. 6) study, the students mentioned teacher error correction as an anxiety-provoking factor by students. She explains how students report feeling disturbed when teachers "begin to reprimand" them for making errors. Students reported becoming frustrated when the teacher corrected the error before they had time to formulate a response (p. 6). Comments made by several students in the study mentioned many teachers interrupting them in order to correct speaking errors. These interruptions frequently cause students to lose focus and become less keen to participate orally (p. 6). However, in Savasci's (2014, p. 2685) research, the informants were asked whether they feel that teacher error correction can influence their reticence. All the informants stated that this do not affect their willingness to participate orally in class. For these students, other anxiety-provoking reasons appear more strongly than teacher error correction (p. 2685).

#### *2.3.4 Lack of motivation*

According to Ornelas (2021, p. 61), the fact that children spend too much time in a classroom during the school day may contribute to their lack of motivation to learn the English language, which results in reticence. He also points out that continuous monitoring and assessment by the teacher is another reason for low motivation. Supporting this, Littlewood (2004) did a study on 567 Hong Kong students and discovered that one of the reasons for

their speaking reluctance is insufficient interest in the class and the subjects (as cited in Savaşçı (2014, p. 2683). Further, Ornelas (2021, p. 61) elaborates that sometimes the students' speaking reluctance is reflected in not being able to find any internal motivation to push on further. Therefore, the teacher's role is essential in motivating students to learn when motivation is lacking. Başöz and Erten (2019, pp. 8, 13) support this and states that motivation affects the students' willingness to participate in speaking activities in English. Therefore, the students who lack the motivation to participate feel no desire to speak English in the classroom.

Lack of interest in the topics of the lesson also plays a vital role in students' oral participation in the classroom. When a topic is unattractive to students, they often lack the motivation to discuss it. On the contrary, when the students find topics interesting, they become more orally active (Ornelas, 2021, p. 35) Hamouda's (2013, p. 27) study confirmed the same findings, where many students stated that they feel uninterested in the English topics in the classroom discussions and that they do not want to take part in class discussions if the lesson is boring (p. 27) Language learning motivation makes the students want to continue learning the target language. Motivated students desire to learn the language, improve their proficiency, and enjoy working towards their goal (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 566) Skulstad (2020, p. 113) states that the aim of an EFL class should be for the students to be motivated to use the target language as much as possible since using the language is a significant factor in developing the language. Teachers should, therefore, facilitate a classroom that motivates and supports students. Akkakoson (2016, p. 55) studied EFL students' thoughts on whether the teacher's behavior could influence their reticence at a university in Thailand. The study revealed that the teacher's behavior is crucial in motivating them to want to learn the target language (p. 55)

Başöz and Erten (2019, pp. 9, 13) revealed that the topic of the lesson impacts students' reticence in the EFL classroom. According to the participants of Başöz and Erten's (2019, pp. 9, 13) study, topic familiarity and interest are the most important characteristics of a particular topic of the lesson, which play a major role in creating eagerness or reticence in English class. Their study continues to explain the effect of a lesson topic on students' degree of reticence towards English. Topic familiarity may result in an increase in an individual's

linguistic self-confidence, whereas a lack of knowledge about a topic may impede communication. Moreover, students appear to be most willing to participate orally in a topic they are interested in. In contrast, they are unwilling to talk about topics that they find boring (pp. 9, 13). MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 546) agree and state that lesson topics significantly influence the ease of language use among students.

### *2.3.5 The educational consequences of Covid-19*

During the two years of lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic in Norway, most schools had to close and implement digital home school. According to The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, hereby referred to as UDIR (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021), digital home schooling resulted in some students losing motivation. Additionally, the teachers lost physical contact with their students, which affected the learning results in a negative direction. However, it is still too early to see any clear long-term consequences of the pandemic in the statistics UDIR usually uses to assess learning outcomes and implementation. During the pandemic, the government aimed to keep the children's and teenagers' education as little affected as possible. Nevertheless, strict restrictions and lockdowns were necessary for schools to keep the pandemic under control. The lockdown and restrictions led many students to experience significant changes in everyday school life and had both academic and social losses over the past two years (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2022).

A more extensive survey that focused on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic in primary schools showed a tendency for the students who previously had challenges in the classroom to experience the digital home school as a challenge. Therefore, students who already were reticent remained this way or increased their reticence (Caspersen et al., 2021). From May to June 2021, a working group was set up, led by the Director of Education at the County Governor in Oslo and Viken, Grethe Hovde Parr (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2022). The working group's purpose was to assess students' academic and social learning loss due to the pandemic, and it was called the "Working Group for the School after Corona". The working group for the school after Corona concluded that many students had felt the consequences of the pandemic, especially at an academic and social level. These consequences have shown themselves as reduced learning outcomes

because of a lack of social interactions and worse teaching lessons during periods of digital home school (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2022).

According to Caspersen et al. (2021) most teachers in upper secondary school state that the transition to digital home school was most challenging for students at a lower academic level and vulnerable students. Most of the teachers experienced that the two-way communication with the students worsened since most of them barely responded when spoken to by the teacher. Andersen, Bråten, Bøckmann, Kindt, Nyen and Tønder (2021) claim that students with academic or other challenges said that the closed schools and homeschooling affected them negatively. Whereas students at a higher academic level were not particularly affected academically by the lockdown (Andersen et al., 2021)

## 2.4 Methods and Strategies for preventing reticence

Choice of teaching strategies and teaching methods in the classroom determine students' speaking reluctance (Savaşçı, 2014, p. 2683). These strategies and methods can be lesson objectives and task types, which may influence the kind of oral interactions a teacher uses in the classroom (p. 2683) Therefore, the teacher's choice of methods and strategies implemented in the students' language learning process significantly impacts the students' reticence in the classroom.

### 2.4.1 *Selective error correction*

Selective error correction composes a two-step procedure that begins with detecting a student's error and ends with highlighting the error to allow the learner to collect the information necessary to fix the error. Feedback can be confined to a single category or several pre-determined categories of errors (Zulfikar, 2022, p. 72). The teacher should not correct students' oral mistakes or errors directly but give constructive feedback (Akkakoson, 2016, p. 67). Zulfikar (2022, p. 72) states that correction should be given in manageable portions of feedback on patterns of errors in the students' speech. Hendrickson (1978, pp. 387-391) states that in previous research on teacher error correction, one of the teacher's aims in the EFL classroom was to prevent mistakes from occurring. It was seen as "wrong" to have your students make mistakes. Similar advice was given to teachers in a first-year Spanish textbook published in the seventies. Under the rubric "Suggestions for classroom procedure,"

the author listed a suggestion: "Whenever a mistake is made, the teacher should correct it at once and then repeat the correct pattern or question for the benefit of the entire class" (pp. 387-391). In other words, it was advised that teachers should correct any mistake at once and then explain to the class why it was a mistake to prevent it from happening again (pp. 387-391).

According to Hendrickson (1978, pp. 387-391), the new positive perspective toward second language errors is based partly upon the analogy that children make numerous errors while acquiring their first language. These are errors that their parents expect and accept as a natural and necessary part of child development. Many language researchers propose that foreign language teachers should also expect many errors from their EFL students and accept them as a natural phenomenon regarding learning a second language (pp. 387-391). When teachers tolerate some student errors, the other students often feel more confident about using the target language than if all their errors are corrected. It is vital that the teachers remind the students that everybody makes mistakes when learning any new skill and that people learn from their mistakes when they receive periodic and supportive feedback. Not only do all language learners necessarily produce errors when they communicate, but errors can also provide valuable insights into the language acquisition processes (pp. 387-391). Hendrickson (1978, pp. 387-391) believes that errors are signs from the students that learning is taking place and that these errors can indicate students' progress and success in language learning.

Before correcting student errors, teachers must consider whether the errors should be corrected at all and, if so, why (pp. 387-391). When students are not able to recognize their own errors, they need the assistance of someone more proficient in the language than they are. Teachers must know that producing errors is a natural and necessary phenomenon in language learning. Additionally, they should accept a wide margin of deviation from the targeted language's "standard" forms and structures from the students (pp. 387-391). Wörde (2003, p. 7) stresses that it is essential for a teacher to be sensitive to students' fears and insecurities. Students should work to confront their fears, and the teacher should be of help, and that can be done using gentle or non-threatening methods of error correction and offering words of encouragement (pp. 6-7). This way, selective error correction is less overwhelming for the students. Selective error correction focuses on fluency to avoid interrupting the flow

of the students' oral production of the language. Therefore, selective error correction is a vital tool to keep in mind. In other words, making the students produce words orally and speak freely without being corrected by the teacher immediately (Zulfikar, 2022, p. 72).

#### *2.4.2 Group work in the EFL classroom*

Group work entails any teaching and learning activities or assessment tasks where students of varying levels of a group work together. These groups can be pairs, small groups or large groups who seek to gain knowledge and understanding of concepts to achieve a goal on different tasks. This way, students can discuss or collaborate on tasks with their peers in a less intimidating setting (Zulfikar, 2022, p. 72). Group work in English language teaching (ELT) might be related to Vygotsky's notion that social support is essential for students' success in learning. In addition, group work creates an interactive environment which can aid the growth of students' linguistic and communicative skills (p. 72). Akkakoson (2016, p. 67) supports this by stating that group work can increase students' motivation, classroom communicative focus, bravery in making mistakes and confidence in oral production. Jackson's (2002, p. 75) three-year case study on a bilingual Chinese-English university in Hong Kong showed that when the classroom is organized in a group setting and facilitated group work, it provides a situation more beneficial to express different perspectives and opinions. According to Drew and Sørheim (2016, p. 59), this may be because placing students in groups allows them to see each other's faces. Therefore, the conversation becomes more natural and authentic, which might result in increased oral participation.

Drew and Sørheim (2016, p. 59) argue that participating orally in pairs or groups makes the students less insecure since they only talk to their group or partner. Jackson (2002, pp. 75-76) found that although students will not participate orally in class, they have no problem discussing in groups or pairs since it is more informal and intimate. She also discovered that using small groups eliminates some of the anxiety-provoking reasons, such as the fear of being humiliated in front of the whole class, fear of being the focal point, and fear of being viewed as a "show off", which leads to the students' oral reticence (p. 82). Group work allows the students to prepare their answers and thoughts with each other before sharing them with the rest of the class. The preparation can make the students feel more comfortable sharing their answers and thoughts since they speak on behalf of others and not just

themselves (pp. 70, 80). The use of group work can lead to more detailed answers from the students, and they can become more engaged when discussing with the whole class (p. 82). Allowing the class to prepare answers during group work can increase oral participation and the quality of the oral responses. This can be because the students want their group to do well, and participating becomes more manageable when the shared answers and thoughts are not solely their own (p. 80).

#### *2.4.3 The use of games in teaching*

When students interact with each other through pair or group work, they are allowed to have some control, “which allows them to experiment with language” (Ornelas, 2021, p. 13). In addition, Ornelas (2021, pp. 67, 72) believes that activities done in pairs also provide learners with an opportunity to learn the language through mutual support, which will benefit their process of learning and stimulate their spoken production. Furthermore, he believes that using games in students’ learning process can be highly beneficial in order to help their ability to speak the targeted language. Using games in the classroom has many qualities that can contribute to creating a learning environment where students naturally use the language (Flogenfeldt et al., 2020). The games will provide students with an environment that will be both motivating and fun. Since their behavior will be positively affected, learners may feel more comfortable speaking (Ornelas, 2021, pp. 67, 72). Some games are based on clear rules, a clear goal and a vital element of fun, which provide rich opportunities for meaningful use of the target language. During the games, linguistic phrases and sentence structures are repeated. Such clear frameworks for linguistic production can help lower the pupils' affective filter by focusing on the games rather than themselves (Flogenfeldt et al., 2020) However, these clear frameworks and structures are necessary for participation in the game and must be explained carefully and practiced in advance. Otherwise, insecure students can easily have a negative experience (Flogenfeldt et al., 2020). Games are an efficient strategy to provide learners with a non-threatening setting to develop their oral skills since all the focus is on the game.

If students are provided with a setting where they feel secure and able to learn through having fun, they may become more involved with the language. Since games may make students feel more secure and confident, they may likely be able to speak more in class (Ornelas, 2021, p. 13). In connection to Flogenfeldt (2020), Ornelas (2021, pp. 67, 72) identifies some



advantages of the use of games, where one is that games help develop elements related to accuracy (vocabulary, pronunciation, form) discreetly. The students are too occupied with the game to worry about their pronunciation. Gozcu and Caganaga (2016, pp. 133-134) also say that games encourage students to interact and communicate successfully and create a meaningful context to use the language. Games also decrease anxiety and allow students to participate in a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere. According to Ornelas (2021, pp. 67, 72) games encourage and motivate learners, especially reluctant ones, to speak, and they change the classroom atmosphere by providing fun. The fun element of games has many advantages for both language teachers and students. They support learning the target language when students are involved in the games, and they have fun without noticing that they are learning the target language. Furthermore, it is more pleasurable for the teacher to present and teach the target language in an enjoyable atmosphere. Games allow teachers and students a chance to escape from unusual routines, which can be very beneficial to students' learning motivation (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016, pp. 127-129). This is supported by Wörde (2003, p. 7) who stresses that foreign language anxiety decreases when the teachers make the class interesting and fun through games. Similarly, using topics and themes relevant to students' lives and interests appeared to reduce anxiety and increase learner motivation for many (p. 7). Lastly, games allow students to interact with one another, thus also helping improve their fluency (Ornelas, 2021, p. 13). According to Ornelas (2021, pp. 67, 72), students showed that they could produce more spoken utterances in English when they were involved in activities where they were to interact with each other. Students used the target language more with each other and therefore avoided L1 when speaking. Games have the unique characteristic of increasing students' motivation when learning. This shows that the more motivated a student is in doing an activity, the more they may contribute to it (pp. 67, 72).

One type of game, a guessing game, can create a non-threatening environment where the students can use the language freely without worrying about making mistakes in front of the class (Ornelas, 2021, p. 7). This proves the point that games done in pairs allow students to develop their fluency and reflect more spontaneity as they practice (p. 7). Students can become so eager to play the game that it takes them to places where they can develop and use the language without paying attention directly to the accuracy of the language (p. 7). During Ornelas' (2021, p. 7) execution of a guessing game with his participants, it became evident how relaxed the students were and the high enthusiasm and interest they manifested during

the guessing game. The relaxed atmosphere, enthusiasm and interest that occurred reflected more significant efforts to use the target language despite slight hesitations and linguistic mistakes. An advantage of using games in a foreign language setting, as mentioned by Gozcu and Caganaga (2016, pp. 133-134), is to reduce stressful situations that can appear in the classroom. In a language learning atmosphere, a stress-free environment should be provided. Games in the EFL classroom are very advantageous since students may feel less anxiety and their positive feelings can increase. Their self-confidence improves because they are not afraid of being punished or criticized while practicing the language freely (pp. 133-134).

#### *2.4.4 Support of L1*

Munden (2017, p. 191) states that English teachers in Norway should aim to speak as much English as possible when teaching English to students from the age of nine and upwards. She explains that in order to learn English, students need to hear the language whenever there is an opportunity. Iversen (2019, p. 54) agrees with this statement, however, he adds that by allowing students to use the languages they already know, it might contribute to a better understanding of the targeted language. According to Krulatz et al. (2018, p. 108) teachers must facilitate a classroom which encourages students to use their home languages since it is a resource for further development in the target language. They also state that English teachers have the “moral responsibility” to make students aware of how important it is to respect all languages, and cultures, found in the classroom (p. 108). Other languages should be considered a resource for learning English. In Akkakoson’s (2016, p. 57) study, all three teachers interviewed agree that using the target language (English) in an English conversation class is necessary. The teachers view output in the target language as crucial since the only chance for the students living in a non-English country to use English, is in the classroom. If they have limited opportunities to listen to English or converse in English, they may not develop a strong language acquisition.

Akkakoson (2016, pp. 56-59) found that the teachers in the study made it acceptable for their students who were struggling orally, to switch between L1 and L2. However, efficient students were encouraged to use English all the time in EFL classes. Those who tried to convey a message in English but remained incomprehensible were allowed to use their L1. This is because of the renewed focus on communication in English, rather than perfect

grammar and sentences (pp. 56-59). Butzkamm (2003, p. 30) states that the mother tongue, or the home language, is the “*most important ally a foreign language can have*”. He explains that by using a student's L1, where they have already learned to think, communicate, and understand grammar, gives them a great advantage in the targeted language’s learning process (pp. 30-31). On the other hand, over-dependence on an L1 is not recommended for the student’s language learning acquisition. The level of L1 use should be decreased steadily when students’ second/foreign language confidence and skill increase. Slowly but steadily, the students should be able to communicate in English without feeling the need to lean on their L1 (Akkakoson, 2016, pp. 56-59).

#### *2.4.5 Creating a safe and supportive learning environment*

Motivating and encouraging your students is one important aspect of being a good teacher. It can be difficult, as a teacher, to know how to act when faced with students who refuse to participate or be orally active. The way a teacher interacts with students is important and their relationship with their students should be a priority. If students trust the instructor, they can feel more secure. If they feel secure, they may be more spontaneous and less reticent. Jackson’s (2002, p. 80) study revealed that the classroom organization and its atmosphere are important factors in influencing the students’ degree of oral participation and their reticence. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009, pp. 41-42) support this statement and point out that the crucial part of helping these reticent students is to provide them with a safe learning environment. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009, pp. 41-42) also support the reasons mentioned earlier, such as fear of making mistakes, being judged and ridiculed by their classmates and/or mispronouncing, as important factors to oral reticence. The classroom atmosphere should be a place characterized by patience, encouragement and acceptance (Skulstad, 2020, pp. 113-114). In order to become proficient speakers of English, students should use English orally as much as possible and take chances, rather than being nervous about making mistakes or being laughed at (p. 113).

According to Drew and Sørheim (2016, pp. 58-59), the classroom atmosphere should be calm and encouraging. Since some students are reluctant to participate orally in front of the class, the teacher should facilitate a classroom where these students’ needs are considered. This can, for example, be accomplished by using group work, building students’ self-confidence,

and making sure students know they are not laughing at other students' mistakes. In addition, as mentioned earlier regarding teacher error correction, teachers should not comment on students' mistakes while they are speaking. They should not do this since it can lead to students becoming more self-conscious and thus choosing not to participate (pp. 58-59). Teachers have a supporting role in helping motivate students to use language and participate in EFL oral classrooms. Their responsibility is to create a relaxing, non-threatening and supportive classroom learning environment. On the other hand, a teacher can work extremely hard to build a safe and supportive learning environment, but there may still be some students who feel judged or laughed at. Even though the learning environment is essential in making the students feel safer, there can still be reticence among some of the students because of other factors (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009, p. 43). A supportive and positive classroom atmosphere or environment significantly reduces foreign language anxiety (Wörde, 2003, p. 7). This may include the teacher's personality and attitude toward the language and the students. A sense of community in the classroom contributes greatly to a relaxed atmosphere. When students feel that they are among friends, oftentimes anxious feelings are allayed and the fear of making mistakes is decreased (p. 7). The teachers may consciously foster a communal and friendly atmosphere and suggest that the students themselves proactively create such an environment. Anxiety may decrease within the classroom if students interact in activities that contribute to a feeling of group identity and support outside the classroom (p. 7).

Başöz and Erten (2019, pp. 6-7, 12) also agree that the classroom environment in the EFL classroom is one key factor for students' willingness to communicate. In their research, Başöz and Erten (2019, pp. 6-7, 12) mention six important sub-factors that impact students' oral participation in English; classmates, instructional methods, the teacher, atmosphere, materials, and class size. More than half of the participants (19 out of 32) from Başöz and Erten's (2019, pp. 6-7, 12) study mentioned how big an influence their classmates have on their oral participation in speaking English inside the classroom. The students appeared to believe that the classroom atmosphere plays an important role in their communication participation in English. They expressed that they are keener to speak English in a relaxed atmosphere with a good and supportive relationship between the teacher and the students. Moreover, they stated that a noisy classroom hinders their participation and learning. One student claimed that the classroom atmosphere directly affects her willingness to speak

English in front of her peers. She said that she does not want to talk when there is a tense atmosphere in the classroom. Mostly, there is a warm and friendly environment in the classroom which motivates her to speak English. Still, when the classroom environment changes for the worse, her motivation and willingness disappear. Başöz and Erten (2019, pp. 6-7, 12) further argue that the classroom's social climate directly influences the satisfaction of students' fundamental mental needs, thereby positively affecting the development of more self-directed forms of motivation. That results in greater levels of willingness to participate orally in the EFL classroom. A positive classroom environment also reduces anxiety among learners and fosters enjoyment to learn a second language (pp. 6-7, 12).

### 3.0 Methodology

A distinction that quickly emerges in social science methodology is between qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data is numbers-based, countable, or measurable. Qualitative data is interpretation-based, descriptive, and related to language (Johannesen et al., 2021, pp. 22-23). One can use a qualitative method to get more detailed and complementary information about the phenomenon that is to be studied. The qualitative method is, therefore, appropriate when one wants to understand why people think and act the way they do (pp. 22-23). What distinguishes qualitative data from quantitative data is that it contains information in words rather than numbers. The typical qualitative data material is transcripts of interviews, notes from observational surveys, media texts and other documents of interest to the issues to which an answer is sought (Hjerm & Lindgren, 2011, pp. 84-85).

This study aims to gather information about Norwegian lower secondary teachers' perceptions and methods regarding oral reticence among their students. We sought deep and reflective answers from the students, which led us to believe that a qualitative study was best suited. This study's research questions are as follows:

*“What does international research say about reasons for reticence, and how does this compare to Norwegian lower secondary teachers' perceptions? What methods and strategies do they think may prevent this reticence?”*

The additional research question:

*“How has the covid-19 pandemic affected Norwegian lower secondary students’ oral participation in class?”*

### 3.1 Choice of Method

The qualitative interview is a prominent form of data collection in qualitative research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 42). Kvale and Brinkmann (2015, p. 47) characterize the qualitative research interview as a conversation with a structure and a purpose. It is well suited when one wants to study opinions, attitudes and experiences. Interviews are suitable when the researcher needs to give the informants greater freedom to express themselves than a structured questionnaire allows, hence why we chose this method. Interviews will naturally be linked to the informant as a subject, where the researcher tries to uncover what the informant thinks about a phenomenon (Johannesen et al., 2021, pp. 105-110).

The most common form of a qualitative interview is a middle ground between structured and unstructured interviews, called a semi-structured interview (Johannesen et al., 2021, pp. 105-110). A semi-structured interview is an interview where one starts with a set of topics or questions/interview guide but allows more fluidity in the interview (Avineri, 2017, p. 106). The interview guide contains a few specific questions, and one can move back and forth with different follow-up questions throughout the interview (Johannesen et al., 2021, pp. 105-110). Based on Avineri’s (2017, p. 106) statements regarding semi-structured interviews, we found a semi-structured interview most fitting for our research. This is because it allowed us some structure, made sure it was comparable to other answers, and provided opportunities to get more information concerning different aspects of our research.

### 3.2 Selection of Informants

Our research question concerns teachers’ beliefs and thoughts on students’ reticence and how they may work towards preventing it. Therefore, we have chosen to interview teachers and not students. Due to time limits, we chose not to interview teachers and students, but we know of the benefits student interviews would have given us. We sought informants who work as English teachers in lower secondary schools. We wanted lower secondary teachers because we see lower secondary as fragile and crucial years paving the way for the next

school years and language development. Even though the students may have a broader English vocabulary throughout lower secondary than in their primary school years, they are still exposed to grades for the first time, which can lead to stress. It can be stressful because these students are not used to being assessed with a symbol of their level of proficiency. These school years interest us, so we wanted to focus on lower secondary school. The study was conducted on five English teachers from three different schools in Norway. All the schools are in the eastern part of Norway, where two of them are more urban than the third. Our informants were both male and female teachers with teaching experience ranging from newly educated to experienced teachers.

The process of gathering informants went better than anticipated. We emailed a handful of teachers we knew of beforehand, and they were all willing to participate. Because we only interviewed five teachers from one part of Norway, this study cannot be generalized to all lower secondary schools in Norway. On the other hand, it provides valuable information contributing to how English teachers work with reticent students.

### 3.3 Data analysis

In order to analyze our collected data, we decided to use phenomenological analysis. This analysis makes the analyst reflect upon their preconceptions about the data and tries to exclude them from focusing on its meaning and content (Johannesen et al., 2021, pp. 28-30). According to Johannesen et al., (2021, pp. 28-30) the phenomenological analysis consists of four steps, overall impression and outline of content, codes and categories, condensation, and summary.

The first step is an overall impression and outline of the content. This step involves getting a complete impression of the data, where the researcher finds central topics without getting lost in detail (Johannesen et al., 2021, pp. 28-30). The researcher is also allowed to remove irrelevant material. We removed the sections from the interviews that we found irrelevant to our research questions and sections where the informants repeated themselves. The second step is coding and categorizing, which consists of finding significant elements from the data connected to the main topics and the research questions (pp. 28-30). Coding is a tool used to

organize meaningful information. We coded our data by reading and listening through our transcriptions and found that the two main categories from our main research question worked well as the main topics for the data analysis. These two categories were “reasons for reticence” and “methods and strategies”. After coding, the third step is condensation. This step is where the coded material is sorted into the categories created, leaving us with a reduced amount of material (pp. 28-30).

While reading through the transcription and listening to the interviews, we placed the informants’ answers in the appropriate categories. We wrote down the reasons and methods and strategies mentioned by the informants continuously throughout the listening and reading process. In each of the two main categories, we also added a few sub-categories. These will be further mentioned in the “Results” chapter. We compared our notes with each other and ended up with our main reasons and methods and strategies. At this step in the analysis, we found that co-writing gave us an advantage since one of us sometimes paid attention to different details than the other and therefore ended up with a broader view of the results. The final step consists of a summary of the data. Here we had to consider if the finished data setup was coherent with the initial data. If not, changes need to be made in order to ensure that the summary represents the original material in the best way possible (Johannesen et al., 2021, pp. 28-30). We found that our setup of the coded data represented the original data adequately. After working through these four steps, the coded data is ready to be presented and discussed further in the study.

### 3.4 Interview approach

#### *3.4.1 Developing the interview guide*

Before we interviewed our informants, we developed an interview guide approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, hereby referred to as NSD (SIKT). If personal data is to be processed in connection with a research project, one needs to apply for approval to carry out the research project. We had to apply to NSD (SIKT) since we were to record our interviews, which are defined as personal data. The interview guide is based on our main research question, additional question, and theoretical framework. Our questions are a continuation of the questions we conducted in our previous research paper. It is not the same



questions used, instead, it is an altered and improved version of them to match our research questions. We wanted to start off the interviews with simple questions, such as teaching experience, what grade they teach, and their educational background. The reason for this is to make these types of questions act as a warm-up and build up the connection between the informant and the interviewer (Johannesen et al., 2021, p. 151). Before our interviews, we had a session with our supervisor, another teacher and two fellow students. We came to an agreement during the discussion to implement questions about Covid-19 in our interview guide. It was clear that everyone thought it would be interesting to see if the teachers we were to interview thought the pandemic had affected the students' reticence.

### *3.4.2 The interviews*

Before we started interviewing, the informants signed a consent form and agreed to have the interviews recorded. They were again informed about their anonymity, what information would be included, and how the recordings and transcription would be saved. To execute the interviews as structured and similar as possible, we conducted the interviews with both of us present. We had one primary interviewer who asked the main questions and the other listened and provided follow-up questions if needed. All the interviews were successful, and we got a lot of exciting and meaningful answers. The informants seemed engaged and had much to say regarding the subject. One of the benefits of choosing a semi-structured interview was that we could adapt the questions to the direction of the conversation, whether that would be skipping already answered questions or changing the order of the questions. Afterwards, we transcribed the interviews and deleted the recordings to protect the informants' anonymity.

## 3.5 Reflections regarding the method's quality

When assessing the quality of a qualitative research design, one must consider validity and reliability. This section will include our reflections on validity, reliability, and ethical considerations.

### *3.5.1 Validity*

A standard definition of validity within quantitative research is the questions, "Do we measure what we want to measure?" or "Are you measuring what you are seeking to

measure” (Avineri, 2017, p. 153). According to this definition, qualitative studies are invalid because they cannot be quantified (measured) (Johannesen et al., 2021, pp. 256-257).

However, within qualitative research, we can describe validity as a method that investigates what it intends to investigate (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, pp. 276-277). Ensuring validity is essential when getting ready for and conducting the interviews. Then again, it is also a continuous process throughout the project and does not stop after the interviews are finished (pp. 276-277). To ensure the thesis’ validity, we designed an interview guide with highly relevant questions to get accurate answers to our research question and additional question. Another way to ensure this master’s thesis’ validity is to guarantee whether our research question and additional question were answered in the interviews, which we believe they were.

Validity in qualitative research concerns the extent to which the researcher’s methods and findings correctly reflect the purpose of the study and represent reality (Johannesen et al., 2021, pp. 256-257). Kvale and Brinkman (2015, pp. 276-277) say that validity can also be defined as a statement’s truth, correctness and strength. A valid conclusion is correctly derived from its premises. A valid argument is reasonable, well-founded, justified, solid and convincing. With this in mind, qualitative research can also provide helpful scientific knowledge (pp. 276-277). Johannessen et al. (2021, pp. 256-257) mention two techniques that increase the likelihood that qualitative research will produce valid results: continuous observation and triangulation. Continuous observation means investing enough time to get to know the field well so that one can distinguish between relevant and non-relevant information and build trust. It is difficult to understand a phenomenon without knowing the context. Considering this, we investigated the field of study by reading several previously conducted studies concerning EFL students’ reticence. Method triangulation means that the researcher uses different methods during the fieldwork - for example, observation and interview (pp. 256-257). It can also mean that the researcher does not just interview one specific person but rather multiple different ones, like in our case where we interview several English teachers from different schools.

Johannessen et al. (2021, pp. 256-257) also mention that one of the ways to strengthen the validity of the research is to let the informants read through and confirm the processed data

themselves. We did not want to take up more time than necessary from the teachers since they seemed busy when we were interviewing them. Therefore, we did not send the informants the data for them to confirm. Choosing not to send the data to the informants could potentially limit the study's validity. However, considering that we recorded the interviews, we have the informants' answers and statements word by word.

### *3.5.2 Reliability*

Reliability regards the consistency and credibility of the research results. Reliability is often concerned with whether other researchers can reproduce a result at other times. In other words, reliability concerns whether another person would provide the same score or measure no matter when they analyze the data or whose data they are analyzing (Avineri, 2017, p. 153). For instance, whether the interviewee would change their answers in an interview with another researcher. During the interview, the interviewer's reliability is often seen in connection with leading questions, which can influence the answers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 276). We sought to be objective in the interviews by not letting our prior knowledge from our research of theory be revealed and affect the informants. We did not give the teachers any prior information on reticence and its reasons. We also tried not to react in any way when they mentioned what they thought the reasons for speaking reticence were. Therefore, we believe that the interviews were not negatively affected or led by our subjective views. While high reliability of the interview findings is desirable to counteract subjectivity, too strong a focus on reliability can counteract creative thinking and variation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 276). The counteract of creative thinking and variation is likely to be shown in a structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are better in situations where it would be relevant to improvise and ask follow-up questions if the informants say something interesting (p. 276). At the same, this can affect the reliability of the data negatively since allowing the interviewer to improvise will result in different answers from all the informants.

Reliability relates to the research's data. What data is being used, and how it is collected and processed. Reliability is critical in quantitative research, and there are different ways to test data reliability (test-retest and inter-reliability). On the other hand, such tests are difficult to execute in qualitative research. Firstly, structured data collection techniques are usually not

used in qualitative research. It is conversation with others, and people's perceptions and thoughts that often are the data that is collected. Secondly, observations depend on the context, and it will be impossible for another researcher to duplicate another qualitative researcher's research. Thirdly, researchers use themselves as instruments. No one else has the same background of experience as the researcher, and no one else can interpret similarly. The researcher can strengthen reliability by giving the reader a detailed description of the context and an open and detailed presentation of the procedure during the entire research process. It is, therefore, important that the researcher is transparent and shares the steps of the research process (Johannesen et al., 2021, p. 256). By presenting our method section in a descriptive and detailed way, we ensure the reliability of the data.

Another potential issue considering reliability is the translation of the interviews. All five of our interviews were conducted in Norwegian. We wanted the interviews to be in Norwegian because we thought the informants would express themselves more freely. We also thought it was more comfortable for us and the informants to use our mother tongue, and fewer misunderstandings might occur due to language problems. Therefore, we had to translate the interviews after transcribing them in Norwegian. During our translation, we tried to find correlating English words with the equivalent meaning and expression as the Norwegian words used. However, in some cases, the sentence structure had to be changed. The reason for this was the occurrence of words or terms without an equivalent phrase in English. We did our best to stay objective and neutral when translating, but it may be affected by our interpretations. Therefore, we have noted our translations with "translated by the authors".

Lastly, a limitation regarding our data's reliability is that we only conducted interviews. We do not know if the informants do what they say they do in the classroom. A way to ensure this could have been by observing the teachers as well. One uses observation as a method in addition to an interview to get the two methods to complement each other. Through the interview, we find out how the teachers *describe* their practice, but through observation, we get to *see* their practice (Dalland, 2018, pp. 100-103). Using an interview allows us to understand the other person's perspective (Avineri, 2017, p. 102). Observation as a research method is an excellent way to determine if the theory matches the practice (Dalland, 2018, pp. 100-103). Unfortunately, because of time limitations, we did not get the opportunity to

observe the informants. Observation, in addition to interviews, is something that can be considered for further research.

#### *3.5.4 Ethical considerations*

The national research ethics committee for social sciences and humanities (NESH) has adopted research ethics guidelines. These guidelines can be summarized in three types of considerations that a researcher must think through (Johannesen et al., 2021, p. 45):

1. The informant's right to self-determination and autonomy
2. The researcher's duty to respect the informant's privacy
3. The researcher's responsibility to avoid harm

The first type of consideration regards those asked to participate, those who participate and those who have previously participated in a survey, and how they can decide on their participation. The informants must voluntarily consent to participate and must be able to withdraw without giving reasons (Johannesen et al., 2021, p. 46). We sent a consent form to the informants before we conducted the interviews. Informed consent means that the research informants are informed about the research's overall purpose and main features. Informed consent also means ensuring that those involved participate voluntarily and informing them of their right to withdraw at any time (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, pp. 104-105).

The second consideration regards the fact that people should have the right to decide who they "let into" their lives and what information is "let out". Informants must be sure that the researcher has a duty of confidentiality and does not use information that can be identified (Johannesen et al., 2021, p. 46). We clarified how the gathered information was to be handled in our consent form and reminded the informants of it before we started the interviews. The final consideration regards how the researcher must assess whether data collection may affect vulnerable and sensitive areas that may be difficult to process and recover from after finishing the interviews. Those participating must be subjected to the least possible strain (Johannesen et al., 2021, p. 46). Our recordings were automatically saved safely on an online form that only we could access through our university accounts. Additionally, we transcribed the interviews as soon as possible to delete the recordings consecutively.

## 4.0 Results

In this chapter, we will present the findings of this study. The findings will be presented within two categories: reasons and methods and strategies. Through transcribing, processing and analyzing the data, we managed to sort the findings into the two main categories. The findings presented in this chapter will consist of results from the interviews we had with five teachers, hereby referred to as informants:

- Informant 1: Female. One year of teaching experience in English. Teaches English in 8<sup>th</sup> grade this year. Works at a school in the Oslo area.
- Informant 2: Female. Around twenty years of teaching experience in English. Teaches English in 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Works at a school in the eastern part of Norway.
- Informant 3: Male. Ten years of teaching experience in English. Teaches English in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Works at a school in the Oslo area.
- Informant 4: Female. Over twenty years of teaching experience in English. Teaches English in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Works at a school in the Oslo area.
- Informant 5: Male. One year of teaching experience in English. Works mainly as a support teacher in English in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Works at a school in the Oslo area.

### 4.1 Reasons for reticence

In this section, we will present the reasons for reticence mentioned by the informants in our interviews. As mentioned in the “Methodology” chapter, while we transcribed our interviews, we categorized our results into smaller sub-categories under the two main categories. The reasons mentioned are presented as these four sub-categories: fear of making mistakes and embarrassment, lack of language as a barrier, lack of motivation and lack of experience due to Covid-19.

#### *4.1.1 Fear of making mistakes and embarrassment*

Another reason frequently mentioned by the teachers was the students’ fear of making mistakes or being embarrassed in class. Informants 1 and 4 reflected on how many of their students feel unsafe in the classroom and therefore choose to remain silent. "They are terrified of losing face, and they are afraid of negative comments. They have every right to be afraid of getting comments because the students can be nasty and rude to each other"

(Informant 4) (Translated by the authors). On the other hand, Informant 1 said that remaining silent to avoid embarrassment can be for other reasons than feeling insufficient. She mentioned that she experiences that some students are solid and perform well in English. "However, they sometimes choose to remain silent to avoid becoming the teacher's pet" (Translated by the authors).

In addition to talking about students wanting to avoid becoming a "teacher's pet", Informant 1 also stated that many students fear participating orally in the classroom because of its unsafe environment. She explained that in an unsafe classroom environment, the students may comment on other students' pronunciation or make fun of something else regarding their oral English, such as vocabulary or intonation. According to the other informants, the students' fear of making mistakes and embarrassment stems from an unsafe environment in the classroom. Informant 3 found that his students are anxious to speak in the EFL classroom because of their social confidence in a larger group, especially in eighth grade. "It is not helpful for students to be surrounded by an unsafe and negative classroom atmosphere, since they can be unsure of their position socially among their peers." (Translated by the authors). Informant 1 implied that creating a classroom with a safe learning environment is essential at the start of lower secondary school. Most lower secondary schools in Norway consist of students from different elementary schools. Therefore, it is essential to create a safe space since some of the students may not know each other when entering eighth grade. Informant 1 said that one must create a classroom where it is safe to talk and express oneself and somehow encourage the students to at least talk to each other. "The teacher should focus more on implementing group work activities from the beginning, rather than the whole lesson consisting of the teacher talking" (Translated by the authors).

According to Informant 2, another way to reduce students' fear of making mistakes is to have simple questions for the students to answer during a task. She explained how she does this when her English class reads and discusses a novel. The homework assignments during this period are to read new chapters every week. Therefore, her students will most likely be able to know the answer when they get asked easy and low-risk questions about a recently read chapter in the novel. To illustrate, the questions can be about what the novel has said about

the main character and how the character is portrayed. It can also be what the students think might happen in the next chapter.

"I experience that more students sign up to answer simple questions with a correct answer than questions that do not have a definitive answer and where you have to think for yourself. They find it easier to look for the correct answer in the novel instead of sharing their thoughts with the class. However, other students find it scary to answer a question where their answer could be incorrect. Although I emphasize that there is no incorrect answer to those questions, it is just your thoughts and reflection; they still feel anxious about it. So there is something about the fact that the students have to understand that they are allowed to have an opinion, and their opinion does not have to be a "correct" answer or some type of conclusion" (Translated by the author).

For many students, fear of embarrassment in class can stem from a lack of confidence. Informant 5 talked about how students' lack of confidence can be a reason for their reticence in class. He said that some students may feel that the classroom is unsafe and are afraid to stand in front of the class and speak. They must build a relationship with the teacher and their fellow students to make them comfortable speaking out loud. Informant 2 also agrees on this topic and said that it is not necessarily language skills that is the reason for their reticence but their confidence. She elaborated by saying that some students have the urge to say something good and relevant to the class discussions but end up with "Can I say it in Norwegian?" (Translated by the authors). The students wish to speak Norwegian because they are not confident to stand in front of the class and say what they want in English.

#### *4.1.2 Lack of Language as a barrier*

Most of the informants think that their students have sufficient passive language regarding listening and reading tasks where they understand English well. However, the English language becomes a barrier in speaking situations for some students. Informant 3 explained how English becomes a barrier for some students by mentioning that he has experienced several clever and reflective students who want to participate in oral subjects, such as KRLE and social science. On the other hand, he said they become very anxious about saying the same thing in English. Informant 4 also expressed that students themselves say the language



is a barrier. She has conversations with her students regularly about them finding the English language difficult. The students agree with each other that it would be easier to speak in class if they had been allowed to speak Norwegian. Informant 4 said that it is difficult for them to be orally active in class because they have to speak English. She clarified that for some students, lack of oral skills can be affected by academic struggles; "And the fact that they struggle with the academic aspect of English as well does not make it any easier for them to speak English" (Translated by the authors).

Informants 3, 4 and 5 agree that many students have the skills to communicate in English when they talk to them one-on-one. Their oral skills are excellent and good enough to get high grades. They further mentioned that many students also have an understanding that they are not very good at English, even though the teachers disagree. The students have misconceptions of themselves and think they need to be more fluent than they already are before they can participate orally in class. Where most students have excellent passive vocabulary, it is the difficulty of using the language that seems to be the barrier. Informant 4 said that:

"I have been working as a teacher for over 20 years and notice that students' academic level has improved. When I started working as a teacher, students' English levels were lower than it is today. Now, the students are more exposed to English at home through gaming and social media, such as Instagram and TikTok. Of course, there is always a difference in the language proficiency level of the students, but many have an excellent understanding of English. It is not a big problem for many of them to be able to communicate or at least understand what the teacher is saying, but they choose not to participate" (Translated by the authors).

#### *4.1.3 Lack of Motivation*

Informant 3 said students often have a more extensive vocabulary within their field of interest because they have picked up words and phrases in their spare time, rather than acquiring them from school. Lack of motivation in the subject plays a massive role for some students. Informant 3 stated, "To some extent, some students can be more motivated to talk about a football match than having to learn the names of cities in Great Britain" (Translated by the authors). Informant 2 agrees and stated that some students do not speak in class because they

do not pay attention and have nothing to say. "Others are simply uninterested, distracted by other things, and lazy" (Translated by the authors). Elaborating on their students' motivation, Informant 5 mentioned that the students are very fond of talking about other things that are not relevant in English class. He tries to use these conversations and ask them questions in English in order for them to get input. He believes this will slowly expand their vocabulary and that the students eventually will respond in English.

#### *4.1.4 Lack of experience due to Covid-19*

We know the Covid-19 pandemic is an unexplored research field, with no current research on how the pandemic has impacted students' oral skills in the EFL classroom. Therefore, our findings connected to the lack of experience due to the Covid-19 pandemic are essential in this study and future research. The pandemic may have significantly impacted the students' oral and social skills. Therefore, this topic needs further research.

After finishing all the interviews, we discovered that the pandemic was a repetitive reason for reticence mentioned by all the informants. When we asked the informants about reasons for reticence, they all mentioned Covid-19 before we asked the questions regarding the pandemic. They stated that Covid-19 significantly impacted their students' oral participation in class. Informant 1 stated that the students lost a considerable part of their social development and oral skills through the pandemic. She thinks the students are less orally active because they have not spoken English out loud for several years due to the lockdown, at least in school settings. "Even though they use some English in their spare time through social media, gaming, etc., they have not "needed" to use it in school. That is why they may find it scary to speak in front of the people they see daily in the classroom" (Translated by the authors).

Two of the informants also acknowledged the social challenges after the Covid-19 pandemic. Informant 3 stated that:

"We see a more evident difference among the students socially and academically. We can see that they are highly affected by the lockdown. They do not know how to speak to one another, and if they do speak, it is usually not pleasant. Unpleasant

communication affects the classroom environment, where the students tend to sit and worry about comments from their peers and how they possibly would have to deal with those comments instead of daring to speak" (Translated by the authors).

Informant 2 elaborated on the social challenges after the pandemic by mentioning that she has seen a tendency in recent years since Covid-19 that the students seem to struggle more with talking to each other. "It is like they do not quite know how to behave, especially towards each other directly" (Translated by the authors). Furthermore, she said Covid-19 may reinforce the students' communication struggles since they had an excessive amount of online school during the lockdown. The students only communicated with their teachers and classmates through a screen. Because of this, she also sees that the students now lack presentation skills. Students normally get to practice having presentations at elementary school, but because of Covid-19, they have lost the last few years of elementary school and therefore lost experience in having oral presentations. Informant 4 expressed her concern for her students' language skills post-pandemic and how their language proficiency may influence their oral participation. She said this about the eight-grade students she started teaching this fall:

"Usually, when I meet my new eighth-grade students in the fall, I always think students' language proficiency has improved. In other words, I feel the level of English rises each year. The academic level does not necessarily rise in other subjects, such as social studies, but the new students seem better at English every year. This year, however, I was surprised. The students' English proficiency was lower than usual, perhaps because they lacked two school years due to the lockdown" (Translated by the authors).

## 4.2 Methods and Strategies

In this section, we will present the methods and strategies mentioned by the informants in the interviews. The methods and strategies mentioned are presented as these five sub-categories: safe learning environment, games, motivating tasks, group work and L1 support and code-switching.

#### 4.2.1 Safe learning environment

A pillar in preventing reticence that all teachers agree on is creating a safe learning environment for the students. Informant 2 talked about how essential it is for a teacher to be clear about the expectations they have of their class and what sort of demands they place on the class in every possible way. She also said that teachers should be clear that they do not tolerate certain classroom behaviors from day one. The students should know precisely where the boundaries for acceptable classroom behavior are. She elaborated by saying:

“I try to clarify to the students that everyone does not have to like each other. It is perfectly fine that not everyone in the class gets along. I explain to them that you will not necessarily like all your colleagues when you are older and work in a workplace. However, it is crucial to make them understand that everyone should be able to work together, be kind, and respect each other regardless” (Translated by the authors)

Informant 1 adds to the importance of a safe learning environment by talking about how she makes room for it. She tends to ensure that she always has varied teaching so that nothing is set in a particular way. She wants the students to not always know what to do when entering a classroom and that they sometimes have to step outside their comfort zone. She focuses a lot on relationship-building tasks, where the students have to work together and talk with each other to get more comfortable with one another. She also acknowledges the students with lower language proficiency and gives them words of affirmation and support. Informant 3 agrees with this. He mentioned that he focuses on activities where the students, for instance, get to talk about their interests or what they did during the weekend. The purpose of these activities is not necessarily about acquiring information about something but simply practicing using the language.

Informants 2 and 5 both talked about how a safe learning environment consists of the students being able to make mistakes. In order to create that environment, the teachers need to show the students that they, *too*, make mistakes. Informant 2 stated that she thinks it is crucial to make it clear to the students that even though the teachers make mistakes it is not unsafe to do so. Sometimes students get shocked when Informant 2 needs to look up a word or do not know the answer to a question. Specifying these situations for the students may result in them believing that it is okay to make mistakes. She stated that too many students

have the impression that teachers somehow can do everything, and that they expect the same from their students, which is not the case. Informant 2 continued to talk about situations where she writes a mistake on the board and the students tell her. She then praises the students for noticing and correcting her on her mistake. "We have to tolerate being corrected on our misspelling or pronunciation because, without it, we will not get better" (Translated by the authors). Informant 5 agrees with this by saying he likes to point it out if the students correct him when he says something wrong or pronounces something wrong. In that way, the students can see that it is okay and that an adult also makes mistakes.

#### *4.2.2 Games*

All the informants mentioned some kind of game or fun activity in class to get the students to speak more. They all had different examples of specific games and fun activities they use in order to make their students more willing to participate orally in class. When asked what methods and strategies they use to get the students to speak in class, Informant 2 explained that she thinks it is essential to vary the teaching by using practical and oral tasks that students can find fun and exciting. For instance, she said it could be to get the students to record a TikTok, sing in English or make a music video. Informant 2 stressed that the teaching material does not necessarily have to be from a textbook, but the teachers need to have a clear goal with their teaching and what they want to be the outcome. The goal might be that everyone should use English as much as possible and speak English as much as possible. She thinks the most important thing is that they speak, so they can experience "that speaking English is not necessarily scary" (Translated by the authors).

During the questions about what specific games our informants use in the classroom, Informant 3 talked about how he uses speed dating to get the students to talk more. He explained it as an oral activity in the classroom that is not assessed, but where the purpose is simply to try to speak with someone that one does not often speak with. Speed dating is an oral activity where the focus is not on the individual student or their language proficiency. These activities are hereby referred to as low-risk activities. According to Informant 3, speed dating is a low-risk activity since the students will discuss a topic that they can easily form an opinion of. Giving the students simple discussion topics makes participating easier for

reticent students since their answers to these discussion topics do not need to be complex and personal. Informant 3 further elaborated:

“Some examples of the questions I give the students to discuss during the speed dating activity can be "Which subject would you like to remove from the school syllabus," "Which subject would you like to add" or "When should school start in the morning". It is easy to answer these questions because they ask for simple answers to harmless topics. Some activities can seem scary if the students do not know each other well, but this activity works regardless of students' familiarity with one another. The purpose is to try and break down some barriers and get them to speak English. During this activity, frequent changes in the "dating" couples must be made so everyone speaks simultaneously. That is because it is easier for reticent students to speak if there is constant background noise, and no one is listening to what they are saying” (Translated by the authors).

Informant 2 gave another example of specific activities that help reticent students. These activities are called problem-solving tasks. The first problem-solving task is called "mystery riddles". This task is a crime mystery sequence where the students work in groups and must find out who the murderer is. The second problem-solving task is called "Murder in a Classroom". In this task, the students are given a case and a role, and then they get a description of the murder case. The description tells them that a person has been killed and what happened. The students have to act out what the description says their character did. Then they have to talk together to find out who the murderer is and why they think that person is the murderer. Informant 2 said that some students manage it perfectly, and others must be helped to get started. She experienced having to sit with a group during the whole task and ask questions because the students did not take the initiative to do this themselves. Therefore, she stressed that these activities might not work perfectly the first time in some classes, but it gets easier each time one does it.

Furthermore, Informant 1 uses a task called "Fun fact task" in her teaching. She explained that all the students must write down a fun fact about themselves which she later collects. Then, four students have to stand in front of the class. The students have the chance to volunteer at first, but if no one volunteers, she randomly picks four students. If so, she

deliberately picks four students she knows can tolerate standing in front of the class and speak English. When the four students are standing in front of the class, she chooses one fun fact from the gathered notes and reads it aloud. The four students in the front must convince the class that it is their fun fact being read. They have to make things up to convince the rest of the class that the fun fact is about them. She stated that "This task is enjoyable for students who need more oral practice because you can choose the fun fact belonging to that particular student, so they can convince the class without making up a story on the spot. The students comfortable speaking English get to practice standing in front of the class and improvising on the spot. The rest of the class has to guess who they think the fun fact is about" (Translated by the authors).

Informant 1 also gave an example of a fun activity the students can do in pairs. She explained the activity as a task where the students must describe a picture to the person sitting beside them without them seeing it. They have to use their vocabulary in order to explain the picture without saying what is being shown. Informant 1 said that she likes to change up the "describing picture" task and make it different for other classes or lessons. Informant 1 elaborated that the teacher can show the students a picture of someone who is, for example, diving, and the students have to come up with a list of important things they would take with them on a diving trip. Additionally, they have to argue why bringing the things on their list is relevant. This task requires the students to find the right words, such as goggles, and reflect on their answers. "Okay, I will bring the goggles so I can see underwater" (Translated by the authors).

Informant 2 uses a game called "Fuel Box" in her teaching to get her students to be more orally active. Fuel box is a game where the students pick a card with a question, and their learning partner or group must answer it. Informant 2 then stated that some questions are easy and more manageable, while others are more complex. Furthermore, she stressed that the fuel box is a great lesson starter in a new class because the students can get to know each other through these questions.

“The questions can be simple questions like, "What is your favourite color?" but you also have the opportunity to adapt the questions to the level considering how old the students are and their language proficiency level. Nevertheless, if it is simple enough,

everyone can say something. The goal is not for the game to be complicated. The goal of this game is to get every student to say something; therefore, the questions must be easy to answer. I find this game useful to get all my students to produce some oral English in class, even the reticent ones” (Translated by the authors).

The last example Informant 2 mentioned was to include drama or roleplay in the English class. The reason for this is to get the students to focus more on the roleplay or the game than their oral English production. When the students have fun, they tend to use the language more and speak more freely and naturally. Informant 2 is also a drama class teacher, and during the interview, she realized many of the tasks she uses in drama could be adapted into English class as well. She elaborated:

“One task I like to use in drama class, which I would love to use in English class, is a "story task". This task aims to get the whole class or a group to make a story together. They start with a word, for example, "Thomas", and then pass it on to the next person who has to come up with a new word. This continues until they have a complete story. This task is fun because it is creative, and the students can speak more freely. When I think about it, I should involve more drama in my current English lessons. However, some students think it is great fun, while others think it is dreadful” (Translated by the authors)

#### *4.2.3 Tasks to motivate*

As mentioned previously, Informant 3 said that his students are more engaged in tasks revolving around their interests. He said, "It is easier for the students to talk about their interests rather than about cities in Great Britain" (Translated by the authors). Considering this, one of the things he has done in his teaching is set up activities that are familiar to the students. Here, the students are allowed to try to express themselves about topics they are one hundred percent sure of instead of having to talk about subject-related topics they might know little about. Since the students may have a more extensive vocabulary within their interests, motivational or familiar activities are a great place to start and work on students' oral production. He also mentioned that English is about the practical use of the language and that the teacher should encourage the students to use it in activities that may be relevant to their lives. He elaborated:



"In ninth grade, we always have a project where the students practice applying for a job and making their own CV. They also have a job interview, which most students have heard of and can recognize as a somewhat relevant experience for the rest of their lives. In this setting, very few people want to sit in a job-seeking situation and be unable to say anything, making it more motivating for the students to practice speaking English" (Translated by the authors).

#### *4.2.4 Working in groups and pairs*

Group work or working in pairs is another strategy mentioned by all of the informants to prevent reticence. Informant 1 stated that she uses group work because it is easier for the students to talk to someone sitting next to them than to speak in front of thirty people. She said that after the students discuss their thoughts with their learning partner, they may see that what they initially thought was stupid may not be so stupid after all. Since the students have formed an answer together, it is less intimidating because they have shared ownership of the answer. The students simply share what they have discussed with the rest of the class, not their initial and individual thoughts.

Informant 2 gave two examples of how they currently work in groups and pairs, which supports what Informant 1 said about making speaking up more harmless. Informant 2 talked about how she uses pairs actively in her teaching. In the week when the interview took place, her class were working on a novel, and one of the homework assignments was to create questions for some chapters. Later in the following English lessons, the students were to sit with their neighbors, ask each other the questions they made and answer each other's questions. Afterwards, they were also going to do it in plenary, which the students were prepared for.

"I think getting them to say something in English using this method is easier since it is already quality checked with their partner beforehand. The students are also prepared to speak in front of the rest of the class, and they know what to say. To make the questions, they had to take their time to read the novel and understand the meaning of it" (Translated by the authors).

Informant 2 continued her elaboration on group work and talked about how discussions are excellent to get the students orally active. She usually divides the class into groups and provides each group with a topic. The topic can relate to a theme they are working on in class, such as the death penalty. They have to talk about the topic together in the group first, and then she will give them specific questions, one question for each of the group members. She exemplified some questions, such as "What could be good reasons for maintaining a death penalty?", and "Can there be any good consequences?". Informant 2 will walk by every group and listen to the discussions. When the first person has answered the first question, she will ask the others if they have anything to add. Then there is a new question for the next person. "I find this kind of group work effective because I have the impression that they find it less scary when they work in smaller groups. The students also have the benefit of being able to build on each other's arguments, like, "I agree with what she said, but I also think that..." (Translated by the authors). All the teachers said that they often use group work in class to get the students to use the language since it is easier to get them to talk to their learning partner than in front of the whole class. Informant 3 said that the more focus placed on the individual, the more difficult it is for some of them to dare to express themselves. It is less severe when you place them in situations where more people work together and share their thoughts than when the spotlight is on one student. Most people often dare to try it even if they do not have the most extensive vocabulary or excellent language skills.

#### *4.2.5 L1 support and Code-switching*

We asked the informants if they speak English or Norwegian during English class to see if their choice of preferred language could have an effect on the students' reticence. In addition, we wanted to see if they use Norwegian as a tool to help their reticent students with English in case they do not understand. Informant 3 answered:

"I try to speak as much English as possible. However, I have to adapt by sometimes giving instructions in Norwegian. I mainly give instructions in English and then repeat them in Norwegian. I encourage everyone to use English as much as possible, but it happens that you use a bit of both languages. I rarely write in Norwegian on the board, but I might if I have to clarify if there is something that is incomprehensible. However, I find their understanding of English quite good. There are very few who strive to understand what I say, and I rarely feel like I *have to* repeat things in

Norwegian compared to some years ago. So, I feel they have good listening skills and comprehension of English" (Translated by the authors).

Informant 1 also supports this when she said that she mainly speaks English in class but usually repeats in Norwegian to ensure that all the students understand what they are supposed to do. Informant 4 is honest about using Norwegian more this year than in the past. She emphasized this by saying:

" I have to use Norwegian when some students do not understand messages that are given in English. The language proficiency among this year's students is lower because there are students who have not had English lessons until now because of Covid-19, students who may already struggle to learn Norwegian, and students who also have English as their third or fourth language. They can therefore struggle to grasp the information given in English. I try to give the information in English and then get the students to repeat what I said in Norwegian. This way, the students use Norwegian to understand English" (Translated by the authors).

Informant 5 supports the other informants by giving his students slightly different working methods. By doing so, he can speak purely English to the more proficient students and scaffold those struggling by implementing Norwegian words in his sentences. He also tries to incorporate English words when he explains something in Norwegian to get them used to hearing English words and understanding their meaning. "By doing this, I can sort of put English words in their mouths" (Translated by the authors). Informant 2 illustrated how she allows her students to use code-switching in the EFL-classroom. She said that her students at times ask if they can say something in Norwegian instead of in English, since they feel it is safer to speak Norwegian. She then tells the students they have to try to speak English, but they are allowed to code-switch and use Norwegian words if they do not know or remember the English word. "They often have a broad vocabulary and know what to say, but they get stressed easily which makes them forget some words or phrases and I do not want that to stop them from producing English. So, I will much rather want them to put some Norwegian words in their sentences if that makes them comfortable enough to speak English" (Translated by the authors).

## 5.0 Discussion

This chapter will discuss the findings of this study in connection with previous research on reticence in the EFL classroom. The discussion will be divided into two main sections: external- and internal factors. In this context, external factors are considered reasons for reticence that the teacher can influence to a large extent. The external factors presented in this chapter are fear of failure and language proficiency. The teacher can also affect internal factors, mainly considering reasons connected to students' personalities and self-perceptions. The internal factors presented in this chapter are lack of confidence and lack of motivation. Each section elaborates on reasons for students' reticence and preventive methods and strategies. The discussion also includes how Covid-19 has influenced external- and internal factors. These external and internal factors are related to the research question and the additional research question, which will help us answer it. The research question is as mentioned:

*"What does international research say about reasons for reticence, and how does this compare to Norwegian lower secondary teachers' perceptions? What methods and strategies do Norwegian teachers think may prevent this reticence?"*

The additional research question:

*"How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected Norwegian lower secondary students' oral participation in class?"*

### 5.1 External factors

#### 5.1.1 Fear of Failure

All the informants in our study stressed that fear of embarrassment is one of the biggest reasons for their students' reticence in the EFL classroom. This correlates with Horwitz et al. (1986, pp. 130-131) and Savaşçı (2014, p. 2683), who state that fear of making mistakes in the EFL classroom has been reported as a highly anxiety-provoking factor. Additionally, the informants state that fear of making oral mistakes is one of the most prominent reasons for preventing students from participating in the English class. Informant 4 said that many of her

students feel unsafe in the classroom and therefore choose to remain silent instead of trying to speak. She continued by saying that her students are terrified of rude comments and afraid of losing face in front of their peers. The other informants had similar thoughts, specifically, Informant 3 pointed out that his students may struggle with confidence in their abilities and language skills and fear someone else's judgment or saying the wrong things. According to Hamouda (2013, p. 24), reticence often occurs in a foreign language context since the students are more afraid to make mistakes or be laughed at in the EFL classroom than in other subjects at school. Informant 3 stated that he has noticed that some of his students who are exceptionally orally active in other subjects prefer not to participate orally in English class. This may indicate that the students are reticent in English class because they fear making mistakes connected to learning a foreign language. All the informants immediately answered "fear of making mistakes" when asked what they think are reasons for students' reticence. That may indicate that fear of making mistakes is one of the most prominent reasons why students are reticent. It correlates with the previous research done in Eastern countries, which makes it an interesting finding as a reason for reticence in Norway, despite the cultural differences regarding English education. However, fear of making mistakes might not be the sole reason for students' reticence and there may be other reasons that could affect their reticence.

Informant 3 said that a solution to students' fear of making mistakes could be to create a classroom atmosphere that is calm and encouraging and where students feel comfortable. He makes room for classroom activities where students get to discuss their interests or hobbies. The purpose is not necessarily about acquiring information about something but simply practicing using the language with each other. These activities could be short, straightforward lesson starters or longer tasks with a learning partner. Supporting this, Drew and Sørheim (2016, pp. 58-59) say that teachers should facilitate a classroom where the students who are reticent to participate orally in front of the class are being supported. Zulfikar (2022, p. 72) mentioned Vygotsky's notion that social support is essential for students' success in language learning. This can indicate that a safe learning environment is important for the students to learn English. A supportive classroom can be accomplished by incorporating oral activities in class where the focus is not on the individual student or their language proficiency. These activities are hereby referred to as low-risk activities.

In addition to Informant 3's example above, another low-risk activity is group work. All the informants agree that using group work as a strategy helps the students to participate in oral activities. Getting the students to talk in smaller groups or with their learning partner is more accessible than getting them to talk in front of the whole class. Informant 3 expressed that most of his students experience this type of fear in situations where many people can overhear them. The greater focus put on the individual student speaking, the more fearful the student gets. They may struggle to dare express themselves if they are put "in the spotlight" (Translated by the authors). Therefore, it seems that if students are put in situations where fewer people are listening and with people they trust, the situation automatically becomes less intimidating. In agreement with Informant 3's perceptions, Drew and Sørheim (2016, p. 59) state that participating orally in groups or pairs makes it easier for the students to speak since they only interact with their group or a partner. In addition, Jackson (2002, pp. 75-76) found that although some students would not participate orally in whole class discussions, the same students had no problem being talkative in groups or pairs. This is because the conversations in groups or pairs were usually informal and more intimate, hence why some students find it less scary (Jackson, 2002, p. 82). This may indicate that group work is a strategy teachers can use in their teaching in order to reduce students' fear of embarrassment, and therefore their reticent.

Informant 4 stressed the importance of games in the classroom as a considerable contributor to the reticent students' confidence. Additionally, games may be a valuable tool for the students to become comfortable with each other. Using games in the classroom is about getting the students to understand cooperation and helping each other. Informant 4 underlined that it does not matter if some students fall short academically because games and fun activities provide focus on practicing the language. Gozcu and Caganaga (2016, p. 113) support this, and state that games make it easier to learn the targeted language for reticent and non-reticent students. They are usually deeply involved in the games and have fun without noticing that they are simultaneously learning the target language. When students feel comfortable and secure with their surroundings, it may be easier to interact, especially considering oral interactions can be high-risk activities. Thus, the teacher must facilitate low-risk classroom activities, such as games (Ornelas, 2021, p. 13). It seems that if students are provided with surroundings where they feel secure and able to learn with an element of fun,

they may become more involved with the language. This can indicate that games may make students feel more secure and confident and that they may likely be able to speak more in class.

On the other hand, the informants were aware of some disadvantages regarding the usage of games in the EFL classroom. One disadvantage mentioned by Informant 2 and Gozcu and Caganaga (2016, p. 129) was that some games are already familiar or boring to some students, which might result in them not getting equally involved. Some students, especially teenagers, may also find games unnecessary and childish. Informant 2 stressed that even though the teacher chooses fun, physical, or out-of-the-ordinary activities in English class, there will always be some students who are not willing to participate. She emphasized that some students never want to do anything, no matter how many options she gives them. Perhaps the usage of gaming, such as Minecraft, can be of help to these students. Gaming may be more attractive for some students than, for example, roleplay and other activities that do not involve a computer. In addition, Gozcu and Caganaga (2016, p. 129) point out some discipline issues that may occur when implementing gaming and games in the teaching. For instance, they pointed out that students may get excessively noisy during games. Games or physical activities may also result in students straying away from the primary purpose of the game or physical activity, perhaps, due to inadequate rules and instruction. Considering this, games and gaming may result in a lack of learning because the fun they provide takes over. The students' focus can fall on the competition aspect of the game and stray away from the purpose of the game as a learning strategy. For that reason, clear instructions, structure and frameworks around the activity seem to be necessary for a valuable learning outcome.

Students' participation in an activity or a game must be explained carefully and practiced beforehand. Otherwise, things can get out of control, and insecure students can easily have a negative experience (Flogenfeldt et al., 2020). Hence, the students might not experience having a safe classroom environment if the activity or the game is out of control. As a result, the students may become reluctant to speak and participate in EFL activities. However, this disadvantage does not necessarily need to be a disadvantage. The teacher can overcome the risk of the game getting out of hand by being aware of classroom management and giving clear instructions. According to Jackson (2002, p. 80), classroom management is crucial to provide a safe space for oral activities. If students trust their teachers, they feel more secure, and when they may feel secure, they may be more spontaneous and less reticent. Jackson

(2002, p. 80) additionally states that classroom management and the classroom environment are essential factors influencing the students' oral participation and reticence. Informant 2 underlined the importance of classroom management by explaining how she makes clear expectations for her class and how certain behaviors are not tolerated from day one. She stressed that not everyone has to like each other, but everyone has to be able to work together, be kind, and respect each other.

Regardless of the disadvantages the usage of games may cause, the students also gain many benefits. Some of the benefits mentioned by Gozcu and Caganaga (2016, pp. 128-129) are that games give both students and the teacher a chance to escape from the usual routine. Games are primarily associated with fun for all the students, which may help attract their interest in a way that ordinary lessons usually do not. From Ornelas' (2021, p. 13) perspective, using games and other fun activities in the classroom will provide students with an atmosphere that will be both motivating and fun which additionally affects the students' will to speak. In fact, Ornelas (2021, pp. 38-39) and Gozcu and Caganaga (2016, p. 132) agree on how games can provide engaged and motivated EFL students. By changing the classroom atmosphere into a safe, fun, and lighthearted place to evolve, games can allow students to interact with one another harmlessly, thus also helping them improve their fluency in English (Ornelas, 2021, pp. 38-39). Changing the classroom into a fun and safe place to learn matches all the informants' answers in the interviews. Informants 2 and 3 found it easier for their students to learn English when the classroom environment is supportive, and the students has a chance to be creative and have fun. Another advantage associated with games is that students' speaking anxiety toward language learning decreases. Using games as a method may help reduce students' anxiety towards oral participation, since students in the EFL classroom often assume that they must be successful in the target language to speak it (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016, p. 133). To sum up, there are both advantages and disadvantages to using games in the EFL classroom. Even though there are disadvantages, these seem minimal compared to the advantages. Games provide the students with an opportunity to speak without being aware of it because they have fun while they learn. This may indicate that students are more likely to participate orally in the EFL classroom if their teacher implements fun activities in the lessons.

Findings from previous studies such as Wörde (2003, p. 6) propose a common reason for reticence is fear of teacher error correction. She mentions teacher error correction as an



anxiety-provoking factor for EFL students. She further explains how some students report feeling disturbed and frustrated when a teacher harshly corrects them for making errors (p. 6). Even though fear of teacher error correction is a reason for students' reticence found in previous research, our informants did not explicitly mention this as a crucial factor. That differs from previous research, such as Alnahidh and Altalhab's (2020, p. 62) and Hamouda's (2013, p. 25) research. They found that their participants expressed concern about the negative attitudes of their teachers when they get corrected for making mistakes or mispronouncing words. More than half of the students in Hamouda's (2013, p. 24) study preferer to remain silent to avoid criticism from the teacher. They mentioned teachers' harshness and strictness as substantial factors contributing to their reticence in the classroom. This statement from Hamouda's students correlates with Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 130), who state that the teachers' authoritative, embarrassing, and humiliating attitude toward students, mainly when students make mistakes, severely affect learners' willingness to communicate in the EFL classroom. On the other hand, in Norwegian schools, students are guaranteed that they will not be exposed to negative treatment and humiliating attitudes from teachers as it is legislated. Section 9A of the Education Act (Opplæringslova, 1998) states that all Norwegian students have the right to a good and safe school environment, where all the employees at the school must have zero tolerance for offensive behavior and harassment. The school must prevent this from happening, which indicates that the teachers are aware of how they face and comment on their students' mistakes.

As mentioned previously, our informants did not mention teacher error correction as a reason for reticence during the interviews, but rather as a strategy to prevent reticence. Our informants are familiar with the fact that some students see being corrected by a teacher as a prominent reason for remaining silent in class and that many students have had a negative experience with this type of correction. However, they did not consider this a fundamental reason for their students' reticence. This may be because of Section 9A of the Education Act (Opplæringslova, 1998) since the teachers are not allowed to treat their students poorly in the classroom or harass them in any way. One can also question if this finding stems from the fact that the interviews were solely conducted with teachers, not students. The answers may have been different from interviewing students as well. Regardless, the informants seemed aware of their error correction in class and stressed that they always try to help their students when they struggle to pronounce something or accidentally say the wrong words. Most of them find it better to support and try to help when the situation occurs rather than correct

them immediately. This method is called selective error correction. Supporting this, Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 131) propose that students' fear of making mistakes could be connected to teachers' methods of correcting their students' errors. This may indicate that the teachers should be aware of their error correction methods since it can negatively affect the students' oral participation. Hence, teachers should maybe consider using selective error correction as a method to prevent reticence in the EFL classroom.

In connection to selective error correction, Zulfikar (2022, p. 72) expresses that teacher correction should be given in manageable portions of feedback for the selective error correction to be less overwhelming for the students. Akkakoson (2016, p. 67) also agrees and adds that teachers should not correct students' oral mistakes directly and immediately, but instead give constructive feedback afterwards. If teachers comment on students' mistakes while they are speaking, it can make students more self-conscious, thus choosing not to participate orally (Drew & Sørheim, 2016, pp. 58-59). Selective error correction focuses on avoiding interrupting the flow of students' oral language production. Informant 2 underlined the importance of selective error correction. She made it clear that it is equally important to correct them when the error occurs; "You must correct them, but it is a matter of how you do it" (Translated by the authors). Since students may have concerns about the negative attitudes of their teachers when they are being corrected for their mistakes, the teacher should be conscious of their choice of correction (Zulfikar, 2022, p. 72). At the same time, Informant 2 stressed that the students must learn how to receive teacher corrections and know it is necessary to improve their English language skills. Around 75% of the students from Hamouda's (2013, p. 24) study agreed on feeling more relaxed when the teacher responds in a friendly way to an error, making it easier for them to expose themselves to a similar situation later on.

Hendrickson (1978, pp. 387-391) mentions that EFL teachers should accept a wide margin of deviation from the targeted language's "standard" forms, but according to the Norwegian Curriculum, the English subject does not have any rules for pronunciation (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019a). As Informant 2 said: "For some teachers, pronunciation probably matters, and there are some teachers who are much pickier even when the curriculum does not say that we should be. The curriculum does not say that you should speak with a certain pronunciation. Some teachers have taught for a long time, but nowadays the students do not have to speak American or British English" (Translated by the authors).

This may imply that there are fewer students who are afraid of teacher error correction in Norwegian classrooms since there are fewer mistakes one can make when there is no “correct” English.

Informant 2 stated that the most crucial thing about oral activities in the classroom is that the students simply speak to practice the language, not that it is grammatically correct. She said that games are a strategy that can be used which allows the students to speak in a non-threatening setting where they only focus on the game rather than worrying about being corrected by their teacher or being judged. The rest of our informants seemed to agree with this, and they all found it essential to vary the teaching by using practical and oral tasks that the students can find fun and exciting. The reason for this is to prevent the students from overthinking their oral production. The informants made it clear that they want the goal for each activity to be that students speak as much English as possible without being aware of it. Moreover, as Gozcu and Caganaga (2016, p. 128) listed, one benefit of games is that they help anxious students worry less about being corrected by the teacher. During a game or a fun activity, the teacher mainly focuses on getting the students to speak English. The correctness and accuracy of the language are not priorities during games, which benefits the students who struggle to participate orally due to their fear of error correction (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016, p. 128). This correlates with Ornelas (2021, p. 13), who states that using games in the learning process might help the students with their ability to speak the targeted language without overthinking it. This can imply that when the students’ fear of making mistakes and being corrected by the teacher is removed, they may more easily participate in oral activities, which can help their language learning process.

### *5.1.2 Language proficiency*

Most of our informants stressed that vocabulary and pronunciation were not particular reasons why their students were reluctant to speak English. Informant 3 emphasized this by saying that he finds his students' understanding of English quite good, as they have good listening skills and language comprehension. On the other hand, Informant 4 stated that she sees pronunciation as one of the significant risk factors for students when it comes to participating orally in class. She believes that their experience of pronunciation is that they want to sound like native speakers and fear sounding strange. She further elaborated on the importance of the class practicing vocabulary since the range of students with a good and less

good vocabulary is wide. She believes this can also explain why some students are reticent in English class (Informant 4).

The reflections from most of our informants differ from previous research. Previous research finds the language proficiency level of a student to be an essential factor in their reticence in the EFL class, which our informants do not. Hamouda (2013, p. 25) states that students are reluctant to speak because they do not know what to say during class discussions. He emphasizes that some students may feel worried that they have a low language proficiency level in English and that the teacher will get a wrong impression of them if they try to speak. If what they try to say is "wrong", they fear being corrected in front of the whole class. As a result, they avoid participating in oral situations in the classroom (p. 25). Murad and Jalambo (2019, p. 41) agree and elaborate that the students in their study do not know what to say because they lack a broad enough vocabulary, hence why they are reluctant to speak. Chandradasa (2019, p. 137) also found that vocabulary and pronunciation are issues to why the students remain silent in the EFL classroom because they are scared of mispronouncing words. Furthermore, Azwar et al. (2021, pp. 225-226) notice that students are less willing to communicate in English because they are unsure of the correctness of their speech. Başöz and Erten (2019, p. 10) also discover that linguistic factors such as pronunciation, practice, and vocabulary knowledge are reasons for students' reticence in the EFL classroom.

However, these findings are from studies conducted in Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Turkey. Unlike Norway, these countries are not as exposed to English regularly. According to EF's English Proficiency Index (EF EPI), a rapport which ranks countries by the equity of English language skills amongst those adults who took the EF test, Norway is ranked as a country with very high English language proficiency. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Turkey are ranked as countries with low or very low English language proficiency (EF, 2022, pp. 6-7). Therefore, they may naturally struggle more with vocabulary and pronunciation than Norwegian students exposed to English regularly through music, TV, gaming, and social media. This may indicate why the informants in our study disagree with previous research's statement about lack of vocabulary and poor pronunciation being the main reasons why students are reticent in EFL class.

During the interviews, the informants reflected on whether they speak English constantly during English class or if they switch between English and Norwegian. The informants

agreed that they try to speak as much English as possible but sometimes use code-switching in class to ensure everyone understands. According to Garcia and Kleyn (2016, p. 18), teachers who face reticent students in English classes because of low language proficiency could consider code-switching as a strategy to get the students to be more talkative. Whether a student's low language proficiency appears as struggling with pronunciation or a lack of vocabulary, the support of an L1 is a helpful tool. Teachers who use code-switching as a teaching strategy know that the starting point for developing a new language lies in the students' linguistic repertoire (p. 18). Code-switching or using a student's L1 as support does not mean abandoning the traditional understanding of language learning. One only exposes the students to the target language and use their prior language knowledge to develop the target language further. Garcia and Kleyn (2016, p. 17) further elaborate that this linguistic repertoire can be extended through interactions with others, both peers and teachers and texts with multiple language features.

Informant 2 explained in the results why she likes code-switching as a strategy in the EFL classroom. Teachers can allow students to use Norwegian words in an English sentence if they do not have the word they need. This is to prevent the students from getting stuck if they are unable to formulate complete sentences. Code-switching seems to be an efficient way to get the students to talk even though they might not know exactly what to say. Informant 4 said that she uses Norwegian to help her students who struggle to understand English. She also allows the students to use Norwegian to express themselves and make themselves understood. This way, the students and the teacher use Norwegian to improve students' understanding of English. The participants in Akkakoson's (2016, p. 66) study all agreed that even though using the target language (English) in an English conversation class is necessary, it is acceptable for students who struggle orally to switch between their L1/L2 and English. Although students need to hear the language whenever there is an opportunity for it in order to learn it allowing the students to use languages they already know might contribute to a better understanding of the targeted language (Iversen, 2019, p. 54; Munden, 2017, p. 191). Using a student's L1 in their language learning process gives them an advantage since they are already used to organizing and mediating the processes of understanding, speaking, literacy, and learning (Butzkamm, 2003, pp. 30-31) (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 18). Informant 5 demonstrated this by incorporating English words when explaining something in Norwegian. The reason for this is to get the students used to hearing English words and understanding the meaning behind the words. He also allows the students to do the same

when speaking. Krulatz et al. (2018, p. 108) state that English teachers have the "moral responsibility" to make students aware of the importance of respecting all languages and cultures in the classroom. Other languages should be considered a resource for learning English, not an obstacle. On the other hand, it is not recommended that the student is over-dependent on their L1 since exposure to and oral production of English is essential for language learning. The L1 supportive use should decrease steadily when the students' English language confidence and skills increase (Akkakoson, 2016, pp. 56-59).

Additionally, teachers may use games as a method in order to help students who have low language proficiency in English. As mentioned earlier in the discussion, an advantage of using games in the classroom is that they help develop elements related to the accuracy of a language concerning vocabulary, pronunciation, and form discreetly. As a teacher, one can integrate vocabulary and pronunciation into exercises without the students being aware (Ornelas, 2021, p. 43). Our informants said that by using games as a strategy in the classroom, the students experience the funny aspect of games, which takes away the seriousness of speaking English. They also stressed that games help students remember what they have learned better than ordinary lessons. Continuing, our informants pointed out some examples that could be fun and educational activities to do with the class. For instance, regarding pronunciation, Informant 2 said that one could get the students to make a TikTok, do a roleplay, sing a song in English, or make a music video. If one relates the teaching activities to students' interests, the students may become more spontaneous with their fluency in English (Ornelas, 2021, p. 43). In addition, they can become so eager to participate in the activity that it allows them to develop and use their language competence without even paying attention to themselves speaking (p. 43). Another type of game one can use in class, mentioned by Ornelas (2021, p. 7), is a variation of guessing games. They can appear in many forms, but their base remains the same. These activities can be a great way of creating a non-threatening atmosphere in the classroom, where the students get to use the language freely without worrying about not having a broad enough vocabulary or mispronouncing words in front of everyone (Ornelas, 2021, p. 43). Informant 1 mentioned a great example of this; a task executed in pairs where one has to describe a picture to the person sitting next to them without them seeing it. The person guessing will be more focused on finding the correct answer than listening to their oral English and vocabulary. However, if the explainer seems aware of their oral production, it helps to make the whole game a competition among everyone in the class. According to Informant 1, when the pair becomes a team in a

competition, the focus shifts from mispronouncing a few words in English to working together toward winning.

Informant 1 stressed that to develop and improve students' language proficiency, they need to participate and challenge themselves in oral activities with others. In order to achieve this, there must be a safe learning environment in the classroom. She focuses a lot on relationship-building tasks in her teaching, where the students must work together and talk with each other. Relationship-building tasks can make the students feel more comfortable with one another. In order to make the students more comfortable with her as a teacher, she makes sure to acknowledge all the students, especially the ones with lower language proficiency, and give them words of affirmation and support. According to Informant 5, students find it essential to build a relationship with their teacher and their fellow students to feel comfortable enough to speak out loud, even though they might not always know what to say. Skulstad (2020, pp. 113-114) stresses that the classroom atmosphere should reflect patience, encouragement, and acceptance from students and teachers. A safe and supportive classroom atmosphere is essential to make the students comfortable with each other, so they participate more easily in games and fun activities. Being comfortable paves the way for more natural and effortless oral participation in class.

### *5.1.3 The external effect of Covid-19*

Our informants' focus during the questions about reasons for reticence was primarily on how Covid-19 is a potential reason for their students' reticence. For instance, Informant 1 said that during the pandemic, the students lost much of their social development and oral skills due to the lockdown and digital home school. She further reflected on the impact that Covid-19 had on students' reticence in class and how it appeared in the classroom. She explained this by stating that the students had not spoken English out loud for several years due to the lockdown and, therefore, may find it scary to speak out loud to their peers since this has become unusual for them. On the other hand, the students' reticence may not necessarily be due to a lack of oral production situations but a lack of social interaction in general during the lockdown. This statement is supported by Informant 2, who has seen a tendency in the students over the recent years to struggle more with talking to each other. She said that it seems like they do not know how to behave, especially toward each other. The previously mentioned "working group for the school after Covid-19" concluded that many students had

felt the consequences of the pandemic, mainly linked to a lack of belonging in the social learning community (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2022). In agreement with the informants of this study, the working group believed that this lack of social interaction due to the pandemic has probably led to reduced learning outcomes (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2022). Since the students had a considerable amount of online school during the lockdown, it was harder to maintain the social aspect of teaching than the academic aspect. However, it is difficult to suggest that students' reticence is unilaterally due to the pandemic or that the current reticent students would have behaved differently if the pandemic had never happened (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2022).

Due to the proximity to the pandemic, little research has been done on the effect the lockdown has had on education, let alone the EFL classroom. However, because all our informants mentioned Covid-19 as a prominent reason for their students' reticence in the classroom, it proves that this needs to be explored further by researchers. All our informants stressed that after the pandemic, they focused more on the social learning environment in the classroom and having the students build stronger relationships. They felt that the social environment and interactions in the class got hugely affected by Covid-19. According to Caspersen et al., (2021), it is reasonable to assume that the pandemic made it difficult for teachers and schools to facilitate supportive learning environments that promote learning through digital home school. About half of the elementary and lower secondary school students believed they learned less in home school than in ordinary school (Caspersen et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers need to focus on creating a safe learning environment where students can naturally practice social interactions with each other. Informant 3 highlighted this importance by explaining that his students barely know how to speak to one another, and when they do, it is usually not pleasant. The students' lack of social interactions affects the classroom environment, which can make students worry about being judged and mocked by peers instead of daring to speak.

Another aspect of agreement from previous research is Khalegi's (2018, p. 165) study, where all the students stressed that it was vital for them to have a friendly and supportive class atmosphere to make them participate actively without any embarrassment from the rest of the class. Since Covid-19 affected the social aspects of the Norwegian classroom, Başöz and



Erten (2019, p. 12) state that focusing on a safe and supportive learning environment in class is essential. Students feel more willing to speak English in a relaxed classroom atmosphere with a good relationship between the teacher and its students. Informant 4 supports this by saying that it is essential that the students tolerate and accept each other even though they are different. Moreover, Başöz and Erten (2019, p. 12) state that an unfriendly and unfamiliar class hinders the students' oral participation and language learning. Başöz and Erten (2019, p. 12) continuously argue that the social climate in the classroom directly influences the satisfaction of students' fundamental mental needs, thereby positively affecting the language's development, resulting in a greater willingness to communicate orally. When EFL teachers become aware of their students' reticence, they can help them provide a friendly environment that hopefully enhances more effective oral participation. Even though all the informants increased their focus on creating a safe learning environment after the pandemic, Informant 4 experienced that her methods did not work for all her students. She feels that some students do not respect her or their peers, no matter how much effort she puts into forming a supportive classroom atmosphere. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009, p. 43) emphasize this by expressing that despite teachers' efforts to build a safe and supportive learning environment, some students may still be hesitant to contribute. Still, teachers should not stop trying to achieve this classroom environment.

## 5.2 Internal factors

All our informants did not mention the external factors regarding their students' reticence without additionally mentioning internal factors such as lack of confidence and motivation. Therefore, the different reasons connected to external and internal factors can influence each other.

### 5.2.1 *Lack of confidence*

Informant 3 elaborated on his previous statement about some of his students who were not orally active in English class but were very talkative in other subjects. He stated that this had to do with students' confidence in their abilities and being secure enough to handle someone judging them or peers making comments if a mistake occurred. He stressed that the students must be confident enough to express themselves without thinking that they have said anything perceived as strange or wrong. Informant 2 clarified that her students' reticence mainly stemmed from a lack of confidence and not a lack of language skills. She justified this

by saying that some of her students usually know what they want to say but are too shy to speak up. "They do not have the confidence to stand in front of the class and say what they want to say in English" (Informant 2). Informant 2's statement correlates with Chandradasa's (2019, p. 137) study, where she discovered that students' oral participation in class discussions depends on their perceptions of competence. She found that students tend to keep quiet because they fear mispronouncing words or coming up with a wrong answer. Some of the students in her study believed that mispronunciation would make their peers mock them. Over half of the students in Hamouda's (2013, p. 24) study expressed their anxiety about making mistakes in class because they are convinced they will make them seem incompetent to others. Moreover, they believe they will be seen as foolish and distort their image in front of their classmates (p. 24). Alnahidh's and Altalhab's (2020, p. 61) discovered that students believe that participating orally automatically exposes their mistakes, making the other students in the class doubt their abilities. It is more important for the students to save their positive image among their classmates than to take a risk in class.

In order to confront and work on the students' self-perception in class, the informants have different approaches. Informants 2 and 5 stressed that to learn a new language, one must dare to speak and be orally active, which also means making a few mistakes. They said students learn and improve their language competence by taking risks and making mistakes. Informants 2 and 5 agree with Skulstad (2020, p. 113), who states that to become proficient speakers of English, students should use English orally as much as possible and dare to take risks rather than being nervous about making mistakes or being laughed at. Informants 2 and 5 explained that they strive to create an environment where they show the students that they, *too*, can make mistakes. Shedding light on situations where the teachers do not know the answer to a student's question or where they have to look up a word, makes those situations more harmless for the students when they encounter them. Informants 2 and 5 stated that too many students think teachers can do everything and expect the same from their students, which is not the case. Informant 2 continued to explain that the strategy she uses when her students are correcting her is to make them understand why that is a good thing. "We have to tolerate being corrected on our misspelling or pronunciation because we will not improve without it" (Translated by the authors). Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009, pp. 41-42) support this and point out that a crucial part of helping reticent students overcome their fear of participating orally is to provide them with a safe learning environment. This safe learning environment is a classroom where the teacher and their fellow students are kind to and

respect each other and where there is room to make mistakes. This classroom environment may boost the students' confidence and make them more willing to participate in oral activities and discussions.

As mentioned in the results, Informant 2 noticed that the students seemed interested in participating orally in the classroom when roleplay and drama were a part of the lesson. The students may be more orally active because they take on a different role and are not "themselves" during the play. Less confident students may find it easier to speak in front of many people when they are supposed to be someone else. Therefore, roleplay may be a great strategy for helping less confident students to participate orally in the EFL classroom.

Informant 5 elaborated on why working with how the students view themselves is essential to oral participation in class. He mentioned that students' lack of confidence is a prominent reason for their reticence and that some students feel uncomfortable and vulnerable in the classroom. They do not want to stand in front of the class and share their thoughts simply because their self-confidence makes them afraid and convinces them that their thoughts are wrong. Drew and Sørheim (2016, pp. 58-59) say that students' confidence in class can be improved by giving them assuring words and encouragement, as well as having oral group work activities in class. Informants 1 and 2 explained how they use working in pairs actively in their teaching, specifically "think, pair, share". They do this to allow the students to discuss their initial thoughts with the other person before possibly sharing them with the rest of the class. Working in pairs helps the students to experience that what they may have thought was stupid is not so stupid after all, as they get confirmation from their partner, which helps them gain confidence. Since the students have formed an answer together, it may be less intimidating to share that specific answer with the class since they now have shared ownership of it. They primarily share what they have discussed in a pair or group with the rest of the class, not their raw and individual thoughts. Supporting this, Jackson (2002, pp. 70, 80) states that group work allows the students to prepare their answers and thoughts with each other before sharing them with the rest of the class. Group or pair work can lead to more active classroom discussions with more detailed answers from students since they speak on behalf of others and not just themselves (pp. 70, 80). Lastly, games also help increase positive feelings and improve self-confidence since there is no fear of punishment and criticism from the teacher and their peers when they are having fun and using English freely (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016, p. 133).

### 5.2.2 *Lack of motivation*

Throughout our interviews, all the informants mentioned students who found English class tedious or struggled with finding a purpose to participate. In Ruud's (2022) article for "Utdanningsnytt", a magazine for the teaching profession, researcher Anders Bakken states that three out of four Norwegian students claim they are bored at school. Most of the students find school irrelevant to their lives and that it does not trigger their inner motivation. In Başöz and Erten's (2019, p. 9) study, one factor that was revealed to impact the EFL learners' reticence in English was the topic of discussion. According to the informants of this study, topic interest and familiarity are important characteristics of a particular topic that play an essential role in creating motivation and eagerness to participate orally in English class. Thus, a learner's interest in or lack of knowledge of a specific topic may affect his/her reticence in English. As revealed in the "Results" chapter, Informant 3 pointed out that it is easier for his students to talk about their interests rather than "about cities in Great Britain" (Translated by the authors). One strategy Informant 3 has used in his teaching is to set up activities where he allows the students to try and express themselves regarding their hobbies or interests. Since he has experienced students having a more extensive vocabulary within their field of interest, he would instead focus on those motivational tasks than others.

The statements mentioned above replicate the findings of an earlier study; MacIntyre et al. (1998) argue that the topic of a lesson or activity significantly influences the ease of language use. Topic familiarity may increase an individual's linguistic motivation, whereas a lack of knowledge about a topic may impede communication. Moreover, students appear to have the highest level of oral participation in a topic they are interested in. In contrast, they are unwilling to talk about topics that they find boring. Informant 3 also mentioned that the English subject revolves around the practical use of the language. The teacher should encourage and motivate the students by conducting oral exercises that may be relevant to their lives. In the new Norwegian curriculum, LK20, there are no "knowledge aims" connected to the English subject. The competence aims have taken their place. "Knowledge aims" were previously set to give the teacher specific aims for what the students needed to learn in each subject (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021). Since there are no longer any "knowledge aims", but only competence aims, there are fewer

frameworks today for what teachers must include in their teaching. This means that they have the opportunity to relate the lessons to students' lives and interests. This can help prevent students' reticence since the teacher is able to prepare lessons that include motivational and exciting exercises for the students. One example of this type of motivational exercise is mentioned by Informant 3, and he explained that in their English teaching, he always has a project where the students get to practice applying for a job and making a CV of their own. Most students can relate to this project and feel that it is a relevant experience for their life in future. He stated that "there are very few people who want to experience a job-seeking situation and not being able to say anything, which can make it more motivating for the students to practice speaking English" (Translated by the authors).

Again, the idea of using games as a strategy comes up, but this time as a way to create motivation. Informant 1 ensured that she continuously varies her teaching, so nothing is set in a particular way. The reason for this is that she does not want the students to know what to expect when entering the classroom. In addition to having a safe learning environment, she wants the students to step outside their comfort zone to keep them motivated. Therefore, she often turns to games and other fun activities in the classroom. According to Ornelas (2021, p. 61), games uniquely increase students' learning motivation. He further elaborates that the more motivated students are to do an activity, the more they might want to participate. Gozcu and Caganaga (2016, pp. 128-129) agree that games attract students because they have an element of fun, unlike many of their ordinary lessons. Teachers tend to get students' attention from the introduction to a fun activity and can use the interest of the games to learn the target language.

Additionally, Informant 2 stated that games help students become more motivated, and even shy and reticent students react positively to using games and fun activities in the classroom. Therefore, games may increase the students' motivation because it becomes "an alternative learning activity that the students may not always have prior knowledge of" (Translated by the authors). In Başöz & Erten's (2019, p. 11) study, the EFL students stated that their willingness to participate orally in English class depends on the instructional methods and materials used to teach the content. They complained about the lack of instructional methods and materials which allow them to speak English in the classroom. They mentioned that they

get bored quickly and thus are often reluctant to speak English in English classes because their teacher does not use any other materials besides the textbook.

On the other hand, all our informants explained that they seek to vary their teaching as much as possible by using teaching tools other than the textbook. They mentioned that teachers must consider how they can execute their lessons and whether their methods and materials generate student motivation. Gozcu and Caganaga (2016, p. 129) agree with this and state that long-lasting EFL learning occurs not only through providing cognitively good instructional practices but also through learning settings that give good pleasure and support to generate student motivation. Increased motivation often leads to a higher willingness to participate orally in English. Therefore, games turn into something new and exciting, which can trigger their inner and outer motivation. It also encourages students to keep their focus during their lessons and be active in their language learning process. In this way, games motivate learning another language (p. 129).

### *5.2.3 The internal effect of Covid-19*

As mentioned previously, all our informants mentioned Covid-19 as a primary reason for reticence, and they continued by elaborating on how it has impacted students' motivation to learn. Due to the pandemic, the informants feel their students have lost much of their everyday life, including school motivation. For many students, the social aspect is a massive contributor to school, negatively affecting them when it was robbed for two years. In a report supporting this, UDIR (2021) states that their current knowledge indicates that a significant element of digital home school during the pandemic made the students lose their spark and motivation toward school and learning. Many students experienced reduced motivation and learning outcomes when the schools were closed, and education became digital in the spring of 2020. During this time, the students also lost physical contact with their teacher during digital home school, which may have affected their current motivation to learn. Students' loss of physical contact with their teacher can affect their learning results in a negative direction. However, UDIR (2021) emphasizes that it is still too early to see any long-term consequences of the pandemic in the statistics they usually use to assess learning outcomes and implementation. Still, Andersen et al. (2021) say that a survey among upper secondary school students shows that almost half of the students were less motivated for schoolwork when the

schools were closed compared to ordinary schools. In addition, these effects of the lockdown have influenced their life going back to physical school life.

## 6.0 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the differences and similarities in international research findings on reticence and Norwegian lower secondary teachers' perceptions of their own students' reticence. In addition, the thesis explored how teachers say they work to prevent reticence, both found in international research and from the informants. The topic was chosen because it appears to be a reoccurring problem in the EFL classroom, based on previous research and our own experiences. Throughout the interviews, our study gained an additional research question, because it became clear that Covid-19 impacted the students' oral participation in class more than we imagined.

The research and additional research question this thesis sought to answer were:

*“What does international research say about reasons for reticence, and how does this compare to Norwegian lower secondary teachers' perceptions? What methods and strategies do Norwegian teachers think may prevent this reticence?”*

And:

*“How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected Norwegian lower secondary students' oral participation in class?”*

In order to answer the research questions, it was necessary to understand terms, international research and theoretical material thoroughly. Firstly, the thesis introduced definitions of terms from various literary authors, which was needed to understand the previous research used as our background information. These definitions included reticence/reluctance and foreign language speaking anxiety and how relevant each term was for this paper. Further, previous international research exploring the field of speaking reluctance/reticence and foreign language anxiety presented different reasons why students may be unwilling to participate in oral activities. Some reasons for reticence mentioned were low language proficiency, fear of making mistakes and embarrassment, and lack of motivation. Practical approaches to how teachers can prevent reticence among students in the EFL classroom were

also examined before concluding the theoretical part of the study. Later, the methodology chapter was introduced, which explained the choices made for qualitative research data collection and the structure of the thesis.

Then, the findings from the five interviews in the study were presented and later discussed with previous research. The findings were exciting and valuable for this study. To answer the first part of our main research question, most of our informants' perceptions agreed with previous international research. The reasons they agreed that may cause reticence among students were fear of embarrassment and making mistakes, lack of confidence and lack of motivation. On the other hand, the perceptions differed regarding language proficiency, such as vocabulary and pronunciation. Vocabulary and pronunciation are significant causes of reticence in all the previous international research. However, our informants do not find it an issue because they perceive their students' language proficiency as sufficient. This sufficient language proficiency could stem from Norwegian students' exposure to English on a daily basis through music, TV, gaming, and social media.

Next, the second part of our main research question raised the question of how Norwegian teachers work to prevent their students' reticence in oral activities. Our informants enlightened us with great examples of helpful methods and strategies. For instance, a safe learning environment in the class is needed to make room for showing the students that making mistakes is normal. To illustrate this, the informants emphasized the importance of setting boundaries and rules for classroom behavior as early as possible. A safe learning environment could be a vital foundation for the following preventative strategies mentioned by the informants. First, the informants underlined group work as a method they frequently use to get all the students to speak some English in class. They think group work is helpful since the focus disappears from one individual, leaving the classroom with background noise. Another essential point in using group work is that reticent students do not have to worry about being called out for their own personal thoughts. If the group were to share their thoughts with the rest of the class, it would be a collective agreement discussed beforehand. Equally important as group work is using games in the EFL classroom to prevent reticence. The informants all used games to create motivation and engagement in the classroom. They



noticed that the reticent students thrived more when there was a fun activity during the lesson and that they focused less on their oral production of English.

In addition to looking at reasons for students' reticence and methods and strategies to prevent reticence, we have also looked into how Covid-19 has affected Norwegian lower secondary students' oral participation in class. Throughout our interviews, it became clear that the informants felt the impact of the pandemic on a large scale. Many of our informants mentioned Covid-19 as a reason for reticence without us asking. Due to the lockdown and digital home school during the pandemic, the participants felt that the students seemed to lack social skills. For instance, conversations among the students seemed more forced than before the pandemic. Furthermore, the informants experienced that the students more easily comment on their peers and make more fun of each other now than what students did prior to Covid-19. Additionally, the informants observe that the students lack experience in basic skills, such as being able to communicate and having oral presentations in English. When students enter lower secondary school, they usually have some experience in having oral presentations from primary school. Therefore, according to the informants, the students are anxious about presentations and will avoid having oral presentations in class. Instead, they prefer to present to their teacher alone. In summary, the informants thought that Covid-19 and digital home school during lockdown had impacted the students' reticence. They lack experience from primary school, and they lack social skills.

### 6.1 Limitations to the Study

One element that can be considered a limitation of this study is its scale. Since this study only conducted five interviews, one cannot consider applying the results to all lower secondary English teachers in Norway. The results may be different in other Norwegian lower secondary schools. The study aimed to explore teachers' views on their students' oral reticence. The five qualitative interviews allowed exploring these different views, opinions and experiences these teachers had in-depth. There is no way to determine whether the results generally represent all Norwegian lower-secondary English teachers' thoughts. Still, we got many corresponding answers, which may indicate that there is a tendency among Norwegian lower secondary school teachers.

Because we only conducted interviews with teachers, there will be a limitation in the reliability of their answers. To illustrate this is when teacher error correction was mentioned as a reason in the results and discussion chapter. The teachers said they do not see their students having teacher error correction as a reason for their oral participation since no students have ever said anything about it. However, we might have gotten different results if we had interviewed the students. Also, we do not know if the teachers use the strategies and methods they mention in the classroom, which will be further explained in the suggestions for further research.

Lastly, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, one limitation of our study is the translation of the informants' answers in the interviews. Since we conducted our interviews in Norwegian, we cannot exclude that some of the answers might have gotten lost in translation. Even though we tried our best to be objective and neutral regarding the translation of our interviews, we are aware of the possible limitation of translating statements and giving them new meanings in another language. Even so, we wanted to conduct our interviews in Norwegian because we thought our informants would answer more freely.

## 6.2 Suggestions for further research

Based on the results and discussion of this master's thesis there are some suggestions for further research. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, we know Covid-19's impact on the EFL classroom is an unexplored and exciting field of research, with no current research on how the pandemic has specifically impacted students' oral skills in Norway. Therefore, our findings connected to a lack of experience and motivation due to the Covid-19 pandemic are essential for our study and future research. We believe the pandemic significantly impacted the students' oral and social skills, so it needs to be researched further.

Additionally, it would be interesting to interview students for further research. This way, we would have the opportunity to ask the students the reasons for their reticence and what methods and strategies they prefer in EFL class. Since we have only interviewed teachers in the current study, we have had to presume that their answers would match their students'. Besides, since we do not know if the teachers do as they say in the interviews, it would have been interesting to do a follow-up observation or a case study to see if their mentioned methods and strategies are being used.

Lastly, we have mentioned foreign language anxiety as a relevant term in our thesis, but reticence became more used. If we had more time and a more extensive thesis, it would be interesting to investigate foreign language anxiety in Norwegian EFL classrooms. One could have gotten the students to take a FLCAS (Foreign language classroom anxiety scale) (Horwitz et al., 1986) test and discuss the results with international research.

### 6.3 Concluding remarks

Throughout working on this master's thesis, we aimed to explore a field of research that felt meaningful and relevant to us as future English teachers. At the start of the master's program at Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet), we struggled to find the research-based teaching that this program offers relevant to our education. We struggled because we view the teaching profession as a more practice-oriented profession than other research-based professions. However, we were positively surprised when we started writing our thesis. We have gotten many suggestions for methods to use in the classroom and great advice from our informants. Even though all lower secondary classes are different, and some strategies might not work for us, having this repertoire for future teaching is helpful. The importance of paying attention to reticent students and how to help these students become more comfortable and confident has given us new insight into the vital role of being a teacher. As teachers, it is our responsibility to help the students voice their opinions and learn ways to express themselves. Therefore, we are grateful for the challenges and opportunities this process and the five years of school have taught us.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview Guide

1. Hvilket trinn jobber du på?
2. Hva slags utdanning har du?
3. Hvor lenge har du undervist i engelsk?
  
4. Opplever du klassen eller klassene dine som muntlig aktive (gjelder alt fra lærer stiller spørsmål, fri flyt av samtaler i klassen, gruppearbeid osv) – beskriv hvordan
5. Har du, eller har du hatt elever som ikke vil snakke engelsk i klasserommet? I hvilke settinger er det de ikke vil snakke?
6. Gjelder dette kun engelskfaget eller er de ikke muntlig aktive i andre fag og?
7. Hva tror du kan være årsaken(e) til at elever er muntlig tilbakeholdene?
8. Hvis du har fulgt klassen din nå, eller en tidligere klasse, har du merket noen forskjell på elevenes muntlige aktivitet før og etter Covid-19?
9. Snakker du engelsk eller norsk i undervisningen? Tror du det har en påvirkning på elevene, i så fall hvordan da?
10. Bruker du og/eller elevene translanguaging ofte? Har det noen påvirkning på elevenes muntlige aktivitet tror du?
11. Hvilke spesifikke metoder bruker du for å få elevene muntlig aktive?
12. Hva tenker du er viktig for å hjelpe elever som kvier seg til å snakke?
13. Føler du det er noe du kan gjøre annerledes for å få de mer muntlig aktive? I form av metoder eller strategier.

#### I bakgrunn

14. Hvordan sikrer du vurdering på elever som ikke vil snakke?



## Appendix 2: Recruitment letter

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

### ***” Speaking reticence among EFL-students”?***

**Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å finne ut hvordan engelsklærere jobber med og støtter opp elever som ikke vil snakke engelsk muntlig i klasserommet. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.**

#### Formål

Vi skal skrive en 30-studiepoengs masteroppgave hvor vi skal undersøke nærmere hvordan engelsklærere møter elever som ikke vil være muntlig aktive i engelsktimene, og hvordan de arbeider med dem. Vi skal sammenligne teori med svarene vi får fra intervjuobjektene.

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

Fakultetet for lærerutdanning og internasjonale studier ved OsloMet er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

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

Du har blitt spurt fordi du er engelsklærer, og vi har spurt de engelsklærerne vi vet om og kan komme i kontakt med.

## Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

- Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at du stiller til et intervju. Det vil ta deg ca. 30 minutter. Intervjuet inneholder spørsmål om dine undervisningsmetoder og dine tanker om muntlig tilbakeholdenhet hos elever.
- Vi tar lydopptak og notater fra intervjuet.
- Det vil ikke bli stilt noen spørsmål som krever personopplysninger fra deg, og du vil være anonym.

### **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 skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Det er i hovedsak kun vi som har tilgang til intervjuet, men det kan tenkes at veileder også har det.
- Vi skal lagre intervjuopplysningene i en låst mappe, og etter vi har transkribert så sletter vi lydopptaket.
- Lydopptaket og opplysninger om deg vil ikke bli publisert, men kun transkribering. Du vil derfor ikke bli gjenkjent i en publikasjon.

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

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes 15. Mai og lydopptak samt transkribering fra intervjuet vil bli slettet.

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

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra OsloMet har 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:

- OsloMet ved Siri Mohammad-Roe (veileder)
- Vårt personvernombud: Personvernombudet ved OsloMet  
(personvernombud@oslomet.no)

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til Personverntjenester sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:

- Personverntjenester på epost ([personverntjenester@sikt.no](mailto:personverntjenester@sikt.no)) eller på telefon: 53 21 15 00.

Med vennlig hilsen

*Emma Gulliksen*

*Karoline Larsen Waaler*

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## **Samtykkeerklæring**

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «Speaking reticence among EFL-students» og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju
- at Emma og Karoline kan bruke svarene mine til prosjektet

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

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

## Appendix 3: NSD approval

[Meldeskjema](#) / [Masteroppgave intervjuer](#) / Vurdering

### Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

Skriv ut 14.11.2022

**Referansenummer**  
850506

**Vurderingstype**  
Standard

**Dato**  
14.11.2022

**Prosjekttittel**  
Masteroppgave intervjuer

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

**Prosjektansvarlig**  
Siri Mohammad-Roe

**Student**  
Emma Gulliksen + Karoline Larsen Waaler

**Prosjektperiode**  
01.01.2023 - 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.

#### Kommentar

##### OM VURDERINGEN

Personverntjenester 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 personvernregelverket.

Personverntjenester har nå vurdert den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at behandlingen er lovlig, hvis den gjennomføres slik den er beskrevet i meldeskjemaet med dialog og vedlegg.

##### VIKTIG INFORMASJON TIL DEG

Du må lagre, sende og sikre dataene i tråd med retningslinjene til din institusjon. Dette betyr at du må bruke leverandører for spørreskjema, skylagring, videosamtale o.l. som institusjonen din har avtale med. Vi gir generelle råd rundt dette, men det er institusjonens egne retningslinjer for informasjonssikkerhet som gjelder.

##### FORUTSETNINGER FOR VURDERINGEN

Vi legger til grunn at deltakerne uttaler seg om sine erfaringer på en slik måte at de ikke kan knyttes til enkeltelever. Vi anbefaler at deltakerne i forkant av intervjuene oppfordres til å unngå identifiserende kombinasjoner av situasjonsbeskrivelser eller bakgrunnsopplysninger.

Vi forutsetter også at meldeskjemaet deles med prosjektansvarlig/veileder. Dette gjøres ved å velge "Del prosjekt" øverst til venstre i skjemaet. Dersom invitasjonen ikke aksepteres av prosjektansvarlig innen en uke, må det sendes ny invitasjon.

##### TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 15.5.2023.

##### 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.

#### PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

Personverntjenester vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

#### DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Personverntjenester vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18) og dataportabilitet (art. 20).

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

#### FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

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).

Ved bruk av databehandler (spørreskjemaleverandør, skylagring, videosamtale o.l.) må behandlingen oppfylle kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art 28 og 29. Bruk leverandører som din institusjon har avtale med.

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

#### 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. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde:

<https://www.nsd.no/personverntjenester/fylle-ut-meldeskjema-for-personopplysninger/melde-endringer-i-meldeskjema> Du må vente på svar fra oss før endringen gjennomføres.

#### OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

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

Lykke til med prosjektet!

## Appendix 4: Declaration of co-writing



### Medforfattererklæring

Om to eller tre studenter gjennomfører og/eller skriver masteroppgaven sammen, skal det legges ved et medforfattererklæring, jf. emneplan MGM05900:

"For studenter som velger å gjennomføre masteroppgaven som gruppearbeid, skal det gå tydelig fram i egen redegjørelse hvordan arbeidet er fordelt, og hvordan hver enkelt oppfyller kravet om selvstendig vitenskapelig arbeid. Her benyttes en medforfattererklæring som begge eller alle tre parter signerer."

Masteroppgavens tittel:

The Loud Silence - a qualitative study of reticence in Norwegian  
Lower secondary schools

Redegjørelse på hvordan arbeidet er fordelt, og hvordan den enkelte oppfyller kravet om selvstendig vitenskapelig arbeid:

Vi leste og fant teori hver for oss. Vi skrev notater fra teorien hver for oss og lagde "utkast" / "skisser" til avsnitt. Sammen flettet vi alt sammen og lagde ferdigstilte avsnitt.

Vi transkriberte noen av intervjuene hver for oss, og leste hverandres. Ble enige om hva vi ville ha med.

I diskusjonen tok en for seg "external factors" og den andre "internal factors". Sammen så vi over, endret og ferdigstilte diskusjonen.

Undertegnede bekrefter å ha bidratt til følgende deler av masteroppgavearbeidet:

Prosjektskisse, idé og tema for masteroppgaven

Ja /  Nei

Praktisk gjennomføring av studien for eksempel innhenting av data

Ja /  Nei

Analyse, drøfting og tolkning av resultatene

Ja /  Nei

Undertegnede har lest og godkjent den innsendte versjonen av masteroppgaven

Oslo 09.05.23

Emma Gulliksen

Karoline Larsen Waaler

(sted)

(dato)

(signatur)

