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Songs in English Teaching for Very Young Non-Native English Speakers:

Perspectives and Implementation Among Norwegian Teachers

Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The goal of this thesis was to investigate the attitudes, perspectives and uses of songs among teachers of English for very young learners in Norway. The study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews among six teachers. The background section provides an overview of relevant previous research and theory on developmental psychology related to language learning, the language acquisition process, as well as the optimal use of songs in the English classroom.

The teachers in this study all had very favorable attitudes towards integrating songs in their teaching practices, and five of the six teachers reported using songs regularly. This positive attitude towards utilizing songs stemmed from an alignment with modern teaching principles and the latest curriculum (LK20) in Norway. The teachers emphasized particularly their view of songs as effective tools in relation to improving pronunciation, listening skills, vocabulary, grammar acquisition, as well as motivation and engagement. The main findings include ways teachers choose songs, the use of songs both as a way to engage and as a part of a three-stage learning approach during lessons, how teachers meet challenges related to using songs and accommodate for different needs among students. The teachers use and positive experience of song as a teaching tool largely aligned with existing theory and research in the field.

Key words: Songs, Teaching tool, Very young learners, The English classroom, Teachers' perspectives and implementation

Sammendrag

Hensikten med denne masteroppgaven er å utforske bruk av sang som pedagogisk verktøy i engelskundervisning på småskoletrinnet i Norge. Herunder vil synspunkter og erfaringer med sang og musikk i undervisningsøyemed behandles. Prosjektet er utført ved hjelp av kvalitativt forskningsdesign der jeg har benyttet semistrukturerte intervjuer med seks lærere.

Litteraturdelen i denne oppgaven gir en oversikt over relevant forskning på barns utviklingspsykologi knyttet til språklæring og språktilegnelsesprosessen. I denne delen presenteres også relevant teori om hvordan sang kan brukes på best mulig måte i engelskundervisning.

I oppgavens hoveddel presenterer jeg mine funn, og drøfter dem opp mot relevant teori. Mine funn viser at informantene hadde positive holdninger til bruk av sang i sin undervisningspraksis, og blant de seks lærerne brukte fem av dem sang og musikk regelmessig. Denne positive holdningen til bruken av sang var knyttet til overenstemmelsen med moderne pedagogiske prinsipper og den nye læreplanen i Norge (LK20). I intervjuer la lærerne vekt på sang som et effektivt verktøy for økt læring, spesielt for forbedring av uttale, lytteferdigheter, vokabular, grammatikktilegnelse, samt økt motivasjon og engasjement. Informantenes bruk og positive opplevelse av sang som undervisningsverktøy samsvarte i stor grad med tilgjengelig teori og forskning på feltet.

Nøkkelord: Sang, Småskoletrinnet, Pedagogisk verktøy, Engelskfaget, Læreres synspunkter og implementeringer

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Abbreviations

TPR = Total physical response

VYL = Very young learner (grades 1-4)

NNES = Non-native English speaking

TBL = Task-based learning

NSD = Norwegian Center for Research Data

LK20 = The Norwegian national curriculum

1 Introduction

Red and yellow and pink and green

Purple and orange and blue

I can sing a rainbow

Sing a rainbow

Sing a rainbow too

(Hamilton, 1953)

Many of us can likely recall songs we have heard from our family members or loved ones as children. Even if we have not heard a particular song for many years, encountering its lyrics or melody can instantly trigger memories or even inspire us to sing along. There is no denying that music plays a vital role in our lives, even if we are not fully aware of it. Songs and music can be entertaining and fun, foster a relaxing atmosphere, trigger emotions, help to bond together groups of people and even stimulate different modes of brain functioning (Arbib, 2013, p. 17; Ball, 2011, p. 11; Thaut, 2008, p. 28).

Many researchers have long recognized the potential benefits of incorporating songs and music into the classroom, particularly for language acquisition (Davis, 2017). This thesis looks at the use of songs and music in teaching English to young learners in Norway. Throughout the thesis I use the term ‘songs’. If not specified in the context, this refers to any use of music with English lyrics in teaching English, and can include singing, listening, playing small portions of songs, acting out a song through movement or dance and English language teaching with a focus on the lyrics of a particular song.

There are a number of studies that show how using songs can enhance vocabulary (Chou, 2014), pronunciation and grammar (Busse et al., 2018; Mulatsih, 2018), as well as motivate students during language learning (Çevikbaş et al., 2018, p. 103). In my own early English language learning journey, I quite vividly recall the words, phrases, and nuances I learned from songs. Songs about topics as diverse as the alphabet and the colors of the rainbow seemed to help engrain in my mind different aspects of the English language. The music we sang in class created a lively atmosphere and seemed to make the learning simple and the catchy phrases enjoyable for me. The Norwegian national curriculum for English includes competence aims related to using songs in the classroom. After the second and fourth years

the students should be able to listen and explore the English alphabet and pronunciation patterns through songs and singing (Ministry of Education and Research, 2020a, pp. 5-6). Shin (2017, p. 14) asserts that teachers must understand how music and movement can benefit child development and language learning. Considering that researchers view songs as important language learning tools, and using songs is part of the Norwegian national curriculum (LK20), several important questions arise: How, and to what degree, are songs included in the English teaching classroom, and how do teachers in Norway view them as a pedagogical tool?

The purpose of this study was to explore these questions through interviews with teachers of English for very young learners in Norway. The study hypothesizes that teachers primarily use songs as a way to provide a break from the lesson, rather than incorporating them as a deliberate learning strategy in the classroom. Specifically, it is expected that teachers do not utilize a wide range of leaning strategies in conjunction with using songs in their lessons, but rather rely on songs as a means of promoting relaxation or enjoyment for students.

1.1 Research questions

In order to examine teachers' beliefs, experiences and use of songs with young non-native English speaking (NNES) learners, the following research questions are addressed: *What are Norwegian teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards the use of songs as a teaching tool for very young learners? If songs are used, how do they implement them into their lessons?*

There exist several different definitions of the term 'young learners' in the field of English language teaching. Ellis (2014, p. 75) refers to young learners as students under 18 years of age. For the purposes of her book, 'Teaching English to Young Learners: Critical Issues in Language Teaching with 3-12 Year Olds' Bland defines young learners as children aged three to twelve (Bland, 2015b, p. 16). For the purpose of this thesis, very young learners (VYLs) will be used to specify students in grades 1 through 4, aged 5-10. This age group has been chosen for this study as it was assumed, based on the literature, that songs might be particularly important for them. This group is also considered a separate stage in the Norwegian school system ('småskoletrinnet' or lower primary school).

2 Background

The background section begins with an examination of what characterizes young learners at this stage of their development and how this can influence teaching approaches. Following this is a review of some of the basic theoretical perspectives in language teaching for NNES learners. Subsequently, the distinctive features of songs and music are discussed, along with how they can be incorporated into teaching strategies based on a review of relevant literature. Throughout the theoretical discussion, I will occasionally include some examples of songs commonly used in teaching English in order to clarify specific points.

It was somewhat difficult to find literature which only considered the age-group relevant to this study (grades 1-4). I have therefore also included literature which considered a wider age-group and tried to focus primarily on the elements which were relevant to the age-group in this study.

2.1 Characteristics of VYLs in relation to language acquisition

“We need to be aware that older and younger children bring different levels of emotional, linguistic, and cognitive maturity to their English language learning classroom” (Emery & Rich, 2015, p. 11). When children begin primary school, they are in the preoperative stage of development based on Piaget’s developmental theory (Blake & Pope, 2008, p. 60). This stage of learning is characterized by a holistic approach to processing information and primarily learning through multisensory experiences (Kaminski, 2016, p. 29; McKay, 2005, p. 6). Analytical and abstract thinking abilities start to emerge around the age of eight when children enter the concrete operational stage (Emery & Rich, 2015, p. 11). Tomlinson (2015, p. 274) highlights the importance of not overloading VYLs with analytical cognitive demands. Rather than explicitly teaching rules that may cause confusion at this developmental stage, it is preferable to assist children to understand the language structure implicitly (Emery & Rich, 2015, p. 17). Language learning should be centered on meaning, engaging input and activities, opportunities centered on the language’s form, and a safe and supportive learning environment that can help them absorb the rich details of the natural language (McKay, 2006, p. 41; Pinter, 2017, p. 36).

As students’ progress, their cognitive abilities expand, allowing them to engage in more logical and reasoned thinking. Despite this progress, they still rely heavily on direct

experiences, including the use of objects and visual aids, to further their understanding. Later, between the ages of 11 and 13, children start to acquire the cognitive capacity to manipulate their thoughts and ideas, which enables them to engage in activities such as reasoning, problem-solving, and critical thinking (McKay, 2005, pp. 6-7). Although Piaget's guidelines provide an important framework for understanding cognitive development, teachers need to keep in mind that children do not necessarily develop emotionally and cognitively at the same rate (McKay, 2005, p. 6).

Emery and Rich (2015, p. 13) highlight the influence of children's social, active, and naturally meaning-focused nature on their language acquisition process. They emphasize how children gain a better understanding of the world through exploration, experimentation and attempting to link their existing knowledge with new experiences as *active learners*. As Ibrahim states "Children do not come to their English classes as empty linguistic vessels, but as functioning, competent language and/or multilingual users" (Ibrahim, 2023, p. 237). A child's environment has a profound impact on their development, as they learn by observing and listening to those around them. Pinter (2017, p. 5) also emphasizes that children learn through exploration, play, and by talking things out with others, usually adults. As children are active learners, it is vital for them to actively interact with and use language in order for optimal uptake and proficiency, rather than relying solely on passive exposure (Rixon, 2015, p. 56).

Lev Vygotsky focuses on children as *social learners*, and points out that development and learning occur in a social context where children are active learners in a highly social environment (Cameron, 2001, pp. 5-6). Using Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Cameron (2001, p. 6) argues that intelligence is more accurately measured by what a child can accomplish when skilled assistance is provided rather than what a child is capable of on their own. In this scenario, the child is doing things in a social context, with other people and language supporting them in various ways, and gradually moving away from being reliant on others to becoming independent.

Considering the fact that VYLs are naturally *meaning-oriented*, it makes sense that they acquire language through learning to understand and use single words or chunks of language that are immediately meaningful to them. A second step (beyond the VYL phase) involves combining these units of language into short sentences and understanding how word order, structural units, and tense can improve the clarity of their messages. Slowly they become

increasingly aware of how to refine their communication, making it more precise and effective. As they acquire knowledge about meaningful language units, their understanding of the relationships between them also increases (Emery & Rich, 2015, p. 16). This emphasizes the importance of children building a solid vocabulary before moving on to other topics – a process English teachers can facilitate through providing students with many diverse opportunities to hear and speak English in the classroom (Alqahtani, 2015, p. 22).

2.2 Transition from traditional to humanistic teaching approaches

Moeller and Catalano (2015) provide an overview of the various theories and theorists contributing to language teaching and learning. A traditional perspective, based in behaviorism and the concept of habit formation, which many now would consider outdated, is the idea that language can be learned through repetition and imitation (Mocanu, 2015, p. 75; Moeller & Catalano, 2015, p. 327). This is commonly referred to as the audio-lingual approach. In this approach, students practice and imitate language patterns with the goal of the patterns becoming automatic. The belief here being that other lexical items could be replaced or slotted into the pattern to create a new and different meaning during conversation (Moeller & Catalano, 2015, p. 327).

During the 1960s, a shift in perspective took place within the realm of psychology and teaching, as the focus moved beyond these behavioral approaches that relied heavily on repetition. The emphasis became more on meaning as a central element in psychology's understanding of the functioning of the mind. Here, meaning as opposed to behavioral reflexes to environmental cues, or as a function of the mind that seeks to search for deeper connections and understandings (Moeller & Catalano, 2015, p. 328). Around this time, Noam Chomsky also proposed that children are born with an innate knowledge of language, allowing them to discover for themselves the underlying rules of language systems without needing explicit instruction. According to this view, a child's knowledge of language can be acquired rapidly (Moeller & Catalano, 2015, p. 327).

The interplay between the environment and the innate language skills of a child in the process of language learning also came into focus during this period (Moeller & Catalano, 2015, p. 327). This perspective emphasized the importance of fitting the language environment to match the child's ability level. Closely linked to the emphasis on environment is Vygotsky's

theory of social culture which stresses that learning does not happen in isolation but is shaped by interaction with others (Moeller & Catalano, 2015, p. 328). The movement from a behaviorist style of teaching towards more humanistic approaches also brought a focus on feelings, emotions and interpersonal relationships into the teaching repertoire (Mocanu, 2015, p. 77). This was a movement defined by a shift of focus from left brain functions to right brain functions - from logic, reasoning, and language processing to creativity, emotions, social interaction and intuition (Mocanu, 2015, p. 78).

The relationship between the mind and the physical body, including all of its interactions with the environment, has become increasingly recognized as crucial for effective learning (Wilson, 2002, p. 625). Empirical evidence supports the idea that learning is an embodied process that, in addition to the mind, involves the entire body and its interactions with the environment (Atkinson, 2010, p. 605; Jusslin et al., 2022, p. 3). This means optimal learning occurs when learners engage their senses in creating meaningful connections between themselves and the world around them. According to some, this process also involves linking physical body movement to cognitive activities (Chicho, 2021, p. 52), leading to a deeper level of understanding as well as increased retaining and retrieval of information (Lindgren & Johnson-Glenberg, 2013, p. 446).

Shapiro and Stolz (2019, p. 21) also emphasize how this embodied approach, beyond its effect on memory, can improve language acquisition, social interaction, and reasoning. Children naturally use a wide array of sensorimotor activities while acquiring language. They hear and replicate sounds associated with physical objects and actions as a part of a multisensory experience (Macedonia, 2019, p. 3). By providing children with the opportunities to use their bodies and senses as integral to their language learning journey, they can be motivated and achieve success (Chicho, 2021, p. 53).

As has been discussed, perspectives on learning have evolved from behaviorist understandings to viewing learning as a co-creative process that includes meaning and a wide field of interaction between the environment, social surroundings, the mind, the body, and emotions. According to Enever (2015, p. 39), some schooling systems still follow a more conventional approach to teaching where formality and concentrated effort are prioritized, and students are expected to be 'well behaved' and not make a lot of noise. Consequently, teachers may be hesitant to introduce creative activities that may be seen as disruptive or elicit

disapproval from their colleagues. Similarly, Rixon (2015, p. 56) points out that in certain classrooms worldwide, communication and collaboration between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, are not given priority. She emphasizes the importance of a necessary change here in order to meet the active engagement of VYLs throughout their language learning journey.

Though communication and collaboration are today viewed as essential elements of teaching, Mocanu points out that there does not appear to be a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ theory when it comes to language learning (Mocanu, 2015, p. 78). Different approaches and opinions exist about the best way to learn, and each may have its own advantages and disadvantages. Children learn in various ways, each with their unique learning style, interest, and abilities. Teachers can help to facilitate this process most effectively by identifying approaches that appropriately meet their students’ immediate needs and learning situation (Mocanu, 2015, p. 79). A wide array of diverse teaching approaches to draw from can be of great value in this endeavor.

2.3 General strategies for teaching English

2.3.1 Lowering the barrier

Receptivity and openness to learning, is a crucial factor in language learning, and researchers frequently refer to the affective filter hypothesis when describing this. This hypothesis was developed by Stephen Krashen (1982), and envisions a hypothetical filter, which when lowered in a student makes them more receptive and likely to exhibit a positive attitude towards learning. Such a state is characterized by high motivation, self-confidence, and at ease in taking in language input. On the other hand, a raised affective filter can prevent students from acquiring language since they are unmotivated and, therefore, will not have the desire to seek language input (Paquette & Rieg, 2008, p. 228; Saldiraner & Cinkara, 2021, p. 121; Schoepp, 2016, p. 2; Shen, 2009, p. 90).

Obviously, it is essential that children are in a receptive state when it comes to teaching a new language (Shen, 2009, p. 90). Possible ways of facilitating this receptivity and lowered barrier to learning include creating a relaxing inclusive atmosphere in the classroom. By fostering an environment where children feel comfortable expressing themselves and interacting with each other, they can become more open to learning and retaining new information (Willis, 2007, p. 6).

2.3.2 Holistic strategies

McKay (2006 p. 42) emphasizes the importance of choosing activities that engage children in doing, thinking, and moving during the early stages of learning, as these activity-based approaches are most likely to facilitate language acquisition. Huertas and Parra (2014, p. 13) point out that physical interaction along with visual, vocal, and facial expressions and gestures should be utilized to engage VYLs in learning. Also in relation to expression, Kersten and Rhode (2015) emphasize the need to allow VYLs to use the new language for their own self-expression: “Young learners should experience L2 as an instrument with the help of which they are able to express their own needs, ideas, attitudes and emotions, while being actively involved in meaningful tasks or problem-solving activities” (Kersten & Rohde, 2015, p. 82).

As mentioned in section 2.1, children are active and social learners. In relation to children’s social nature, the teacher has an essential role in mediating the world for the children and in creating an engaging social environment, providing students with the opportunity to interact on various levels and use the language together (Cameron, 2001, pp. 5-6). To a great degree, this interaction comes natural for children as they have an instinctive tendency to use their bodies and interact with their environment and others in it. However, this tendency also results in relatively shorter attention spans for the youngest children. In order to flow with the children’s moving attention, teachers should incorporate and alternate between a variety of different learning strategies (Chou, 2014, p. 285).

2.3.3 Multiple literacies and emotional literacies

The concept of *multiple literacies* encompasses many forms of literacy which together are much broader than traditional reading and writing alone (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 187). According to Kaminski (2016, p. 33), it is important that children develop the ability to use and understand these multiple modes of communication, especially in a digital world where diverse forms of media are used. Multimodal theory emphasizes the need to provide children with many opportunities to engage in activities that allow them to express themselves and build meaning through diverse modes of communication (Kress, 1997, as cited in Ellis, 2018, p. 85). These include images, sounds, video, facial expressions, and body language etc.

Ellis (2018, p. 85) points out how visual images can be used to challenge children to interpret emotions conveyed through facial expression, gestures, and body language. This may facilitate the development of one form of literacy known as *emotional literacy*. Emotional literacy as described by Weare (2003, p. 14) is the ability to understand and manage our own emotions, and respond effectively to the emotions of others. Along this line of thinking, scholars point out that the material used in the classroom should have the potential to elicit an emotional response and engagement from the students (Schmitt, 2008, p. 338; Tomlinson, 2015, p. 274). Similarly, to Ellis' example of using images to convey emotion, lyrics and melodies in songs can also convey emotion which VYLs can interpret and themselves express through the act of singing. Children's songs are often accompanied by gestures or movements, and today also by visuals in the form of videos on digital platforms. These can all potentially further enhance children's emotional and embodied engagement in the activity.

2.3.4 The right kind of activities and tasks

As seen in Section 2.1, the cognitive and linguistic development of VYLs can differ from child to child. "Children bring to their language learning their own personalities, likes and dislikes and interests, their own individual cognitive styles and capabilities and their own strengths and weaknesses" (McKay, 2005, p. 5). Therefore, it is advantageous for teachers to choose various activities and tasks that reflect the range of their students' development (Cameron, 2001, p. 27; Emery & Rich, 2015, p. 11). Too little or too much challenge can be counterproductive (Cameron, 2001, p. 27). On the other hand, language which slightly exceeds the learners' level, can still be meaningful and manageable if it is accompanied by context and other supportive frameworks. Various types of supportive material can provide such context, and be essential for the learners at this stage (Linse, 2005, p. 13). This journey can also be greatly facilitated by exciting tasks and activities which require children to work collaboratively and interact with each other (McKay, 2006, p. 41).

2.3.5 Task-based learning

Task-based learning (TBL) is a widely used approach to language instruction (Jackson, 2022, p. 1). In its essence, it is a learner-driven approach that focuses on practical language use in real-world contexts. The tasks used engage students in situations, often small groups, where they must make use of the new language to complete authentic tasks (Bland, 2022, p. 315). This approach is viewed as advantageous to traditional language exercises that lack a tangible

purpose and appeal (Nunan, 2004, p. 12; Pinter, 2015, p. 118). Unlike these more rigid language exercises, tasks provide learners with opportunities to communicate and practice using the language in meaningful ways. This engagement is critical for advancing in language acquisition (Pinter, 2015, p. 118). It forms a ‘learning by doing’ framework that captures the dynamic and hands-on nature of language learning itself (Nunan, 2004, p. 12).

Pinter (2015, pp. 118-119) provides an example of how a TBL can be put into practice. In her example, students, who have each been given a different picture, work together in pairs. The students talk about their picture and describe five distinctions between the pictures they each have. Jackson points out that singing songs can be an effective TBL activity where students are engaged in doing a stimulating language based activity together (Jackson, 2022, pp. 4-5). Singing songs together in a classroom can potentially touch on many of the essential elements of a task in the TBL framework. Singing is an engaging, ‘learning by doing’, purposeful, social activity that goes beyond simple language exercises and can be carried out in smaller or larger groups where natural language can be exchanged during and after the activity itself.

2.4 The potential benefits of songs in language learning

A song, according to Lake (2003, p. 102) is more than words and notes on paper; it is an environment that expresses emotion and transmits a message. Kaminski (2016) emphasizes that songs are not solely defined by their functionality. Instead, these texts have the power to engage and influence on a deeper, more emotional level:

They are artistic texts and as such they may entertain, enchant, inspire, calm, stir or provoke, educate or enlighten their audience but they are not defined by their functionality. Through their versatile, non-conformist, playful nature, works of art engage their audience and they do so on more than a purely cognitive level. They address us as a whole person with our memories, fears, dreams, values, and sense of beauty (Kaminski, 2016, p. 26).

Shen points out that the lyrics themselves are characterized by rhythms, conversational speech, and poetic expressions. These characteristics of lyrics, in combination with the song as a whole, can create a hook that captures the listener’s attention and may make the words more memorable and unique in comparison to regular speech (Shen, 2009, pp. 88-89).

Using songs as teaching aids in the classroom can potentially encompass a number of the teaching perspectives and approaches mentioned in the section 2.3, general strategies for teaching English. These approaches range from repetition and imitation to those that touch more on emotion, physicality, social interaction, meaning and motivation. The following discussion reviews some of the potential benefits of using songs as well as the teaching approaches they can provide based on a literature review of this subject.

2.4.1 Influence on the learning environment through motivation and emotion

Learning a foreign language is a challenging process. Including exciting and enjoyable activities, of which singing is an example, can become the key to success (Ulate, 2008, p. 96). The emotional and feeling-based nature of songs can also provide a holistic and embodied experience as well a potential springboard for socializing and learning:

A song is a very strong means of triggering emotions that contributes to socialization (a song is collective); appeals to the ear (one listens to himself while singing); engenders pleasure (reproduction of sound, enjoyment of the rhythm) and help to develop an aesthetic taste (expressing feelings and sentiments) (Cakir, 1999 as cited in Castro Huertas & Navarro Parra, 2014, p. 14).

This points to a potential advantage of songs in their ability to influence students' moods which naturally will also have an effect on the learning environment. Singing, as compared to speaking activities, may activate brain regions related to reward, suggesting that there is a greater element of emotional processing involved (Callan et al., 2006, p. 1328). This more emotional and personal experience which songs can provide, may result in a deeper connection to the language (Džanić & Pejić, 2016, p. 45). In addition to strengthening the connection with the language, the relationship between students and teachers may also be strengthened, as they are physically involved in the same actions and experiences (Kaminski, 2016, p. 29; Sevik, 2012, p. 11).

According to Pinter (2017, p. 45), in language learning classes for VYLs, the primary source of motivation often stems from their teacher and the engaging activities they encounter in class. A child's motivation to learn can be influenced by a variety of factors, including internal factors such as interest, enthusiasm, and desire, as well as external factors such as peer

pressure (Shen, 2009, p. 90). The teacher, the students, and the learning environment all play a critical role in shaping the learning experience and influencing learners' levels of motivation and engagement (Littlejohn, 2023, p. 23). Using English songs can provide a harmonious classroom atmosphere which helps to lower students' affective filter, reducing their anxiety, fostering their interest and motivating them to learn the target language. Students will more easily regard English songs as part of entertainment rather than work, and thus may find learning English through songs amusing and relaxing (Shen, 2009, p. 90).

As songs often contains repetition and simple language structures, learners are often more motivated to understand and use songs than other types of text (Džanić & Pejić, 2016, p. 45). As learners listen to a song they really enjoy, they will often want to learn the lyrics and sing the song themselves, often finding it relatively easy to memorize the lyrics compared to text without melody (Shen, 2009, p. 92). Munden and Myhre (2015, p. 84) suggest that this process of learning English songs by heart can enhance self-confidence, regardless of proficiency. Learning new language through songs, may motivate students to maintain a positive attitude and willingness to learn (Džanić & Pejić, 2016, p. 43).

The environment in which our VYLs learn English must be nurturing and non-threatening for them to succeed (Mohamad Nor & Rashid, 2018, p. 163). Language-rich activities should be conducted in an environment that encourages children to take risks in speaking the language (McKay, 2006, p. 41); song-based language activities are one of several possible choices (Džanić & Pejić, 2016, p. 40). Singing can feel much less threatening than many other approaches to those learning a new language (Boothe & West, 2015), as there is less pressure to produce the language on cue. Learners can, for instance, wait to sing along until they are ready (Džanić & Pejić, 2016, p. 40).

Authentic children's culture encompasses the cultural practices and traditions that are familiar and meaningful to children (Read, 2023, p. 70). Using songs as a source of authentic children's culture can provide valuable resources that are likely to be familiar to them in their other languages. Incorporating materials from authentic children's cultures can help strengthen the connection between home and school, and encourage children's active participation in learning (Read, 2023, p. 70).

While the enjoyable motivating nature of songs and singing can be of great value, a certain balance needs to be found. Littlejohn (2023, p. 22) emphasizes that while enjoyable classroom activities may be used as a way to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation to learn, their effectiveness may be limited. The reason for this is that such activities can create an expectation among students that they should always be having fun in the classroom. This focus on fun may shift attention away from the satisfaction of learning itself and may not lead to sustained engagement or interest in the subject matter once the fun activity is over and normal class work resumes. As a result of this, students may come to view leaning as something that should always be entertaining and engaging, rather than as an activity that can sometimes be challenging or require effort (Littlejohn, 2023, p. 22).

2.4.2 Building listening skills

Listening comprehension involves the ability to interpret sounds and make sense of what is being said. The skill of listening is considered actively receptive, implying that although listeners' efforts are invisible, they must work very hard to hear, understand, and retain what they hear. In short, Nemtchinova (2020) explains what goes into this process:

When hearing a message, the brain quickly processes it in the sensory memory before either passing it on to short-term memory or discarding it based on quality, urgency, and source. The message may then be analyzed against existing knowledge before potentially being stored in long-term memory. Those who are effective listeners are able to reconstruct words from sounds, extract meaning from them, and ignore irrelevant input without noticing that they are performing these cognitive functions (Nemtchinova, 2020, p. 18).

Nemtchinova (2020, p. 47) suggests various methods to teach listening skills to VYLs. These include utilizing resources such as audiobooks, videos, podcasts, and songs. By engaging in such activities, VYLs can develop their listening skills and ability to interpret the language.

Pinter (2017) highlights the importance of allowing learners to listen to the language without necessarily being required to speak it. One method which incorporates this approach is *Total Physical Response* (TPR). This method links listening to physical actions in meaningful contexts where the listener does not need to respond verbally (Pinter, 2017, p. 58). Using physical movement while listening to the song allows children to become familiar with the

language without having to speak it. For instance, in introducing the children's song *Hop a Little, Jump a Little*, students can act out the actions portrayed in the song. In order to know what to act out, learners must closely listen to the lyrics of the song. By incorporating physical movement, students can gain a deeper, more embodied understanding of the lyrics, as they are able to use their own bodies in making connections between the words and the actions.

2.4.3 Memory tool

Songs, like poems and nursery rhymes have a highly patterned structure. Primary-aged children are particularly attracted to these patterns, as they help to satisfy their cognitive need for structure and predictability (Bland, 2015a, p. 152). It is reasonable to assume that the natural attraction to these patterns will help to engage memory and recollection of the language in the passage.

Songs are often repeated and re-sung. Though this involves the repetitional aspect of the behaviorist approach to language teaching, singing songs can also go far beyond the pattern drills employed in the audio-lingual method (Bland, 2015a, p. 162). Bland highlights the benefits of children chanting poems to enhance their grammatical and phonological awareness and give them an experience of sensory delight in the meaningful repetition of the words. Further she emphasizes the value of 'context, meaning and story worlds' that enable young learners to form mental representations of the language found in poems (Bland, 2015a, p. 162), which have certain similarities to songs (Kaminski, 2016, p. 35).

Providing children with the opportunity to sing songs, will allow them to repeat words and language structures frequently, making the process an effective memory tool (Džanić & Pejić, 2016, p. 42; Paquette & Rieg, 2008, p. 228). This importance of repetition, which songs can provide, is also emphasized by other researchers: "Despite the vital importance of multiple exposures to new language material, language teachers are often far too uneasy or unaware with regard to the need for repetition" (Bland, 2015a, p. 153). Most children enjoy singing, and a certain amount of singing the same songs over again, may prevent boredom that otherwise could come from rote repetition (Džanić & Pejić, 2016, p. 40). Once the language has been absorbed through songs, children begin to internalize it through such repeated exposure (Trinick, 2012, p. 7). It is common for learners to consider listening to and singing songs as entertainment while not being aware that they are also learning a language

simultaneously. In this sense, singing and listening to songs can be seen as an effective and enjoyable complementary approach to the more traditional way of memorizing vocabulary (Shen, 2009, p. 91).

2.4.4 Developing intonation and pronunciation

The English language is considered stressed-timed, meaning that certain syllables within any given stretch of language, tend to last longer than others. This is one of several prosodic features of the English language, which also includes pitch, tempo, volume, rhythm, and intonation. Kaminski (2016, pp. 37-38) points out that these prosodic features of a language play an important role in a child's acquisition of their mother tongue. She also suggests that the prosodic nature of songs as well as chants and rhymes can therefore be important in learning a second language, a point which seems to be supported by research.

It has been shown that students who focus on prosodic aspects of speech will be better equipped to master intonation and pronunciation, two essential steps towards language proficiency (Kaminski, 2016, p. 41). Songs may be a useful and enjoyable tool for learning and integrating these features of the language (Forster, 2006, p. 63; Paquette & Rieg, 2008, p. 228)

2.4.5 Everyday vocabulary in context

To learn a language, vocabulary is of course essential. Without a sufficient repertoire, children will not be able to understand or be understood (Adnyani & Dewi, 2020, p. 90). According to Millington (2011, p. 135), songs are effective tools for learning and practicing vocabulary. They are often themed or based on specific topics which may be helpful for VYLs as the context can aid in learning and retention of the new words.

When introducing new words, Pinter (2017, p. 101) emphasizes the importance of including words that children are able to observe, touch, feel, and experience on a daily basis. If, for example, the aim of the lesson is to teach basic vocabulary of body parts, action songs like *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes*, may be beneficial as these involve pointing to the different body parts (Trinick, 2012, p. 6). Another example could be using the song *I can Sing a Rainbow* when reviewing color names (Millington, 2011, p. 136). Forster (2006, p. 65) suggests that songs can also be used to introduce vocabulary linked with the everyday

classroom experience of the children, their daily routines, and simple everyday spoken exchanges. Since song lyrics are usually written in a manner resembling everyday spoken language, they have an authentic nature (Lee & Lin, 2015, p. 2), which can help students in developing ‘real-world’ communication skills, and prepare them for the types of language they will encounter throughout their life (Paquette & Rieg, 2008, p. 228).

2.4.6 Living grammar

The concept of grammar is often used to refer to the rules and conventions of language that enable us to construct meaningful sentences and communicate effectively (Cameron, 2001, p. 98). The language system and its many rules are obviously unfamiliar to VYLs, and generally teaching approaches do not introduce explicit language rules to the youngest learners.

Children typically begin by acquiring a holistic understanding of the language in order to engage in various activities, such as playing or singing. As VYLs are exposed to songs and engage in singing, they instinctively start using the grammatical structures presented in the lyrics, even if they are not initially aware of it (Shen, 2009, p. 91). The melodic nature of the song, and its repeated singing, help to engrave a memory of the inherent grammar as well as the vocabulary (Shen, 2009, p. 92). Later on, as they progress through their learning journey, more explicit teaching can be provided to increase their grammar awareness (Pinter, 2017, p. 98).

As students master a song or reach a later stage of their learning process, teachers can add different variations or extend grammar structures contained in songs to aid the students’ understanding of grammar points (Forster, 2006, p. 65). As a thought experiment, after the class has learned the song *Mary had a little lamb*, the teacher can introduce a modified version of the song with the present tense, *Mary has a little lamb*. This time, as they sing, the teacher encourages them to act out the lyrics by pretending to hold and pet a little lamb (embodied learning). Later, the teacher can then ask the children if they notice any difference between the two versions of the song. The children may respond, “It’s happening now!” or “Mary still has the lamb!” The teacher can then explain that the last version is singing about now instead of before. By experiencing the difference in the actions and the way the song is sung, the children may begin to understand the concept of past and present tense without explicit grammar instruction.

2.4.7 Experimental studies and studies of teacher perspectives

In the previous sections, various potential advantages of songs have been discussed. There has also been a number of experimental studies that have shown that songs can provide a number of learning benefits:

Good, Russo, and Sullivan (2015) carried out a study to examine whether songs can aid pronunciation, serve as an effective tool for enhancing memory, as well as facilitate vocabulary acquisition. Thirty-eight children between 9 and 13 years of age participated in a classroom experiment. The study lasted for two-weeks. The children were taught a four-line lyrical passage from the song *Functions Of The Face*, with one classroom receiving the lyrics as a song and the other receiving them as a spoken poem with a rhythmic pattern. The study assessed the children's ability to pronounce foreign vowel and consonant sounds, recall the lyrics verbatim, and translate target terms. The results showed that the students who learned the text through songs were more successful at pronunciation and recalling than the children who learned through spoken poetry (Good et al., 2015).

An experimental study done by Ali (2020), aimed to examine the effectiveness of using English songs in improving listening comprehension. The participants were 80 young learners between the age of 7 and 10. Half of the students practiced listening to English songs and a control group of the students practiced listening to the same words using 'traditional' methods. Different songs were introduced, like the Song *Wheels on The Bus*. The study found that the experimental song group had significantly improved listening skills compared to the traditional group (Abou Ali, 2020).

Another study investigated the impact of learning grammar through songs (Busse et al., 2021). The study involved 57 English language learners between the ages of 8 and 10. The students were divided into three groups: singing, speaking, and control group. The singing and speaking groups were taught new vocabulary or grammar through either singing or speaking lyrics. While the control group had new vocabulary introduced through regular lessons. Language gains were assessed through pre-, post, and follow-up tests, with the selected music material being an adapted version of the popular song *Do You Like Broccoli*. The results of the study showed that the singing group had a significant advantage over the other groups, indicating that using songs to teach grammar can be a highly effective method (Busse et al., 2021).

Despite research showing the effectiveness of songs, I found a lack of studies regarding teachers' perspectives on the use of songs in classes with VYLs both internationally and in Norway. However, one extensive study conducted in Finland was found on this topic. This study investigated the beliefs and practices relating to songs and poems, of ninety-four teachers of Finnish as a second language. The study referred to a number of earlier studies which had shown positive effects of the use of song and music in language learning, but also pointed out that there were few studies examining teacher beliefs and practices related to songs. The teachers in this Finnish study strongly believed that singing and listening to songs had both positive psychological benefits, as well as language learning benefits. They were also found to frequently put on songs for their students to listen to during teaching. However, despite teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of singing for learning, singing itself was scarcely used. The researchers theorized that this might have something to do with the ease of just putting on a song, and a hesitancy around singing, or a reduced comfort level when it comes to teachers using their own voices. They also pointed out that the existing education of teachers did not effectively prepare them for using song in the classroom (Alisaari & Heikkola, 2017).

2.5 Applying songs in the classroom

Teachers' primary responsibilities are to teach the target language to VYLs, not to develop their singing abilities (Sevik, 2012, p. 12). For songs to be an effective tool for developing language skills, Sevik states that they must be carefully selected for the student's cognitive and linguistic needs and thoughtfully integrated into a scheme of work (Sevik, 2012, p. 12). Songs can be used and implemented in many ways. Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2002, p. 168) discuss how songs can serve as warm-ups, transitions between activities, introductions to new vocabulary, attention-getters, and integrated with storytelling, topic work, or cross-curricular activities.

2.5.1 Selection and supporting material

As teachers select materials in other contexts of language learning, they use their tacit knowledge and common sense in choosing appropriate learning resources. The same applies when selecting songs (Trinick, 2012, p. 59). Prior to introducing songs in the classroom, it is important to consider the students' age, interests, stage of development and language

proficiency (Džanić & Pejić, 2016, p. 43; Forster, 2006, p. 65). Choosing the wrong song may result in the child becoming demotivated and not benefitting from the potential learning value of the song (Davis, 2017, p. 451). Additionally, Forster (2006, p. 65) emphasizes the importance of considering the song's purpose and relevance, although she notes that nonsense songs can also be appreciated in certain situations. Throughout the process of selecting songs and materials, the teacher needs to consider the learners' familiarity with the language to be used – although some new words can be introduced, it is not advisable to present significant amounts of new language in a song. Another important point is that listening to the teacher sing, rather than listening to audio might be helpful for our VYLs, since teachers can vary their speed and clarity (Pinter, 2017, p. 53).

The choice of songs to be used in the classroom goes hand in hand with choosing other teaching material that can support the learning potential of the selected song. It goes without saying that different students enjoy different activities. Some children enjoy physical activity, while others do not (Džanić & Pejić, 2016, p. 42). Linse (2005, p. 16) emphasizes that we have three main learning channels: auditory, tactile, and visual. Teachers should consider these different channels when selecting materials to use with songs. A mix of activities, as suggested by Pinter (2017, p. 16), can ensure that every student's preference is accommodated at some point.

One question that arises is whether learners should be provided with the written lyrics of songs played in the classroom. Nemtchinova (2020) discusses this in relation to teaching listening skills and points out that there is a belief among some teachers that students get distracted by written texts, resulting in the listening becoming a reading activity. However, she suggests that printing out the text of audio can be a useful tool for intensive listening and working on intonation and stress as well as vocabulary (Nemtchinova, 2020, p. 48). Obviously, this would only be fitting for students who are at a stage where written handouts are appropriate.

According to the available literature, selecting suitable materials clearly requires a teacher to critically analyze the lesson's purpose and students' needs, as well as understand what supplies will help to accomplish the learning goal. Nemtchinova (2020) emphasizes that teachers cannot make the mistake of believing that playing a song or other audio passage is equivalent to teaching listening comprehension. It is recommended that listening and learning

activities are accompanied by other exercises leading up to and after the listening activity (Nemtchinova, 2020, p. 50). This general approach is found more specifically in the so called three-stage approach.

2.5.2 Three-stage approach

Several authors point out the importance of consciously using a *three-stage approach* in working with songs in the classroom (Cameron, 2001; Džanić & Pejić, 2016; Sevik, 2012). This approach, which is also used in other teaching settings, includes a pre-activity, core activity, and post activity. The pre-activity stage allows teachers to introduce the necessary language points and vocabulary while engaging the learner's imaginations and expectations in relation to the next core activity (Cameron, 2001, p. 32; Džanić & Pejić, 2016, p. 43). The core activity is the main activity, without this stage the whole activity would collapse (Cameron, 2001, p. 32). The core-activity or task must be related to what was learned during the pre-activity. In the last stage of the three-stage process, the post-activity stage, pupils are given the opportunity to apply what they have learned. This last stage will help increase the full educational value of the teaching activity. During this stage, they develop and integrate the skills designed to be acquired through the use of the songs (Džanić & Pejić, 2016, p. 44).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

A qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews, was chosen to explore the perspectives and attitudes of Norwegian teachers regarding the use and implementation of songs as a teaching tool. The qualitative approach was chosen for several reasons. As there is little existing research on this area, it was important to explore themes directly with teachers before for example designing a quantitative questioner-based study. An approach which is often suggested in such situations (Morgan, 2013, p. 105). Including observational data in this exploration could also have been a possible approach, however due to time limits, and my initial hypothesis that songs were probably seldom used, this was not chosen at this stage. Ultimately, semi-structured interviews were considered the most suitable research tool in order to gather data that could capture teachers' perspectives, beliefs and experiences as well as different aspects of their teaching approaches (Kvale et al., 2015, p. 20; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 24).

3.2 Sampling and participants

In research, there are generally two main methods of sampling: *probability sampling* and *non-probability sampling* (Cohen et al., 2018, pp. 383-385). Probability sampling is preferred when generalizing about a large population since it is randomly chosen to represent it (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 385). On the other hand, non-probability sampling refers to a method of selecting participants for a study where researchers specifically choose individuals to represent a particular group, rather than selecting participants randomly from the entire population. *Convenience sampling* is one method within non-probability sampling where participants are chosen based on their relative ease of access to the researchers (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 390). While this approach is not generalizable to the wider population (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 390), a non-probability convenience sample was used in this study as it was practically the most feasible method and was seen to potentially provide some insights into this field in which there was little previous research in Norway.

This study used a convenience sampling method to select English teachers who were, at the time of the study, teaching VYLs in Norway. The inclusion criteria were any teacher currently working in teaching English to students in grades 1-4 somewhere in Norway. The teachers had to be full-time employees. Substitute teachers were not included in the study. The following approaches were used to recruit participants:

- 1) A Facebook group consisting of English teachers in Norway discussing their teaching lessons, methods, approaches, and related matters online was identified through a search on Facebook. Forty-eight teachers who were actively contributing to the group and appeared to meet the selection criteria were contacted using the platforms messenger feature. Six of these 48 teachers responded back. Three replied that they did not meet the selection criteria. Ultimately three teachers were willing to participate.
- 2) I reached out to teachers I personally knew, including former teacher advisors, who met the selection criteria, and asked if they would be interested in participating or knew of any other teachers who also met the selection criteria. Three teachers, all of whom I had prior contact with, agreed to take part.

During the initial contact with teachers, I provided them with an information letter (Appendix 3) explaining the purpose of the study, and what participation would involve. Potential participants were also informed of the anonymity of the study and their ability to withdraw at any point during the research process. From the start, I made it a priority to try to create an open accommodating atmosphere in communications with all potential participants, and they had the opportunity to contact me at any time during the study if they had questions or concerns. The goal here being to try and ensure that the participants felt respected throughout the study, both for their experience of being participants, and the possibility that this might lead to more fruitful and reliable interviews.

The study included six teachers who worked in different parts of Norway. All were female with ages ranging between 28 and 65. On average, the participants had 20 years of total teaching experience in any subject, with a range from 5 to 40 years.

3.3 Data collection methods

The use of semi-structured interviews involves creating a list of open-ended questions which allows for content to be re-ordered, making digressions, and exploring themes more deeply when appropriate (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 545). In order to assure consistency, an interview guide based on the existing literature was prepared in advance to ensure that all participants were asked the same key questions. The interview guide that was used was structured into five main topics: “About the participant”, “General experience with songs”, “Attitudes and perspectives”, “Implementation”, and “Students’ reactions”. The first two topics consisted of questions aimed at gathering information about the participants, such as their age, their teaching experience, the grade level they were currently teaching, as well as their general experience and familiarity with songs. The third topic focused on questions intended to uncover the participants’ attitudes and perspectives regarding the use of songs in comparison to other teaching approaches, and looking at which areas in language learning they believed songs could be most beneficial. The implementation section involved a range of questions regarding the frequency of the use of songs, the process of introducing songs, and reasons behind song selection. The last topic included questions that were meant to cover the participants perception of how students react when implementing songs in the classroom. These questions included aspects such as changes in classroom atmosphere, students’ willingness to sing, and any memorable experiences regarding the use of songs (Appendix 4).

The interviews followed a fairly loose structure around open-ended questions, allowing the participants to freely express their thoughts and opinions as they arose. The guide was based on general introductory questions, and in many cases a number of follow-up questions were asked.

Three of the interviews were carried out face-to-face, while video chat (Zoom and Teams) was used for the three other interviews due to the distance to participants. In the information letter which participant had received prior to the study, they were asked if they were willing to be recorded during the interview. All participants consented. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. During the interviews, a *Dictaphone app* provided by OsloMet was used to record the participants. This application provided the necessary confidentiality and secure storage of the participants personal data (Universitetet i Oslo, 2022). This was ensured by the recordings, which were not stored on the phone, being immediately encrypted, and automatically sent to a website that only I could access. Before the interviews, a test was conducted to ensure that the system worked properly.

3.4 Data analysis methods

Prior to the data collection, three main topics in relation to the use of songs were determined. The areas were 1) attitudes and perspectives, 2) implementation, and 3) students' reactions. Within each of these main topics, *Thematic analysis* was used in analyzing the data that emerged from the interviews. This approach involves organizing and describing the data set into general categories or themes found in the interviews and narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This study used a hybrid approach, including both deductive and inductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 83). The deductive categories and themes were drawn from the main chosen topics (attitudes, implementation, and reactions), while the goal was to also gather fresh inductive data by having sufficiently open interviews that potential new themes could be found. I wanted to guide the participants towards certain aspects of the study, but also allow for openness in the questions to allow for all the participants' opinions and perspective to shine through.

The interviews were transcribed manually on the same day as they were conducted. Once all the interviews were transcribed, the material was read and re-read a number of times to become thoroughly acquainted with it as a whole. A new document was created for each topic

and responses pertaining to that topic were reorganized into these separate documents. Themes within each topic were then identified and collected into separate portions under the original topic.

3.5 Credibility

As earlier discussed, the study was based a non-probability sampling, and is not generalizable to the wider teacher population. However, a number of steps were taken to insure the most possible valid and reliable data within the confines of this study's methodology.

Teachers from various schools and geographic areas were included in this study. This may have helped to give a certain degree of credibility as to the results being a reflection of practices throughout Norway, as different schools and geographical regions may have varying teaching cultures. Likewise, the fact that teachers were from a wide range of age-groups may have helped to assure a variety of perspectives that could be influenced by age and experience.

To address the challenge that I was alone on the research project, and possibly enhance the validity of the findings, I had an external individual read over the interview transcripts and reflect on the themes together with me.

As seen later in the discussion, there was a congruence between themes that emerged in the interviews and the existing literature on the subject, implying a probable degree of validity to the results.

The participants who were recruited through the Facebook page were all active online contributors. This may have skewed the results somewhat, as it is possible that these teachers had a different relationship to the subject matter than teachers who are not visible online. Additionally, recruiting participants within my personal network may have also have potentially skewed the results. These being people I knew, they may have told me what they believed I wanted to hear, or held back on sharing some details. This could also have been a possibility for other participants as well. To reduce this risk, I made sure to communicate with potential participants in a way that emphasized their voluntary participation, and tried as much as possible to avoid them feeling any sense of obligation. In any case there is always a

possibility that what is said in an interview does not fully reflect the reality of the phenomena one wishes to explore. A point that should be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

3.6 Ethical considerations

To assure the best possible ethical approach, several central considerations were emphasized. Informed consent (Appendix 3) was obtained from all participants prior to conducting the interviews. Prior to the interviews I also tried to make sure each participant had a clear understanding of the nature of the project as well as their role and rights in it. I also made sure that they were free to ask about any questions they might have.

As the project involved the handling and storing of personal data in the form of voice recordings, it was necessary to notify the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD/Sikt). I submitted an outline of my project as part of this process, and NSD reviewed it to ensure it complied with the data protection laws and addressed ethical considerations. The project was approved after their evaluation (Appendix 1). NSD will also contact me after the completion of the project, to ensure that all data is deleted.

Throughout the project, it was important to proactively identify risks that could impact the ethics of the project, or its final completion. To accomplish this, I developed a risk and vulnerability analysis table based on guidelines from the university (Appendix 2). This allowed me to carefully assess each risk and its potential impact, as well as develop preventative strategies to minimize risk. One example of a risk I identified was the potential theft or loss of the project computer, resulting in the possible exposure of sensitive personal data. To prevent this from occurring, all documents containing personal information were stored exclusively in a OneDrive cloud storage.

In order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants, pen names were used in the transcription: Participant A-F.

3.7 Reflexivity

I was centrally involved in every stage of the project, from the design, to carrying out the interviews and data analysis. This could have potentially influenced the results in a number of ways, which I both recognized, and tried to control for. In the initial stage of the project, I

took the time to reflect on my personal perspectives and attitudes towards the selected topic. In doing this, I looked back at the positive impact songs had on my own language learning journey, and acknowledged that this had influenced my own attitudes towards the subject. In an effort to address this, I tried to remain aware of how this bias might emerge during the project, and possibly compromise its validity and reliability. One way in which I tried to ensure that my own perspectives and attitudes did not influence participants' opinions, was to try to ask questions in a neutral tone, avoiding leading questions or suggestions that could influence participants' responses. I also encouraged the participants to provide any additional information they felt was relevant in order to ensure that their opinions were accurately represented. Despite my attempts at minimizing the effects of my own bias and perspectives, it is important to acknowledge that they undoubtedly had an influence on the project results.

4 Results

During the analysis, several themes emerged within each predetermined topic. Within the **attitude's topic**, the dominant themes were: Traditional versus new approaches, songs as an effective tool, establishing an enjoyable and motivating learning environment through songs, as well as overcoming barriers and building confidence through the use of songs.

Within the **implementation topic**, the themes that emerged were: The importance of song selection, the 'how' of songs, and language use. **The reactions topic** had two main themes, which were positive engagement, and challenges and potential solutions when incorporating songs.

4.1 Teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards the use of songs

4.1.1 Traditional versus new

One theme that became very apparent throughout the interviews was teachers contrast of 'traditional vs. new' teaching approaches. This theme was referred to in a number of ways. The traditional approach could be referred to as "traditional", "old fashioned" or as "typical". The use of songs in the classroom was seen as a creative new and effective approach, while more passive traditional activities, such as "sitting and reading", were considered as less effective, at least for this age group. Participant D, who had taken further education in teaching English, pointed out that she had learned the importance of varied and active learning in this education: "not the old-fashioned learning, because then the kids don't learn."

Generally, the teachers gravitated towards using the new, creative approaches and seemed to feel free to do so in their school settings. However Participant B expressed that songs were not seen as a relevant teaching tool at her school, and seemed to express a tension between the ‘traditional and the new’: “So I don’t feel that songs have been seen as a teaching material at the school I work at, but I feel that it is brilliant to use them (...) At the school I work at, I feel that songs are seen as just something some teachers play for a little break in the teaching.”

Here are some other examples of how this theme could be expressed:

Participant B: “When I have the children, I like to do more fun activities, not the typical activities where they have to read in a book (...) When I went to school there was only old-fashioned teaching lessons.”

Participant C: “What I remember from my primary English classes is that they were focused on using textbooks, with a lot of reading aloud where we would take turns reading one line at a time and then answering questions about what we had read. The teacher did not incorporate many additional materials (...) One has to make language teaching playful and lively, not just read in the book and do exercises. That doesn’t work.”

4.1.2 Effective tool

Nearly all participants emphasized that they incorporated songs practically every English lesson. However, Participant B only occasionally integrated songs into her teaching, and when she did, it was often due to her students’ requests to include them. All teachers expressed their positive attitudes towards the use of songs as a tool for English language learning. While several teachers had unique perspectives related to songs, there were a number of similarities as to which benefits songs could have. They believed songs could facilitate various aspects of language learning such as vocabulary acquisition, listening skills, grammar reinforcement, and pronunciation. Teacher F also suggested that songs can be beneficial for improving reading skills by providing students with the lyrics of the song. Additionally, participant E emphasized the exposure to authentic language that can be achieved by incorporating music into the lesson. Participant C highlighted songs as an essential tool for all aspects of the language. One participant mentioned the importance of exposing VYLs to songs since they need and enjoy frequent repetition. Several participants also noted that songs can enable students to learn new words without consciously realizing it. As Participant A put it: “They sing along and pick up words and they don’t think they have to

learn something, they just sing along and think it is so fun.” It was also pointed out that the repetition of songs was very helpful in learning new words: “You remember better when you sing. There is a lot of repetition, especially in the refrain, and it is sung several times. It is also very motivating, and that helps them to remember much better, so it is a nice way to learn.”

Songs being seen as an effective language learning tool was to a great degree founded on the fact that children most often enjoy singing and become engaged in the learning material through song. Participant C: “I find that the students are fond of singing, it is in their pure nature as they really enjoy singing and music. So, I think we should cultivate it for all it is worth (...) I think songs are a fantastic package of break, fun, and enjoyment, but especially in relation to English and Norwegian, language classes in general, there is lots and lots of language learning in it.”

Participant D spoke about the clear differences in using songs and singing in contrast to traditional teaching methods: “The more active the students are the better. It becomes too boring for them if they don’t have any songs, games, or physical movements. Just straightforward sitting, reading, and writing is no good.” Several participants further emphasized that songs are easily accessible as a teaching tool, pointing out that songs on different topics are easy to find through a Google search, and that these can be used to introduce new topics and themes in the classroom.

Several participants emphasized the fact that singing gives students the opportunity to frequently use and practice oral English, a point they felt was especially important for younger students as at this stage it was possible to prevent later hesitancy to speaking. As participant D expressed “The younger they are, the more they should be using the language. Eventually they will learn to read and write, but we have to use the oral language, and songs and rhymes are great to use.”

Participant F highlighted her preference for using songs as a teaching tool: “If I had to choose only one activity, I would actually choose singing and songs. Maybe it’s a bit strange to say, but English is mainly an oral subject, especially in the first and second grade.” Participant D also mentioned how she viewed her use of songs in the classroom as within the ‘learning by doing’ framework which she felt was essential for VYLs. Participant B recognized the value of using songs in the classroom, but expressed disappointment that her school did not

consider it as an acceptable teaching approach. This hindered her in incorporating songs into her teaching: “I feel that if I use songs in my lessons, and a colleague happens to walk by and hears a lot of noise, they might think my lesson are unstructured and full of ‘play’ or ‘free’ time.” Additionally, she shared that her education lacked guidance on utilizing songs, resulting in her feeling uncertain about how they should be used in the classroom. Overall, the importance of incorporating the use of songs in the English language learning was a recurring theme amongst the participants.

Most of the participants felt comfortable using songs, but often acknowledged that not everyone may share the same comfort level, resulting in some teachers not always choosing this type of activity. Participant F expressed her advantage of being both an English and a music teacher, probably making her more comfortable with the use of English songs: “I am somewhat fortunate in that way, that I have no barriers or inhibitions when it comes to using songs and singing in English.” One participant shared that sometimes teachers who were less comfortable with songs would invite her into their class to teach a song.

Participant C found it strange to consider that some teachers might not be using songs, or even that a research project on the extent of use was necessary: “When I saw the topic of your master’s thesis, I thought that it is something I use frequently and believe songs are really important. I started to ask myself, is it the case that not everyone incorporates songs into their English teaching?”

4.1.3 Enjoyable and motivating learning environment

During the interviews, teachers frequently mentioned using songs to establish a positive and motivating learning atmosphere. It was emphasized how songs and singing could make the lesson less daunting, easing the pressure on students, and helping them feel comfortable expressing themselves. As Participant E mentioned, “I think that’s important since many find English very difficult. For students, it’s fun. I can put on a song, and they enjoy being in English class.” Participant C expressed: “Language learning approaches should stimulate exploration, create wonder, as well as be fun, and positive.” She believed that low-threshold approaches like using songs and play-based activities could help achieve this. Similarly, Participant E emphasized the importance of fun and games in the classroom and believed that students’ enjoyment should be a crucial part of the learning process. She hoped that more teachers would recognize the significance of creating a positive and fun learning environment

for VYLs. At the same time, she acknowledged that not all teachers may feel comfortable using songs in the classroom.

Two of the teachers had clear memories of learning English songs in school as a child or youth. Participant A even shared with her students her own memory of a song she learned in school, and how the song, as she put it: “made a great impression on me.” She used the same song, *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*, in the classroom. Participant E remembered, as a child, loving singing songs in a small class with 14 students which were very comfortable with each other. She also shared that she had fond memories of her own teacher who seemed to be less concerned with grammar, and more passionate about fun, playing and songs as teaching approaches. She was also of the opinion that songs had been a part of the curriculum for many years.

4.1.4 Overcoming barriers and building confidence

The use of songs as a tool to overcome barriers and build confidence in VYLs was a common theme that emerged among some of the interviewees. This was often expressed as the ability of song and music to help in making the students feel comfortable, safe, and secure in the classroom. Participant C suggested that making the language less intimidating can be achieved through the use of songs: “I believe that using songs can primarily ease the pressure felt by the students. I have experienced with students in higher grades, that they are hesitant to speak in class, because they feel embarrassed and uncomfortable. I believe that we have a job to do right from the beginning, where we can create a safe environment where students can express themselves with what they know.”

Participant D and F believed that songs could help VYLs overcome the barrier to speaking English through helping to create a relaxed environment that encourages students to participate and communicate. As Participant F explained: “They like music and they like to dance and move around, not so keen on always speaking English to each other. So, you have to kind of sneak it in. Get them to use the language without them realizing it. Don’t give them time to worry.” Further, Participant D said: “Often, students express their inability to speak English. So, if you start with the youngest students and get them to master songs or understand ‘English cards’ (in play), then it may be that they overcome the barrier of thinking they cannot speak English.”

Participant E expressed how “fun and games” was important to unarm kids and make the whole subject less serious and scary. She felt songs could help to do this: “I am interested in fun and games because the students find English difficult, it is totally new to them.”

4.2 Implementation

4.2.1 The importance of song selection

Most participants made it clear that the choice of songs is not arbitrary. Several factors were important when selecting songs. Participants emphasized the importance of selecting songs and accompanying media that were appropriate for the students age and language level, and aligned with the competence goals and theme or topic of the lessons. For instance, if the students were learning about numbers, animals, or occupations, songs would be selected in relation to these themes. Songs could also be selected based on the language structure and grammar or vocabulary in them. Participant A could choose songs based on the verbs or adjectives in them. She did this so that she could later make exercises and tasks based on the vocabulary in the song. She also used songs during breaks and as a reward, often choosing songs with activity, dance and movements for the breaks: “I use it when we don’t have English too, in the morning and as a treat. When I feel they have worked really well on their exercises and deserve a break.” Participant F also mentioned how she, on some occasions, chose songs based on what she heard students singing on their own, thinking that the children could be inspired to understand more of the lyrics and “maybe adding on some movements, and simply singing it into their system.”

The teachers used a variety of platforms to select songs, including YouTube, Spotify, British Council, Skolen, Stairs, Quest, BBC Kids, Kor Arti, Cappelen Damm, Starfall and Easy Kids Songs. A variety of methods was used in order to reach as many students as possible through their preferred mode of learning. Participant C mentioned leaning more towards using YouTube this platform is “More visual and expressive than just playing a song on Spotify. I believe that finding songs on YouTube will capture more of the students (...) including those who may have hearing challenges.” Participant F mentioned that although YouTube can be entertaining to watch, she recommends using text and melody if the focus is to learn the song.

While the majority of participants indicated that they used only songs made for children, Participant E noted that she also incorporates other types of songs into her lessons, and highlighted her preference for choosing songs that she believes are familiar to her students. For two participants, one factor in song choice was their own ability level to sing or play the guitar along with the children. One participant was of the opinion that all songs had something to offer. “I feel that you can use pretty much anything, I think most songs work.” Participant D felt that easy songs were the best for engaging kids: “The simpler the better.”

Some of the participants also mentioned incorporating songs that could reinforce grammar points. Specifically, Participant E expressed: “I like to use the ‘to be’ song, helping students to memorize the conjunctions of the verb ‘to be’. You can sing it (starts to sing): I am, you are, he, she, it is...” Participant A mentioned that the choice of songs also depends on the season, stating, “I may go for a ‘back to school’ song at the start of the school year, or select a song related to ‘spring’ or ‘Halloween’ as the occasion approaches.” Participant C emphasized the use of songs for different daily occasions, such as ‘Good Morning’ or ‘Goodbye’ songs. Participant F said that she tried to select songs with a cross-curricular connection. In other words, she could choose songs that were based on what was currently being taught in other subjects: “If we have about ‘the body’ in science, I like to plan that they have ‘the body’ in English. Then I might include a song that relates to the theme, such as ‘Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes’, and incorporate that song in their weekly lesson plan. Then they can practice the song at home as well.” This cross-curricular connection could actually go both ways, where for example as Participant A shared, English songs could be used in all subjects. For example, using an activity based English song “to shake it out” when students needed a break during math class. Participant C also used English songs across subject, as she mentioned the significance of incorporating English songs in music classes.

4.2.2 The ‘how’ of songs in the classroom

Participants used different approaches for incorporating songs into their teaching. Some of the participants explained that they had a practice of using activities before, during and after presenting a song. This was in response to a direct question relating to whether or not they had related activities before and after a singing activity. Participant D prepares the students before listening to a song by having them look at pictures, going through some of the vocabulary on the blackboard, as well as discussing the lyrics. She also explained that once the song has been played, often several times, she revisits the words with the class once more.

Participant A mentioned that she, on some occasions, creates follow-up activities related to the songs, such as finding rhyming words and counting adjectives, or verbs in the song. Participant C and E emphasized that they encouraged active listening by asking students questions related to the song after it is played or sung. Participant C: “They prefer to turn around and move all the time, therefore, you have to develop their ‘ears’ by giving them an exercise.” Participant E: “Right now, we are working on a song called *When I grow up*, the song is about different professions, so together we sing many of these professions. Afterwards, I ask them ‘What is a ‘brannmann’ (firefighter) called in English’.”

Many of the participants expressed that they like to repeat the song, and one specifically emphasized also listening to the same song at the end of the lesson if time allows for it. Two of the Participants also relayed that they work systematically with a song by repeating verses or lines several times. Participant F expressed: “Introducing a song often happens at the beginning of the lesson. I introduce the song, maybe there is an animation with movements, then we learn the song verse by verse, then the chorus, and talk about the different parts. Afterwards, we listen to the whole song. By that time, many of the students have already learned it and sing along.” Participant C also expressed the importance of thoroughly exploring a song: “I think it is important to not just learn a lot of songs, while it is nice to have a repertoire, I believe that if students are really going to learn a song, it is important to go in depth on that one song. Work on pronunciation and vocabulary.” She explained how she could dedicate a fair amount of time working with all the language in a song, picking apart different language sections and making sure the students understood them.

Throughout the interviews, most participants highlighted the significance of including many diverse activities in the classroom of which songs were one. As Participant D expressed: “variation is key!”

Participant C emphasizes how songs should be introduced and the importance of actively engaging as a teacher, saying: “‘Let’s listen to a song now’ in a dull voice won’t cut it. Instead, using an engaging tone and say something like ‘Hey guys, now we are going to listen to a fun song together’.”

4.2.3 Language use

One of the themes that emerged was the way languages, including English, Norwegian and body language, could optimally be used while incorporating songs in the teaching approach. Teachers expressed the importance of clear communication where necessary, through a combination of the use of Norwegian, English and body language. Though this is also a theme that one might say is general in relation to English teaching for VYLs, it was so clear in the interviews, that it emerged as a separate theme in relation to songs.

Participant C stressed the importance of using both English and Norwegian in the instructions and teaching, in order to assure the children could understand the teaching points and stay engaged in the classroom activities. At the same time, she pointed out the importance of gradually leaning towards speaking English as much as possible in class, while continuing to use Norwegian when additional support is needed. She also stressed the importance of using body language clearly: “It is very frustrating if you have a teacher who only uses the English language, and there are students who do not understand what is being said. So, I try to also use my body language clearly.” Additionally, she emphasized the importance of helping and supporting students to express themselves independent of the language used. She was of the opinion that the ability to express and communicate takes precedence over the language, even in English class. Along this line of using body language, Participant D expressed how she used her body actively while singing: “singing songs myself, that I know and that I use with movement, is much better. Then I can be very clear with the language. It’s just like reading a book. You can stop wherever you want.”

4.3 Reactions

4.3.1 Positive engagement

All of the participants expressed that the use of songs has a clear tendency to enhance positive engagement of VYLs. Participant A possibly said it most clearly when she expressed how songs could liven up the classroom atmosphere: “I put on the song *I Like Hot Dogs*, and they go bananas, crazy.”

This enhanced engagement included an increased motivation, enjoyment, and participation in the classroom. In addition, several teachers noted that students seemed more relaxed and at ease with the use of songs. Others noted that students often react to songs by becoming

focused. Participant D, on what happens when songs are played: “First of all, you get the focus.”

Several participants shared memorable experiences of how the use of songs promoted such engagement among the students. Participant B shared the following experience: “I played a ‘weather’ song, and my students took the initiative to actively follow the instructions of the lyrics. The lyrics were designed in such a way that the students had time to say what the weather was like when the song asked about this. They looked out the window and answered ‘sunny’, without us talking through what it was in English. This was a surprising experience, as I didn’t think the students knew much English.”

Participant A talked about how students wanted to be able to listen to the songs she used in the classroom while they were at home: “Oh, can you please put the song in Showbie (A digital platform tool, teachers use to give assignments and communicate with the students) so we can listen and sing the song at home?” Participant F shared an experience where she had prepared a lesson plan for English class that involved various activities including a song. However, during the actual lesson, due to the students’ enthusiasm about the included song, the focus ended up being solely on the song itself, *The Ants Go Marching*: “The children were so enthusiastic about the song and pretending to be ants, that we had to repeat the song several times. The song involves one ant moving around the classroom, and then another ant joins in with different actions for each new addition, such as ‘two by two.....tie his shoe’. Although I had not planned for only focusing on this song, it was a lot of fun. The song ends at twelve ants, so we had to repeat it, so everyone got a chance to act out the song.”

One of the six teachers, Participant F, expressed that accompanying singing with guitar was extra engaging for students: “There is a touch of magic when the guitar is brought out.”

4.3.2 Challenges and solutions

While the participants generally observed that songs had the effect of enhancing engagement among students, they also acknowledged that some students may be shy or reluctant to sing for different reasons. However, this was generally a temporary challenge, and usually all students would eventually join in. Participants had different ways of dealing with this challenge and shared some of them during the interviews.

Participant A said she used the Vygotsky scaffolding approach. She would stand close to the student and gently encourage them: “If you don’t know it all, I will help you along”.

Participant E was of the experience that some students could feel particularly self-conscious about singing in larger groups, and introducing songs in smaller groups could be preferable.

Participant C had experienced that some students could voice negative comments about the chosen songs. Her solution was to respond to these reactions in a constructive yet firm manner: “If I get some negative comments, it is important to point out that this is what is going to happen, and next time you can come with a song request.” Participant F emphasized the importance of being sensitive to individual needs and reactions and noted that reluctant students should not be forced to participate.

5 Discussion

In the discussion portion of this thesis, I will reflect on the findings of the project in light of the literature and theory relating to teaching English to non-native young learners.

5.1 Teachers perspectives

The teachers that I spoke to emphasized that they believed, and had experienced, that songs were a particularly helpful tool for teaching English to VYLs. They used songs frequently in their teaching, and emphasized the fact that their students found songs and singing enjoyable. They were of the opinion that using songs could improve various aspects of the language, including comprehension, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. In many cases they pointed out that songs could be more helpful than standard teaching approaches, and were also positive to other active, creative, and playful approaches. This benefit of songs is in line with a number of earlier studies which show that using songs can have important benefits beyond standard teaching methods (Alisaari & Heikkola, 2017).

There were also clear similarities between the perspectives of the teachers found in this study, and the existing literature on songs in the classroom when it comes to their effectiveness being grounded in their holistic nature. This holistic perspective sees the potential of songs as rooted in, among other things, a wide use of the senses, social relations, embodied learning, exploration and play (Chicho, 2021).

Teachers also pointed out that the use of songs fosters language receptivity by helping to facilitate a positive, enjoyable, and relaxing atmosphere in which the children have a means to express themselves in a fun way that requires less cognitive effort and strain than some other more traditional approaches. This point of learning language through less conscious effort can be of particular value for VYLs at this stage of development. Developmental theory points out that children at this developmental stage stand to gain more from learning languages through implicit learning approaches that are not based on cognitive, analytical exercises (Emery & Rich, 2015; Kaminski, 2016; Tomlinson, 2015).

The fact that teachers so clearly contrasted the standard ‘traditional’ teaching approaches to more holistic, active, creative and authentic approaches such as song, was an interesting finding. The teachers expressed that the more ‘old-fashioned’ traditional teaching approaches were not particularly useful for this age group, and pointed out their own efforts to move beyond these traditional approaches. The fact that this traditional image of ‘sitting and reading’, or memorizing text is still so prevalent, and the need for the teachers to contrast this with ‘newer’ approaches, was especially interesting. As the literature points out, the traditional approaches which the teachers referred to as ‘old fashioned’ seem to align with aspects of behaviorist teaching approaches (Moeller & Catalano, 2015). Despite teachers’ efforts to incorporate new teaching methods, the fact that they made such a clear point relating to ‘old fashioned’ approaches speaks of a certain power these traditional images of teaching still hold in the teachers’ minds. Approaches that contrast to the ‘old fashioned’ approaches, are however not necessarily ‘new’, considering that many of the participants remember songs being used when they were in school. There may however now be a greater focus on the potential benefits of songs, resulting in them being more actively and consciously used. This is also reflected in the latest curriculum guidelines in Norway, as will be discussed later.

To really study what forms of teaching are most used today, one would also need to do observational studies in the classroom. However, the perspectives of these teachers’ do suggest that the field of language education has evolved to incorporating innovative and creative teaching methods to aid students’ language acquisition.

This same theme of ‘traditional vs new’, could also be seen in the hesitation of a young teacher to use songs as a teaching tool due to her concerns about how her colleagues might

perceive her if her students were ‘noisy’. Seemingly, she was not aware of the importance songs are given, both in the research as well as the latest curriculum, and her desire to use them was possibly hindered by traditional concepts of teaching and the teacher’s role. These finding seems to align with Enever’s (2015) discussion on how some schooling systems still adhere to a more traditional approach. However, considering the results as a whole, the teachers in this study expressed being generally quite comfortable with the use of songs in the classroom.

While holistically engaging approaches are believed to be important for learning, it is ultimately the assimilation of the fundamental building blocks of language, vocabulary and grammar, that will prove whether a teaching approach is effective. While this study cannot evaluate the effect of songs over other teaching approaches, teachers were of the opinion that songs could clearly contribute to both grammar and vocabulary. While explicit rules of grammar are not taught at this stage, certain grammar aspects are emphasized in the curriculum. This includes the ability to identify lexical categories and sentence structure from the fourth grade (Ministry of Education and Research, 2020a, p. 6). The participants expressed that using songs could help emphasize different pointers of the grammar. This may prepare students for explicit grammar instruction in the future. For instance, one of the participants mentioned using the *to be* song for VYLs. When these same students later get more explicit grammar teaching, they can think back on the *to be* song as a helping tool when they are conjugating the verb ‘to be’.

5.2 Implementation

Participants expressed that a key consideration for choosing songs was the topic or theme of the lesson. Since songs are often theme based, it was natural for them to choose certain fitting songs to incorporate into the lesson. Many of the teachers commented that modern Google search makes songs that fit teaching topics easily accessible. When it comes to integrating songs in a lesson, the literature suggests a three-staged approach (Cameron, 2001). Although participants did not explicitly mention such a three-stage approach, several explained that they used before, during and after activities in conjunction with a song. It was interesting to note this overlap between the theory and practice.

The initial hypothesis for this study was that teachers primarily used songs to give students a break or reward during the English lesson, without much reflection or work with the songs as teaching tools. However, this study shows that these particular participants incorporate songs as a more thought-through integrated part of their teaching practice. Almost all of the teachers used a variety of learning strategies in conjunction with songs, rather than solely using them as a break from the lesson or as an approach for promoting relaxation and enjoyment. Although relaxation and enjoyment were highlighted as important, teachers primarily employed songs to facilitate various aspects of the language. This is again in congruence with the theory that points out the importance of both song selection and how to implement them most effectively as a learning tool (Sevik, 2012).

The project shows that teachers use songs as a source of authentic language which they can incorporate activities around. Such activities could include acting out the song, movements, a variety of tasks related to the lyrics, as well as group discussions. As mentioned by one participant, a useful approach for improving listening skills is to give students tasks that requires them to be especially aware when listening to the song so that they can then discuss the lyrics. This aligns with the literature highlighting the importance of integrating tasks focusing on practical language use among students (Pinter, 2017). Integrating physical activities related to the language in the songs can be seen as a way of applying the ‘learning by doing’ framework (Nunan, 2004). As students actively engage their bodies with what the song conveys, they may gain a more comprehensive and integrated experience of the language.

The findings from this study also relate to some of the principles of Multimodal theory (Kress, 1997 as cited in Ellis, 2018), which underlines the importance of being familiar with and using a diverse array of ‘languages’ in communication. The teachers expressed giving conscious effort to providing students with diverse opportunities of exposure to multiple modes of communication. This included exposure to different media platforms (aiding both the audio and visual modes), body language and expression, using instruments, as well as their own voice.

5.3 Students reactions to songs through the eyes of teachers

A very central theme which emerged through the interviews was the potential of songs to actively motivate and engage students during learning. This is very in tune with the theory which emphasizes the significance of creating a positive relationship with learning the language at an early age (Džanić & Pejić, 2016). In order for the learning to continue, this mindset should be sustained over time in order to help the students continue to explore the language and develop their abilities (Džanić & Pejić, 2016). Teachers pointed out that they felt songs, when included among other varied activities, could help to sustain this needed engagement for learning a new language.

One might wonder what specific features of songs and singing engage children to such a degree that this would emerge as a central theme in the study. One factor that appeared to enhance engagement, according to teachers, was the integration of actions, movements and role-playing together with the singing. This important combination of the physical and cognitive, has also been pointed out in the existing theory, and can potentially lead to better language learning outcomes by improving understanding, retention, and retrieval of the language (Chicho, 2021; Lindgren & Johnson-Glenberg, 2013). The literature and theory also suggest that songs possess certain inherent features that can facilitate learners' engagement. The melody, the repetition, and the catchy nature of the chorus of many songs can create a hook capturing the listeners attention and helping to set them in a positive emotional state (Shen, 2009).

The fact that songs often are sung together with others, and can include common physical actions, can also strengthen the relationships to others in the classroom as well as the teacher (Kaminski, 2016; Sevik, 2012). This may be especially important for children who are known to be active and social learners. Other factors which may contribute to engagement include the authentic language in songs, as well as some of the songs being familiar, or having been sung earlier in their Norwegian versions. This familiarity itself can be engaging, and some teachers chose to specifically use songs they believed were familiar to their students. Listening to songs can also be engaging through their imagery, story line and connection with imagination and fantasy (Bland, 2015a). This was alluded to by the teachers in several statements. One pointed out how engaging it was for children to act out a song (the ants go marching), another mentioned how clear it was that children became focused when a song was played.

Further, according to the teachers' observation of their students' reactions, it was clear that incorporating songs into the teaching approach helped to create a more relaxed and enjoyable learning environment, leading to increased participation from the students. This was seen as helpful in assisting students to overcome barriers to learning and speaking, and is consistent with the research (Saldiraner & Cinkara, 2021). This observation is also consistent with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, which suggests that increased learning is possible when children are able to relax and lower their guard, making them more receptive to language input (Schoepp, 2016).

Despite songs being a favorite activity among the participants' students, several of the participants highlighted that some students may be shy or hesitant to sing. This is, in general, a fairly common situation in any classroom as students have different needs, preferences and personalities (Linse, 2005). Songs as an activity may, of course, not be the most suitable and inspiring for every student, and consequently, their resistance to learning (affective filter) may remain high. This may account for why several teachers emphasized the importance of varying activities to cater to the needs of all students. In contrast to one approach, such as exclusively singing, it was suggested to incorporate a wide range of activities. Teachers also pointed out that a reluctance to singing was often fairly short lived and passing, and offered several approaches, such as scaffolding, to help students beyond this barrier.

Singing in a larger group can also be especially intimidating for some students. Participants suggested using smaller groups to accommodate these individual needs. For some students, resistance to the singing activities could be expressed through negative comments. One teacher pointed out the importance of handling these in a constructive manner. In doing so, the teacher can foster a more positive and supportive learning atmosphere that has the potential to benefit all students. By recognizing the diverse needs of their students and employing a range of strategies to address them, the participants demonstrated a student-centered learning with a focus on creating a secure learning environment. This is also pointed out as essential in the literature (Pinter, 2017).

5.4 The new curriculum

The perspectives of teachers relating to songs also correspond to several important elements that are relevant to the new curriculum (Ministry of Education and Research, 2020b, pp. 2-6).

Specifically, one of the many aspects in LK20 is offering students multiple opportunities to experience and explore the English language in diverse ways. This includes various exposures to authentic language, emphasis on play-based activities, and the importance of interdisciplinary approaches. The participants reflected spontaneously on many of these aspects, and had a number of suggestions as to how songs as a tool can help in supporting the new curriculum. Independently of whether the new curriculum was mentioned, many of the points brought up in the interviews also fit well into its central goals. Additionally, a crucial aspect of all teaching emphasized in the new curriculum, is to individualize instructions according to students' needs and stage of development. The findings reflect the teachers' awareness of this central point, which was given consideration when they selected songs and chose how to present them. For instance, one of the teachers was very flexible presenting a song through offering smaller portions at a time, in line with what the students were able to assimilate. Other ways in which teachers adapted songs to the students was through the use of appropriate supportive audio-visual material.

5.5 Additional reflections

Seen as a whole, the interviews illustrate that the teachers' perspectives were, in many areas, in line with what was found in the literature. This may be due to several reasons (or a combination of them). The teachers in this study may have been well-educated or well read-up on the literature relating to songs, and used it actively in their teaching. Through pure experience, they may also have discovered similar principles and practices to those in the theory. It could also be that the perspectives of the teachers shared similarities with the literature in that they both reflect general pedagogical principles such as varying activities, whole person approaches, catering for students' needs, and having different tasks around one core activity. Another possible contributing factor to the similarities between the findings and the literature, could be that the interview guide was partially developed on a framework based on the existing literature.

Despite there being much common ground between the theory and perspectives of teachers, there were some theoretical perspectives from the literature that were not brought up explicitly by the teachers in this study. In other words, clear themes in line with some aspects of the theory did not emerge in this study. This includes the emotional aspect of songs and learning as well as relationship building with the teacher and the function of meaning in

learning. The fact that these topics were not explicitly discussed by the teachers does not mean that they were not inherent in their own perspectives on learning and the potential of songs. It may be that these aspects were more difficult to express directly than other topics such as songs effect on vocabulary. One may also interpret some of their statements as touching on these topics, or including them ‘between the lines’. It could, for example, be that the importance of emotion was expressed in other ways like positive classroom environment, sense of security in learning, or the ability of authentic texts to stir authentic reactions and emotions. The importance of relationship could have been expressed similarly as the importance of classroom atmosphere and engagement in a common activity. The importance of meaning could have been expressed through the importance of familiar, authentic texts.

While there were clear similarities and common themes within the participants perspectives and practices, each interview was also unique and provided interesting points or illustrated intriguing practices and perspectives distinct to each participant. In short, it might be said that there were unique individual practices and approaches that together could be contained within the larger overarching uniting themes found in the results. This demonstrates one possible benefit of such research in that it can spread perspectives and practices among teachers, who, just like their students, can always benefit from further growth.

6 Contribution, limitations, and further research

6.1 Contribution

Hopefully the introductory review on the use of songs in teaching English may provide a general outline of the topic that can be of use for those of interest in a deeper understanding of the field.

I found little relevant research on the use of songs among English teachers for VYLs in Norway. Hopefully this study may provide some information to the field, specifically as to how Norwegian teachers view and use songs as a teaching tool. Though this project is not meant to be any form of exhaustive reference work on how to integrate songs in the classroom, hopefully it may provide some guidance, ideas and inspiration for teachers looking for resources in the area, as well as some strategies for addressing potential challenges that may arise when incorporating songs in the classroom.

6.2 Validity and limitations

There are several limitations to this study. One limitation is the small sample size of six participants. While it would have been preferable to have a larger sample size, time constraints and difficulty in finding more willing participants limited the final number. The participants were chosen through a non-probability sampling, and one cannot assume that they are a representative sample of Norwegian teachers. The findings can therefore not be generalized to the wider population of teachers. However, in that a number of recurring perspectives and concepts emerged, it is probably reasonable to assume that the study did capture some relevant and generalizable data.

The participants were also to a certain degree self-selected in that they were invited to participate in a study about songs. This may have had the effect of including teachers that had a special interest and engagement in the topic, and the results may therefore not reflect a generalizable picture of the perspectives of English teachers in Norway. It should also be noted that the practices of these teachers were self-reported, and may not fully capture their actual practices.

Limited time, and to a certain degree, my own limited experience in the field of interviews, prevented more extensive questioning and probing that potentially could have further illuminated the subject. In some cases, it was a challenge to keep the interviews focused on the topic of songs. It was natural that this topic was framed within the broader context of teaching English. However, this made it at times difficult to return to the main topic of songs. It also seemed that some teachers had a clear need to share their general passions and frustrations in relation to the job. Maybe my role as a young student teacher with an open ear gave them a needed opportunity to 'let out some steam'. This was only a limitation to the extent that it could hinder going more in detail on songs.

Saturation is the point where certain themes, patterns and concepts begin to repeat themselves with added interviews in a study. When saturation is reached, it is seen as an indication that there are a sufficient number of participants in the study. However, it is debated how saturation should be defined and measured (Marshall et al., 2013, p. 11). While this study was not designed to increase the number of participants until saturation was reached, it did become clear that certain themes and perspectives began to repeat themselves, indicating a certain level of saturation for these topics. This was seen in themes such as songs relation to

engagement, creating a safe classroom atmosphere and environment, ease of learning and new vs. old fashioned approaches. Other perspectives were only seen in a few of the participants interviews, making it harder to determine to what degree these were individual views, or might reflect more general patterns. A larger study size could provide more clarity here.

As I was alone in conducting this research, there is a clear possibility that my personal attitudes, experiences and biases might have influenced the project and its conclusions. As mentioned in the methods section, I strived to approach the subject material with neutrality, however it would be impossible to completely separate the researcher from the project, especially in a qualitative research project based on personally conducted interviews.

6.3 Further research

Since the study only involved a small sample of teachers, a more extensive study, with a more generalizable sampling method could provide added insight into teachers' perspectives and methods in implementing songs in the English classroom.

One of the six participants in my study expressed reluctance regarding the use of songs as a teaching approach. This might suggest that there are other teachers who share similar reservations. It would be interesting to conduct further research on this specific topic, and how it may be addressed.

While this study focuses on teachers own reflections on the integration of songs in their English lessons, it could be interesting to conduct classroom observations to provide additional information on the topic. A more direct interaction with students during such teaching sessions may also provide a clearer understanding of how songs and singing may be of use in teaching English. It could also be useful to have more experimental studies testing the benefits of songs as well as the best way to use them in the classroom.

7 Summary of main findings

The goal of the current thesis was to provide insight into the two main research questions:

- 1) What are Norwegian teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards the use of songs as a teaching tool for very young learners?
- 2) If songs are used, how do teachers implement them into their lessons?

The participants in this study expressed positive attitudes towards the use of songs as a teaching tool for VYLs. They highlighted clear advantages to integrating songs over more standard teaching methods. They view songs as a helpful tool in facilitating vocabulary acquisition, grammar reinforcement, listening skills, and pronunciation. Importantly, participants highlighted how songs and singing could create a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment in which motivation and engagement could be stimulated.

The findings reveal that songs are frequently used among the teachers in this study. Nearly all of the participants reported that they used songs as a teaching tool in practically every English lesson. The actual choice of which song or songs to use, is often determined by the topic of the lesson. The teachers also consider the students' needs and preferences when choosing an appropriate song. The implementation of songs is often integrated with activities before, during, and after listening or singing a chosen song. Songs that can be integrated with physical movement are often a preference among the teachers, giving students the opportunity to actively use their bodies together with the presented language in the song.

The findings of this study need to be evaluated in light of its limitations which include a non-probability convenience sampling method. Additional research is important to shed further light on this field.

8 References

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Appendix 1 – NSD Approval

03.05.2023, 17:57

Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger



[Notification form](#) / [Teaching English through Songs: Perspectives among Norwegi...](#) / Assessment

Assessment of processing of personal data

Reference number	Assessment type	Date
149794	Standard	04.01.2023

Project title

Teaching English through Songs: Perspectives among Norwegian Teachers

Data controller (institution responsible for the project)

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

Project leader

Janice Mary Bland

Student

Maya Synnøve Sexton

Project period

31.12.2022 - 14.05.2023

Categories of personal data

General

Legal basis

Consent (General Data Protection Regulation art. 6 nr. 1 a)

The processing of personal data is lawful, so long as it is carried out as stated in the notification form. The legal basis is valid until 14.05.2023.

[Notification Form](#)

Comment

ABOUT OUR ASSESSMENT

Data Protection Services has an agreement with the institution where you are carrying out research or studying. As part of this agreement, we provide guidance so that the processing of personal data in your project is lawful and complies with data protection legislation.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES

We have assessed that you have a legal basis to process the personal data, but remember that it is the institution you are employed/study at that decides which data processors you can use and how you must store and secure data in your project. Remember to use suppliers that your institution has an agreement with (e.g. for cloud storage, online questionnaires, video calls, etc.)

We presuppose that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

NOTIFY CHANGES

If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify us. This is done by updating the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified: <https://sikt.no/en/notify-changes-notification-form>

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

We will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!

Appendix 2 – Risk and vulnerability analysis

Risikovurdering av personopplysninger						
Virksomhet: OsloMet			Avdeling: GFU, Engelskseksjonen			
Hva er risikovurdert: Datamateriale fra forskningsprosjekt «Teaching English through Songs: Perspectives among Norwegian Teachers»			Hva er lagret hvor (personopplysninger): Se opplysninger i skjemaet nedenfor			
Vurdert av: Maya Dato: Januar		Avdeling: GFU, Engelskseksjonen	Telefon/epost: S334258@oslomet.no , 45178874			
Instrument/ objekt	Hendelse	Årsak	Konsekvens	Tiltak	Risikonivå	Betydning for sett kryss
Mobiltelefon, PC	Tap eller tyveri av bærbart utstyr	Tyveri, tap.	Uvedkommende får tilgang til data. Får ikke tilgang til mine data.	Sørge for at data lagres i Onedrive OsloMet. Lagre intervju på nettskjema diktafon app. Logge av app slik at ikke uvedkommende får tilgang til lydfiler.		__x_Konfidensialitet __Integritet __x_Tilgjengelighet
Diktafon		Mangle mobildata, ustabil nettt på lokasjon.	Får ikke lagret lydopptak gjennom app til ekstern lagring. Kan ikke gjennomføre intervju med opptak.	Undersøke nettilgang på forhånd, sørge for 4G tilgang og nok mobildata.		__Konfidensialitet __Integritet __x_Tilgjengelighet

		Glemmer å skru på flymodus på mobil.	Andre program på enheden vil avbryte opptaket.	Ha en sjekkliste på hva jeg må gjøre før et intervju. Bruke både pc og mobil til å ta opptak.		
Informant	Brudd på personvern/taus hetsplikt	Informanten glemmer seg og oppgir data som kan føre til identifisering av tredjepersoner, eller sensitiv informasjon om seg selv.	Opptak kan ikke lagres og må slettes umiddelbart, brudd på personvern. Intervjuet må startes på nytt.	Sørge for at intervjuguiden ikke åpner for denne typen informasjon, minne informanten i forkant av intervjuet på at personsensitiv informasjon samt informasjon som kan føre til identifisering av barn/elever ikke må forekomme.		__Konfidensialitet __x_Integritet __Tilgjengelighet
Fil	Uvedkommende kan kjenne igjen opplysninger i filen, da den ikke er tilstrekkelig avidentifisert.	Det er ikke gjort godt nok arbeid med anonymisering i filen.	Brudd på personvern.	Være sikker på at datamaterialet er anonymisert, og adskilt mellom to ulike enheter.		__x_Konfidensialitet __Integritet __Tilgjengelighet

Appendix 3 – Information letter and consent form

Are you interested in taking part in the research project:
**“Songs in English Teaching for Very Young Non-native English
Speakers:
Perspectives and implementation among Norwegian Teachers”?**

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to find out how English teachers in Norway view the use of songs for teaching English, as well as how they incorporate songs into their teaching practice . In this letter I will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

The project aims to explore Norwegian teachers' perspectives on songs and using songs to teach English to young learners. As part of this research, I intend to conduct interviews with English teachers to gain a greater understanding of their perspectives, experiences, and how songs are used in their classrooms.

I am conducting this research as part of my master's thesis at Oslo Metropolitan University. An extensive literature review of previous research on the given topic will be incorporated into my master's thesis, and in-depth interviews with teachers will be the focus of my primary research. My master's thesis will be submitted on the 15th of May.

Who is responsible for the research project?

Oslo Metropolitan University is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

As a primary school teacher in Norway who teaches English to children in grades 1-4, you have been invited to participate.

What does participation involve for you?

If you decide to participate in this project, I will come to your school and interview you about the topic. Alternatively, if it's more convenient for you to do an online call, that is also possible. The interview will take approx. 45 minutes. In our conversation, I'd like to know your thoughts and perspectives on the use of songs in the English classroom. To ensure that the questions I ask my chosen participants are equal, I am preparing an interview guide that I will bring with me. Questions will primarily focus on your experiences and perspectives on using songs in the English classroom. During our conversation, I will take notes and gladly do a voice recording. The recording will be helpful to me in my transcription process, but please do not hesitate to let me know if you do not wish for me to record it. I will not record on my personal computer/phone device, but on a Dictaphone app provided by OsloMet, which will ensure that the data is deleted after my project is submitted.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

I will only use your personal data for the purpose specified in this information letter. I will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). My Master's thesis will maintain the anonymity of all statements, ensuring that no one can identify you. OsloMet's cloud (OneDrive) solution will be used to store your personal data (name, e-mail address/ phone number). The cloud will guarantee that no one can access my documents, and I will not be able to be synchronized to my own laptop. Personal data will only be accessible to me and my supervisor Janice Bland.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end 15th of May. All digital recordings and personal data will be deleted at the end of the project. In my master's thesis, I will ensure that you are not identifiable during the writing and final results.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complain to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with Oslo Metropolitan University, Data Protection Services has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Oslo Metropolitan University via Janice
Email: janicemary.bland@oslomet.no
- My contact info
Email: s334258@oslomet.no
- Out Data Protection Officer: Ingrid Jacobsen
Email: Ingrid.jacobsen@oslomet.no
- Data protection Services
Email: personverntjenester@sikt.no

I would greatly appreciate your participation if you interested in joining my master's project.

Yours sincerely,

Maya Sexton (student) and Janice Bland (supervisor)

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project “Songs in English Teaching for Very Young Non-Native English Speakers: Perspectives and Implementation Among Norwegian Teachers” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in an interview
- to store my personal information (name, email/phone number) in OsloMet's cloud until the project ends
- to the storage of my voice recordings in Dictaphone until the end of the project

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end of the project.

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix 4 – Interview guide

About the participant:

- How old are you?
- How long have you been working as a teacher?
- What is your educational background?
- What grade level do you currently teach?
- Which grades have you taught English to?
- What is your primary approach to teaching English, and what factor do you consider when planning a lesson?

General experience with songs

- What is your prior experience or knowledge of using songs in the English classroom?
- What personal associations or relationships do you have with songs?
 - Your primary school journeys?
 - Teacher education?

- Others?

1: Attitudes and perspectives

- What do you think of using songs compared to other teaching approaches and activities?
- What are your thoughts on using songs as a teaching tool for the English classroom?
 - What ways?
 - Which areas?

2: Implementation

- Do you use songs in your English classroom?
- How often do you use them?
- What is the purpose of using songs?
- What types of songs do you use?
- How do you introduce and use songs in the classroom?
- What are your motives behind your song selection?
- What platforms do you use?

3: Students' reactions

- How do your students respond when songs are used in the classroom?
- Can you describe any potential changes in the classroom atmosphere?
- Are there any students who are reluctant to participate when you use songs in the classroom?
- Could you share any experiences related to the use of songs in the classroom?

Is there anything else you would like to add to this discussion?