MASTER'S THESIS

M5GLU

May 2023

English Pronunciation in Lingua Franca Communication: A Study of Norwegian Teachers' Beliefs

Academic thesis

30 credits assignment

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Abstract

As English has become a global lingua franca, the way the language is used has changed. Technology, business, travel, and social media means most people are exposed to English, and today most people in Norway can speak English. Additionally, there are currently more non-native speakers of English than native speakers, and because of this, local variations and non-native accents are more present than ever before. Within the field of English language teaching, the question is how one should speak English. Does accent matter? Does pronunciation matter? Previous research shows that this can be a personal question, with answers depending on someone's beliefs. As this is the case, what teachers believe could their influence teaching, as well as their students' learning. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to explore teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward native and non-native variations of English and gain broader knowledge of how their beliefs impact teaching and learning. Therefore, the research question for this study is: *What are English teachers' beliefs regarding pronunciation in lingua franca communication?*

As beliefs are personal and dependent on the person, a qualitative method was used for this thesis. Through two focus-group interviews with teachers with work experience from 5th-7th grade and 8th-10th grade, semi-structured interviews let the teachers explain their beliefs regarding pronunciation. The results reveal an interesting tension. The teachers are generally positive to implementation of non-native varieties of English in the classroom, and do not mind non-native accents. However, their personal beliefs still show signs that native speaker standards are prevalent amongst them, especially regarding Norwegian-accented English. This tension between professional beliefs and personal beliefs shows that there is need for more research in this field, and that teachers who are positive to non-native varieties still struggle with moving away from the traditional approach to language teaching.

Keywords: Professional beliefs, personal beliefs, accents, pronunciation, English teaching, teacher cognition

Sammendrag

Ettersom engelsk har blitt en global lingua franca, har måten språket brukes på endret seg. Teknologi, business, reise og sosiale medier gjør at folk flest blir eksponert for engelsk, og i dag kan de fleste i Norge snakke engelsk. I tillegg er det i dag flere som som har engelsk som andrespråk enn som morsmål, og på grunn av dette finnes det flere lokale variasjoner og aksenter enn noen gang før. Innenfor engelskundervisning er spørsmålet hvordan man skal snakke engelsk. Betyr aksent noe? Betyr uttale noe? Tidligere forskning viser at dette kan avhenge sterkt av en persons tanker og oppfatninger. På grunn av dette kan lærernes oppfatninger påvirke deres undervisning, så vel som elevenes læring. Derfor er hensikten med denne oppgaven å utforske læreres oppfatninger om variasjoner av engelsk, samt få bredere kunnskap om hvordan deres holdninger påvirker undervisning og læring. Derfor er forskningsspørsmålet for denne studien: Hva er engelsklæreres holdning til uttale i lingua franca kommunikasjon?

Ettersom holdninger er personlige og avhengige av personen, ble det brukt en kvalitativ metode for denne oppgaven. Gjennom to fokusgruppeintervjuer med lærere med arbeidserfaring fra 5.-7.trinn og 8.-10.trinn, ble semistrukturerte intervjuer brukt for å la lærerne snakke om sine holdninger til uttale. Resultatene viser en interessant spenning. Lærerne er generelt positive til implementering av ulike varianter av engelsk i klasserommet, og har ikke noe imot engelske aksenter. Imidlertid viser deres personlige holdninger fortsatt tegn på at de har et tradisjonelt syn på engelsk, spesielt når det gjelder engelsk med norsk aksent. Denne spenningen mellom profesjonelle og personlige holdninger viser at det er behov for mer forskning på dette feltet, og at lærere som er positive til fremmede varianter fortsatt sliter med å gå bort fra den tradisjonelle tilnærmingen til språkopplæring.

Nøkkelord: Profesjonelle holdninger, personlige holdninger, aksenter, uttale, engelskundervisning, lærerkognisjon

Preface

After five years at OsloMet, this thesis is the final step before becoming a teacher. The process of writing this master's thesis has been challenging, frustrating, fun, and exciting. Now that I am done, there are several people who deserves gratitude.

First, I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor Lynell Chvala. Thank you for your constant support and motivation and thank you for being available to answer whatever questions that arose during the process of writing this thesis. Thank you for your insightful feedback, as without it, this thesis would not be finished. I also want to express my gratitude to fellow students and amazing friends, who have been incredible writing buddies, proof-readers, helpers, and motivators throughout this process. Thank you to my family, who have been supportive of me from the very start. A special thanks to my mother, Anita, for being just a phone call away when I needed reassurance and motivation.

Lastly, I want to thank my boyfriend, Jonas. Thank you for letting me use the entire kitchen table every night, for listening to my complains, for motivating me and for being so supportive. As with everything, it was easier with you around.

Helena Louise Staahle   15.05.2023

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1 Introduction

Within the field of English language teaching (ELT), questions are being raised as to how one should speak English. Is a certain pronunciation considered better than other variants? What even is good pronunciation? The answer to these questions changes depending on who you ask. For some, a native-like pronunciation of British English or American English is desirable, while others do not mind a non-native pronunciation. Some might not even care about pronunciation if the way a person speaks English is understandable. Without a clear answer to these questions, issues could arise in the classroom. If some teachers focus more on pronunciation than others, this could lead to a difference in the way students are assessed. Modern ELT tends to focus on communicative ability (Chvala, 2018), and the ideas of accurate pronunciation and accent is no longer reflected in the current curriculum LK20 (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020). Because of this, there is a need for alignment between modern ELT and teachers' attitudes towards pronunciation. This study aims to explore what attitudes teachers in Norwegian schools working in 5th-10th grade have towards English pronunciation.

1.1 English in the world and in Norway

Language plays an important part in shaping the world as we see it today. It carries culture and knowledge and becomes an influential power. With English being imposed on colonies by the British during the colonial era, the language was implemented and spread to many parts of the world. Later, with the rise of the USA as an economic and political superpower, along with its popular media, English continued being influential around the world through technology and culture (Asningtias, 2017). English has become the global language of communication, and it is increasingly characterized by those who use it as a second or third language, as opposed to the native speakers of English, according to Rindal and Piercy (2013). It is therefore safe to say that English has a prominent role in the world today, and knowing the language is considered an important life skill to partake actively in a global community. Because of the role of English in the world today, pronunciation varies greatly depending on where the English is spoken. Local languages affect pronunciation, causing there to be several ways to pronounce words. If the traditional view of English is upheld, with only American or British accents seen as accepted, this does not consider the spread and use of the English language today.

In Norway, English is understood by most people. Increased exposure through media, technology and travel has caused the language to have its own place in Norwegian society. The main findings in a report by Medietilsynet (2020) shows that about six out of ten children are exposed to English more than Norwegian while gaming, watching TV shows or movies. The report does not, however, explain what type of English children see online. This exposure means English plays an important role in many lives in Norway. In addition to being its own school subject, English has become its own separate identity and part of speakers' linguistic repertoire in Norway, even without having an official language status (Rindal & Piercy, 2013). Therefore, many consider English an unofficial second language, as most Norwegians today speak and understand it. Due to the global influence, it also affects how English is used in teaching. As many people learn to speak it outside of school, their pronunciation is based on what they hear, which in media often is native variations of English.

1.2 Pronunciations standards in English education

Traditionally, pronunciation has always been important when teaching and learning English. In Norway, the standard was for a long time being able to speak with the British Received Pronunciation (RP). Later, American English (GA) was accepted and taught in schools. The shift we see today has moved away from Received Pronunciation and other native-sounding variations of English. Sounding like a native speaker is now less important, and intelligibility has been strongly emphasized in approaches like ELF (English as a Lingua Franca). ELF considers how pronunciation is part of a person's linguistic identity, and therefore their first language influencing how they pronounce words is a more realistic approach when learning to speak English (Torgersen, 2018). This does not mean, however, that there is not a desired pronunciation among learners. According to Rindal and Piercy (2013), 75% of the participants in their study showed that learners aimed for a native accent, with American English as the most desired accent. None of the participants aimed for Norwegian English. The idea of an "accent aim" is therefore important for some learners and should be something teachers reflect over when teaching English, especially as this contradicts the curriculum LK20, where there is no aim for a certain accent or pronunciation.

1.3 English as a school subject

English has traditionally been taught as a foreign language in Norway, but due to increased exposure and proficiency amongst speakers it has developed away from being a function of a

"foreign language", towards being its own, stand-alone language comparable to Norwegian in the curriculum (Rindal & Piercy, 2013). In Norway's current curriculum, English is described as an important subject for communication, all-round education, and identity development purposes. It aims to prepare pupils for participation in further education, working life and society where competence in English is required (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020). Pronunciation is not mentioned here, which highlights the question as to what role pronunciation should have in the subject in school.

1.4 Research questions

Pronunciation can be a challenging task for teachers to navigate, according to studies like the one conducted by Tishakov and Tsagari (2022). Does pronunciation matter or not? *Should* it matter? Are some variations of accents of higher value than others? This view can stem from the traditional view of English, where only the accents from America and Britain are accepted and seen as suitable. Their beliefs can cause bias, which again could negatively affect the students in their classrooms. Additionally, what do teachers themselves think about accented English? These questions are central in this thesis, where the aim is to explore what teachers believe regarding pronunciation in lingua franca communication. As seen in Norwegian curricula through the last few decades, pronunciation and "accent aims" have changed, and are now not as important as in previous years. This is seen in the current curricula, where there is no mention of an accent that students should aim for, but rather communicative ability (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020). This development leads to teachers having to navigate and confront their language beliefs to properly instruct their students without being biased of their students' language in their assessment and guidance. This leads into the research question for this thesis:

> *What are English teachers' beliefs regarding pronunciation in lingua franca communication?*

1.5 Structure of thesis

This chapter has introduced pronunciation and accents as the topic for this thesis. In the second chapter I will look at relevant theory and previous research that relates to the topic of this thesis, where the two main ideas of native-speakerism and English as a lingua franca will be clarified. I will also explore which beliefs exist in other Expanding Circle countries, as

well as the Norwegian context regarding pronunciation attitudes. Chapter two will also discover previous research related to this topic. In chapter three I will present the method used in this study, and the process of finding participants and how the results were analyzed. I also consider validity and reliability, as well as ethical considerations. In chapter four I present the findings from the focus-group interviews, as well as the results. Chapter five discusses the findings up against theory and previous research. Finally, chapter six will try to answer the research question for this thesis. I will also look at the limitations of this study, as well as possibilities for further research.

2 Literature Review

In this chapter, relevant theory related to this thesis will be explored, in addition to previous research on the topic. The chapter is split into four sub-chapters.

The first sub-chapter will explore native speaker models in ELT, focusing on native speakerism and Kachru's Concentric Circles. In sub-chapter two I will look into English as a lingua franca, as well as the LFC, which is a pronunciation model developed to help L2 speakers. Sub-chapter three will look at the Expanding Circle context to teacher attitudes toward pronunciation. Finally, sub-chapter four will focus on the Norwegian context, as well as previous research.

2.1 Native speaker models in ELT

2.1.1 Native speakerism

The terms "native speaker" and "non-native speaker" have been heavily contested as scientific terms. In fields such as second language acquisition (SLA) the terms have traditionally been neutral, describing the objective classification of speakers primarily based on their early exposure to a language (Kiczkowiak & Lowe, 2021). Native speakerism is an ideology within the field of English language teaching (ELT), where native speakers are the ideal for both the English language and the English language teaching methodology by representing Western culture (Holliday, 2006). The ideology sees the West and their native speakers as privileged in discussions of how English should be taught, and who should be the ideal teachers of the language (Kiczkowiak & Lowe, 2021). The discourse around English language teaching have been colored by view of the native speaker's English as the perfect example of language learning. An example of this is the copying of pronunciation. Unreal expectations, skills, qualities, and behaviors have been attributed to "native speaker" English language teachers, creating the ideology of native speakerism (Swan et al., 2015). This also represents a cultural disbelief, implying a cultural deficiency resulting from non-Western stereotypes: the native speaker's hegemony against which the non-native speaker must take action against its "lower status" (Holliday, 2015).

The impact of native speakerism can be seen in professional settings, like employment policy (Holliday, 2006). In a previous study findings showed that 23,1% of ads for the position of English teacher in Colombia referred to "nativeness", as well as requesting that applicants

were from either the United States of America or Canada (Mackenzie, 2021). In some cases, teachers are hired to teach English simply because they have the right background, and not based on what ELT professional qualities and attributes they may have (Kiczkowiak & Lowe, 2021; Swan et al., 2015). This shows that the non-native speaker can in some instances experience discrimination in employment based on the belief in dominance of the native speaker's standards of language and language teaching methodology (Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009).

2.1.2 Kachru's Concentric Circles

Kachru's three concentric circles is a model that aims to highlight the distribution and variations of the English language in the world. Another term for these variations of English is World Englishes, which serves as an umbrella term covering all variations of English, with the different approaches used to describe and analyze them (Jenkins, 2006). Kachru's model is split in three circles, the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. Each circle represents a specific type of "spread, patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages" (Park & Wee, 2009).

The Inner Circle countries are primarily considered the countries where traditionally monolingual native speakers of English are located, or where English is the usual mother tongue. These countries are the USA, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada (Jenkins, 2006; Park & Wee, 2009). Some consider Inner Circle Englishes as superior through perceptions that native-speakers are more reliable producers of language than those who belong to the Outer or the Expanding Circle (Leonard, 2019).

The Outer Circle is described as a narrowed sense of World Englishes, describing the "new" Englishes in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean (Jenkins, 2006). The linguistic classification of the Outer Circle is often ambiguous, as the speakers are not considered interlanguages, yet not native (Higgins, 2003). The Outer Circle is also largely postcolonial communities, where English is used as a second language (Canagarajah, 2006), or in other words, where English has been retained and institutionalized as an additional language (Higgins, 2003; Park & Wee, 2009).

In the Expanding Circle, English has no official status, and is used mainly for international communication or a foreign language (Higgins, 2003; Park & Wee, 2009). Because of

historical origins and patterns of use, some Expanding Circle Englishes are perceived as norm-dependent, and therefore described as "learner-English" or "interlanguage" (Jenkins, 2009). Norway has traditionally been placed in the Expanding Circle category, as English is mainly used as a lingua franca with the outside world and is not an official language (Rindal, 2013).
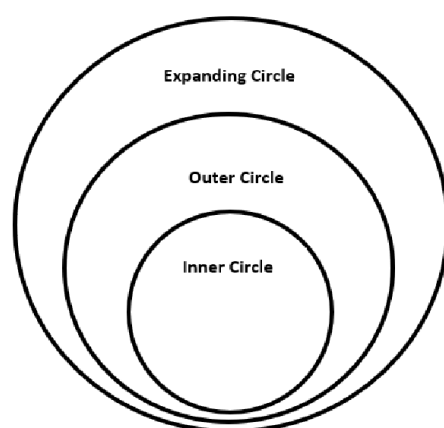
Figure 1: Kachru's Concentric Circles

2.1.3 Criticism of Kachru's Circles

The Kachruvian model was published in the 1980´s as a way to understand the rapid rise in contexts of English use and English education across the world and as a result of globalization and has therefore been critiqued several times. These critiques argue that the model does not properly capture the dynamics of English-usage in different communities; it does not allow a country to move from one circle to another; and it maintains the distinction between native and non-native speakers, which the model aims to combat (Park & Wee, 2009). Inner Circle speakers are considered native, while Outer and Expanding Circle speakers are seen as non-native, even if research proves these variations of English clearly differ from interlanguages (Higgins, 2003).

Kachru's model focuses on native speaker fluency, which is problematized by researchers questioning the native speaker's ownership of English (A. Al-Mutairi, 2019). While ownership according to the Kachruvian model embraces the Inner Circle and its speakers as *norm-providing*, the Outer and Expanding Circle are described as *norm developing* and *norm dependent* (Canagarajah, 2006). Ownership can also refer to the way speakers appropriate the English language to suit their own use of it. In this way, native speakers do not have authority

over norms and standards, as grammatical forms are created by speakers and communities outside the native context (Higgins, 2003). Here we see the limitations of Kachru's model clearly, and the challenges requires a reconceptualization of the diverse varieties of English (Canagarajah, 2006). In other words, the model does not account for the spread of English and the adoption and adaptation of English to local contexts and lingua franca situations.

2.1.4 Understanding English in the Expanding Circles

At the turn of the century, attention concentrated on the contexts where English did not have a historical established presence, meaning the Expanding Circle. The important point shared in the academic approaches to this subject is that English has a complex role in the world as it has created its own identity: teachers are not native speakers, native varieties of English does not represent relevant models for learners around the world, or work as the default choice as language teachers (Saraceni, 2009). The use of English in the Expanding Circle has therefore had an impact on the language itself. As English is used by an increasing number of people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, it evolves and changes in response to the needs and preferences of its users. For example, English in the Expanding Circle has been influenced by the grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation of the local languages spoken in those countries. Some varieties gain acknowledgment and become codified and institutionalized, illustrating that English in the Expanding Circle exists without necessarily following Inner Circle norms (Asningtias, 2017).

2.2 English as a lingua franca

Since the turn of the century, native speakerism and conceptions of the distribution of English have been challenged by the rise in contact and use of English amongst a wide range of speakers around the world. The use of English as a common language spoken between people from different linguacultural backgrounds is referred to as English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2009). English is the most widely spoken language in the world today, and its means as a tool for communication plays an important role in shaping the world. An estimated 1.5 billion people speak English worldwide, either as their first language or as a second language. The number of speakers using English as their second language is growing, and is today far greater than the number of native speakers (D. Graddol, 2006; Saraceni, 2009). English has become the language of international communication, business, science, technology, and entertainment, and its influence can be seen in almost every aspect of modern life. In other

words, English is the predominant international language and has spread around the globe at a scale no other language can compare to (Seidlhofer, 2011).

2.2.1 ELF communication

A central principle in understanding lingua franca communication is how speakers negotiate and accommodate to each other, by cooperating and reconstructing the English they have learnt in order to communicate (Bøhn & Hansen, 2018). ELF is not considered another variation of World Englishes as it is a situational and fluid language that is not stable, in addition to not being geographically confined (Cogo et al., 2021). This perspective of English language acquisition is based on the teaching and learning of English in relation to the realities of the language's current spread and use (Jenkins, 2006). Emphasis is put on the accommodation work speakers use instead of traditional fixed items of grammar, lexis, pronunciation, and pragmatics. Examples of accommodation work is negotiation of meaning through clarifications, reformulations, repetitions and paraphrasing, as well as the use of multilingual resources and non-verbal communication (Cogo et al., 2021). ELF accommodation still uses linguistic strategies in the same way that "native" or Inner Circle Englishes do. These can be local variations arisen from their own first languages, or through contact with other ELF speakers (Jenkins, 2009). The variety of characteristics in ELF are being identified by researchers, but any suggestion of a variety of ELF is premature without sufficient data from all parts of the world, involving a wide range of first language backgrounds (Kaur, 2010).

The rejection of the native speaker as the norm in English language teaching context within ELF, raises the question of which norms should be used. This question is also relevant as the number of non-native speakers outnumber the native speakers, making the Outer and Expanding Circles bigger than the Inner Circle (Asningtias, 2017; Bøhn & Hansen, 2018). With this, English has become the global language of communication, and it is increasingly characterized by those who use it as a second or third language, as opposed to the native speakers of English (Rindal & Piercy, 2013). As ELF is not a stable language variety, it can be difficult to use as a framework for teaching. This means that teachers need to be constantly updated on the use of ELF to know what the criteria for assessment of their students' language competence should be. It also highlights the fact that different teachers' ideas of ELF can be varying, leading to discrepancies when teaching in what is considered correct and what is not considered correct.

2.2.2 Lingua Franca Core

The Lingua Franca Core (LFC) is a pronunciation model created by Jennifer Jenkins in an attempt to assist communication for L2 speakers. As L2 speakers rarely achieve native-like pronunciation, English language pronunciation teaching should be changed. Speakers should no longer aim for a native-like accent, but rather a "comfortable intelligibility" (Ugarte Olea, 2019). The LFC proposes that non-native speakers are characterized by their fluid and dynamic phonology, engaging in communications with other L2 speakers without having a common, shared repertoire of phonological features (Barrera-Pardo, 2022). Without this common phonology, Jenkins claims that native speakers' pronunciation is not the most logical model to adopt, contrary to a widely assumed and accepted belief (Ugarte Olea, 2019). The LFC becomes the third alternative to the former leading alternatives Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA), which for a long time were the only accepted variants of English to teach. As several non-native speakers might have no need for native-like pronunciation or might not wish to sound like a native speaker, they should not be forced to identify with or choose between the two variants. Jenkins' LFC is therefore a collection of more teachable and learnable pronunciation targets for learners that are based on research of intelligibility errors among non-native speakers (Dauer, 2005).

The significance of the LFC is that it offers a starting point for describing what intelligible phonetic features emerge from non-native speaker interactions (Barrera-Pardo, 2022). The LFC consists of three core areas: consonants, vowels, and prosody. This stands in contrast to the current pronunciation methodology by emphasizing segmentals like consonants and vowels, and downplaying the importance of suprasegmentals like rhythm, word stress and intonation (Dauer, 2005).

2.3 Expanding Circle context to teacher attitudes to English accents and pronunciation

Teacher cognition is a term that refers to the beliefs, knowledge, and thought processes that teachers have about teaching and learning. In the context of L2 English pronunciation, teacher cognition plays an important role in how teachers approach teaching pronunciation to their students. The rise of focus on teacher cognition emphasizes the recognition that what teachers believe, think, and know actively impacts their classroom practices. As knowledge and beliefs can strongly influence human action, this recognition has suggested that understanding

teacher cognition is essential to understand teaching (Borg, 2015). Regarding pronunciation, lack of training often leads to teachers not adequately addressing it in the classroom. Amongst non-native teachers of English, this lack of training is often accompanied by insecurity and lack of confidence in their own English pronunciation (Levis et al., 2016). This can be tied to the fact that some countries' curricula do not encourage or assess pronunciation, causing teachers to skip specific teaching on this topic (Sonsaat, 2018). Research conducted by Ustaci and Ok (2014) revealed that a wonted approach for teachers would be to correct pronunciation mistakes immediately when noticing a student using the wrong pronunciation or vocabulary. This approach is supported by Munden (2014), who argues that this method teaches pronunciation by gently and quickly correcting a mistake, therefore not humiliating or discouraging students from speaking.

Further research also shows negative attitudes towards pronunciation teaching, with reasoning such as its practice is not related to the communicative competence of the language, and earlier attempts in teaching pronunciation has not been successful, so they believe it does not work (Gilakjani, 2017). According to Nuske (2018), research on English in the Expanding Circle consistently shows that teachers and students demonstrate perceptions that native varieties of English are the sole acceptable models for English learners, and localized varieties are inappropriate, undesired or unproductive. This view is supported by students who believe that non-native teachers of English can be perceived as inadequate because of L2 accents which results in inauthentic L2 input, reinforcing errors that learners themselves might be apt to make (Levis et al., 2016).

2.3.1 Pronunciation beliefs among Chinese English teachers

To understand how attitudes are regarded in other Expanding Circle contexts, it can be helpful to look towards countries like China. Research on Chinese teachers' beliefs regarding English pronunciation largely identify a tendency of positivity towards native-speaker standards, as a majority does not want to be identified as Chinese when speaking English, and believe that the major reason they need English is to communicate with native speakers (Nuske, 2018). In a questionnaire survey made by He and Zhang (2010), they found that 55,4% of their participants did not mind speaking English with the accent of their mother tongue. The reasonings included the point that native-like pronunciation would be unnecessary as long as they could make themselves understood. Other reasons were that they wanted to be recognized as Chinese when speaking English, and the belief that their English pronunciation

could not be free from influences from their native language, Chinese (He & Zhang, 2010). A more recent study by Pan et al. (2021), however, showed self-contradictory attitudes towards China English; students were positive towards China English, but did not want to be identified as Chinese when using English. This contradiction was brought to attention in the study by Nuske (2018), where one person interviewed realized she was only negative toward her own accented English, yet not any other variations, saying that she was in one way discriminating against her own people. Findings made by Ma (2012) also show that learners appreciate teachers who are Chinese, pointing to advantages like the ability to use students' L1 as a linguistic and pedagogical tool other than English for communication when raising and discussing questions about their learning. The disadvantages of this, which was pointed out by students regarding their teachers, were inaccuracies in pronunciation and grammar, which were perceived as a limiting opportunity to practice English (Ma, 2012).

The perceived importance of English in society and the importance of being able to communicate does not seem to have affected how it is being taught in China. This reveals a complex situation, according to research done by Pan and Block (2011). Teachers are often limited to tests based on native standards, prescribed curricula tied to materials from Western publishers, as well as a perceived need for a standard dialect to ensure intelligibility when traveling and doing business, as well as students' expectations for their learning (Nuske, 2018). The deeply rooted examination culture leads to an exam-based syllabus, which clashes with the communicative language teaching approach which teachers are meant to implement (Pan & Block, 2011). With localized Englishes being dismissed in order to include what is expected of teachers, a status quo is perpetuated regarding English pronunciation in China, with beliefs being set aside in order to comply with national teaching plans (Nuske, 2018).

2.4 The Norwegian context

2.4.1 Pronunciation in Norway

English has become a widely spoken language in Norway, particularly among younger generations. Norway has traditionally been placed in the Expanding Circle according to Kachru's model, as English is mostly used as a lingua franca and is not considered an official language (Rindal, 2013). According to the 2022 EF English Proficiency Index, a ranking of 111 countries and regions by English skills based on tests of 2.1 million adults, Norway ended on fourth place, scoring a very high proficiency average (Education First, 2022). This shows

that Norwegians generally are considered competent English speakers compared to other countries. However, Norwegians can be blind towards their competence and tend to be negative towards their own L2 pronunciation. In an MA thesis study by Hordnes (2013), he points to previous Prime Minister and chairman of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, Thorbjørn Jagland as a target for much criticism due to his heavy Norwegian accented English. In examples from Norwegian media Jagland's English was described as embarrassing, in addition to other negative remarks deeming his pronunciation too poor and not worthy of a man of his position, suggesting he gets a translator. However, these negative attitudes were not found abroad, and shows that the criticism of Norwegian accented English mainly comes from Norwegian people themselves (Hordnes, 2013).

2.4.2 Curriculum changes and policy development

In education, English has traditionally been considered a foreign language, but since the 1990's there has been a belief that English is slowly transitioning from being considered a foreign language to becoming a second language (Simensen, 2014). This change can be seen directly in today's curriculum, LK20, as English is not grouped together with other foreign languages but stands alone as its own subject with a specific curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020). Regarding pronunciation, the English curriculum does not offer any clear guidance on what students should sound like (Bøhn & Hansen, 2017). Consequently, there is not much guidance for teachers. After 7th grade students should be able to "explore and use pronunciation patterns and words and expressions in play, singing and role playing", and after 10th grade students should be able to "use key patterns of pronunciation in communication" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020). These key patterns are not further explained in the curriculum and is therefore decided by each county. The assessment criteria based on these decisions are decided locally, leading to varying and inconsistent use by teachers, schools, and counties.

2.4.3 Previous research

Finding out what teachers and students believe regarding English pronunciation has been a topic of research for several years. This sub-chapter will investigate previous research on this topic in a Norwegian context.

Tishakov and Tsagari (2022) have conducted a study based on an online survey that reports English teachers' language beliefs and self-reported practices in linguistically diverse classrooms in Norway. Through analysis they discovered a complex paradox emerging where teachers' acceptance of multilingual ideals was contradicted by their beliefs and teaching practices, which reflected monolingual ideologies. They were unable to dismiss native speakers as the most preferred language teachers, with only 22% disagreeing and 1% strongly disagreeing with the statement that teachers should have a native speaker pronunciation (Tishakov & Tsagari, 2022). Further, teacher age, learner age group, and teacher gender seemed to be significant factors to some beliefs, showing that teachers' trajectories are in transition towards a pro-multilingual ideal where non-native variations of English are more acceptable than earlier (Tishakov & Tsagari, 2022).

A study by Bøhn and Hansen (2017) argues how the English subject curriculum offers little to no guidance in how to assess pronunciation. In addition, there is no criteria among the very general competence aims, causing them not to be applicable when assessing students' oral English. The criteria used by schools are decided by each county, leading to varying and inconsistent use by teachers, schools, and counties. Through questionnaires and interviews with teachers working in Norwegian schools, they found that teachers themselves were unsure about pronunciation: some were adamant that students should sound like native speakers to get the highest grade, while some were more ambiguous, saying that while a native accent is not a "must", it is preferrable (Bøhn & Hansen, 2017). While teachers disagreed on the salience of nativeness, they all strongly believed that intelligibility was needed to get a good grade.

As English has become the global language of communication, it is increasingly characterized by those who use it as a second or third language, as opposed to the native speakers of English, according to Rindal and Piercy (2013). In Norway, we can see this change as there no longer are any explicit L2 models offered by educational authorities: speakers are accustomed and tolerant of variations of English, and no certain variation of English is considered better than others. This does not mean, however, that there is not a desired pronunciation among learners. In the study conducted by Rindal and Piercy (2013), 75% of the participants showed that learners aimed for a native accent, with American English being the most popular choice. None of the participants aimed for Norwegian English. Therefore, results show that the idea of an "accent aim" is considered important by learners and should

thus be something teachers reflect over when teaching English, especially as it contradicts the curriculum LK20 where there is no aim for a certain accent or pronunciation.

In an analysis of English as a school subject in Norway from 1936 until 2014, Simensen (2014) investigates what variant of English has been preferred in the Norwegian education system. The analysis shows that native variants of English were preferred in earlier curricula, with American and British English being equalized in 1987. Simensen (2014) also points to the challenges ELF presents as a model for learning. As ELF is not a stable language variety, it can be difficult to use as a framework for teaching. This means that teachers need to be constantly updated on the use of ELF to know what the criteria for assessment of their students' language competence should be. It also highlights the fact that different teachers' ideas of ELF can be varying, leading to discrepancies when assessing the same student. Without clear assessment criteria, it is therefore a challenge for schools to treat their students equally. In addition to this, Simensen (2014) argues the point that some students believe sounding like a native speaker is beneficial in evaluation situations. Likewise, teachers also see students with an almost native-like pronunciation and intonation as positive. The implementation of ELF in the curriculum therefore shows a change in education policy, although Simensen (2014) believes a lot more research is needed in order to implement change in the school subject English as pro-native beliefs are still prevalent amongst students and teachers.

2.5 Summary of chapter

This chapter has been a literature review of relevant theory for this study, as well as previous research related to the topic. English in the world today plays an important role both in education and in overall society. Native-speakerism, a term coined by Holliday (2006), is based on an ideology that sees the Western world and particularly native speakers as the standard for how English is meant to be spoken, as well as who should be the teachers of the language (Kiczkowiak & Lowe, 2021). Further, native speakers have been attributed qualities, skills and behaviors that paints them as the perfect example of language learning (Swan et al., 2015), which by comparison sets the non-native speaker in a negative light.

Kachru's concentric circles is an example of a model that shows the distribution of English around the world, with the Inner Circle being the example of native speakers being the owner

of the language, while the Outer Circle and Expanding Circle are seen as non-native, following the standards set by the Inner Circle (Leonard, 2019). This model has been heavily criticized, as it does not take into consideration how the English language is being used in other countries that are not considered native, according to Kachru, and fails to see the dynamics of English outside the native-speaker view (Park & Wee, 2009).

Focusing on non-native speakers' use of English is important in ELF. As the number of English speakers is greater in non-native countries than in native countries, this highlights an important shift in how the language is used (D. Graddol, 2006). This shift also means teachers need to change how they approach topics like pronunciation. The LFC was created by Jenkins (2006) in order to approach English teaching and learning in a new way, where speakers' native languages are taken into account, and the native speaker is no longer the standard for everyone.

This shift can be seen in Norwegian education policy, where pronunciation standards are no longer connected to sounding like a native speaker. While this change has been implemented on a curricular level, studies show that teachers and students still show signs of preferring native speakers' accents and pronunciation over their own, Norwegian-accented pronunciation (Bøhn & Hansen, 2017; Rindal, 2010; Tishakov & Tsagari, 2022).

In the next chapter of this thesis, I will focus on the methodology behind my research.

3 Methodology

This thesis means to explore the research question: "What are teachers' beliefs about English pronunciation in lingua franca communication?". To answer this question, a qualitative approach was taken based on a pragmatic decision in order to meet the research aim. Each data collection method has advantages and disadvantages that must be considered when looking at what you want to do, how you want to do research and how it fits with your goals (Avineri, 2017). For my research it was important to be able to ask questions to get meaningful data, which is why the qualitative approach seemed more fitting for this purpose. Qualitative research is focused on making sense of lived and observed phenomena in a specific context with specifically chosen individuals (Johnson et al., 2020), and gain deep understanding of these experiences (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Central characteristic in qualitive research is therefore the interest in how people interpret their experiences, and what meanings they attribute to these experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, Dalland (2017) argues that when doing research that aims to discover opinions and experiences that cannot be measured or numbered, a qualitative methodological approach is appropriate.

3.1 Interviews

3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are typically a conversation with the interviewee in the form of back-and-forth responses. Interviews are usually categorized as either structured, semi-structured or unstructured. The differences between these categories are based on how structured an interview is, and the different methods are suitable for different purposes. Structured interviews can resemble questionnaires because you only go through set questions with your interviewee (Avineri, 2017). This makes comparing answers across respondents an easier task but does not always allow for exploration of details that could be important for understanding the interviewee properly. Semi-structured interviews allow for more fluidity. The questions are often tailored to the person being interviewed, and the interviewer will probe further into areas of interest as they arise (Avineri, 2017). Semi-structured interviews can therefore vary greatly, even if they are based on the same questions.

Semi-structured interviews are appropriate and useful for investigating beliefs as it allows for some structure, but also the freedom of investigating various prompts through the interview

phase (Avineri, 2017). In semi-structured interviews the questions are typically open-ended and flexibly worded. Most of the interview is based on a list of questions or issues to be explored, but neither the wording nor order of the questions is decided ahead of the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This allows for the researcher to adapt the questions to the conversation at hand and ask other relevant questions if necessary. As semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to access first-hand accounts from the interviewees, and ask follow-up questions immediately, this was the best type of interview to generate necessary data for the research question.

The qualitative interview is a research method used to gather insights and understanding of a particular topic from the perspective of the person being interviewed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This method involves conducting interviews with either individuals or groups to explore their experiences, opinions, beliefs, and perspectives related a specific research topic or question. Qualitative interviews can be considered conversations with the purpose of gathering a certain kind of information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this case, researching teachers' beliefs regarding English pronunciation in lingua franca communication. Interviews allow for the exploration of feelings, thoughts and intentions that cannot be directly observed. Interviews therefore allow for exploring informants' perspective and the what, how and why of their experience (Avineri, 2017).

A main benefit of qualitative interviews is that they allow for a deep and nuanced understanding of someone's perspective on a certain topic. By asking questions that target someone's opinion or values, you can get data related to that person's beliefs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is also important to make sure the interview situation is open and planned: planning questions ahead that stay on the research topic, while leaving room for openness by asking questions related to the answers you are given by your respondents. By taking these steps, it is more likely responses will be spontaneous and unexpected (Dalland, 2017). As beliefs may be less conscious, the interviewer can gain insights into the respondents' emotions, experiences and beliefs, which may difficult through other research methods such as surveys or experiments (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are somewhat flexible, allowing both for the researcher to adjust questions based on responses, as well as ensuring the discussion of key topics.

There are, however, some limitations to qualitative interviews. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) point out the roles of the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer is responsible for ensuring that the interviewee feels comfortable to share experiences and beliefs, as well as acting professional and not letting their own perspectives influence the interviewee's answers. Asking neutral questions as opposed leading questions minimizes the potential for bias and generates higher quality data as the interviewee is providing the data themselves (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Overall, qualitative interviews are a useful research method for gaining insights into teachers' beliefs because they allow the researcher to explore someone's thoughts and opinions which can provide important data for further research.

3.1.2 Semi-structured focus group interview

Focus group interviews allow for a more informal style human interaction between researchers and informants more akin to everyday conversation, whilst still being able to discuss the topic of the research (Gulliksen & Hjardemaal, 2016). The group needs to be large enough to generate a proper discussion, yet not so large people are left out of the conversation (Avineri, 2017). For this thesis, the data collection consisted of two focus group interviews with three participants each. The first group consisted of three English teachers working with 5th-7th grade students. The second group was teachers of students in 8th-10th grade. Gulliksen and Hjardemaal (2016) compare focus group interviews to the team meetings teachers have to plan academic terms, and as such they are a familiar format for the participants in my research. This can be highly helpful, because participants in more unfamiliar or clinical settings can become shy or uncomfortable and may be less inclined to share their thoughts with the researcher (Dalland, 2017).

Because the interviews were done in groups and every teacher had different time schedules, it was decided to conduct the interviews digitally through Microsoft Teams, a platform they were all familiar with. This was agreed beforehand, and in addition, this allowed the participants to sit where they felt comfortable. As stressed by Avineri (2017), the location of an interview is of high importance, because the researcher should aim to make the interviewee feel as comfortable as possible. Therefore, conducting interviews in a teacher's own classroom might not be as comfortable for the interviewee as a video call or a closed office. This could also prevent distractions such as people disrupting by walking in on the interview

or taking part and answering questions. Not having privacy while conducting an interview can also make the interviewee shy or uncomfortable and make them less inclined to share their thoughts with the researcher (Dalland, 2017). Spending time finding a suitable location is beneficial for the interview, and the researcher should therefore strive to find the middle ground between comfort and ease for the interviewee. It also did not waste time, as the interviews could quickly start and end as to not take up more time than necessary for the participants. As Microsoft Teams was both beneficial and familiar, it allowed for two smooth and efficient interviews. By choosing to have two focus group interviews, the aim was to see if there can be found any differences or tensions between the two group discussions.

3.2 Interview guide

This study investigates teachers' beliefs regarding English pronunciation in ELF communication. The interview guide is the main research instrument used to guide data collection related to the aforementioned research aim. The interview guide was constructed of specific and more open-ended questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and served to guide the researcher and participant through the interview (Dalland, 2017).

The interview guide was organized around four topics with a total of 10 questions (see appendix 2). The first section included general questions about the participants' education and experience working as an English teacher. The purpose was to obtain some general background information that might influence their beliefs. Subsequent topics included English as a school subject, pronunciation, as well as a sound clip of Jens Stoltenberg speaking English (Dagbladet, 2019). Finally, the interviews ended with two questions asking the participants if they wanted to include something we had not discussed during the interview, as well as asking them if they had any questions for me.

The interview guide was organized into these topics:

Topic:	Type of data generated:
General questions	Background information like education and teaching experience
English as a school subject	Introduction and wide approach to English. What do the participants think of when

	talking about English in a school related context?
Pronunciation	Exploring opinions and beliefs regarding pronunciation
Sound clip of Jens Stoltenberg	Giving informants a chance to listen to and comment on spoken English in real time
Concluding questions	For clarification in case of confusion or if anything was left unsaid that the informants wanted to elaborate on

Firstly, I wanted to ask some general questions about the participants, seeing as they all are English teachers working in Norwegian schools. Asking about their work experience would allow me to discover differences between more and less experienced teachers, as well as getting some insights into their backgrounds. Topic 2 focused on English as a school subject, where the participants were asked what they believe their students should have learnt by the end of 7th or 10th grade. This explores the potential differences between different grades, as well as beliefs about pronunciation from a reported teaching practice view. Topic 3 narrowed the focus more towards accents and pronunciation. This directed the attention more towards my research question, in addition to allowing the participants to discuss amongst themselves their views on English pronunciation.

As the final topic I wanted to expose the participants to a sound clip of spoken English. I therefore decided to show them a one-minute YouTube video of former Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg speaking to the American Congress, telling a short story about the first Norwegian to ever come to America. The aim of showing this clip to the participants was to expose them to spoken English with a clear Norwegian accent. After presenting the video, the participants were asked an open-ended question about their thoughts regarding the video to exemplify and summarize the questions discussed earlier in the interviews.

The participants were not aware of the categories and were therefore not given the interview guide beforehand. This was done in order to not lose spontaneity, as well as minimizing the chance of getting rehearsed answers. As the aim was to discover their beliefs, their experience as English teachers was of importance, and further preparation was not a prerequisite for the

interview to take place. However, when gathering informants everyone was given information about the project and the range of topics, as well as my personal information in case they had further questions. In other words, the topics for discussion were disclosed, but the exact questions were not revealed beforehand.

3.2.1 Pilot testing

The interview guide was piloted to test how questions were understood by the interviewees, and to ensure that all topics are covered (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Pilot interviews are crucial for trying out questions, as they reveal what questions can be confusing and need rewording, as well as what questions are less useful for your data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, the pilot interview allowed for practice in interviewing several people at once. The interview was piloted on acquaintances familiar with the topic and certain changes were made.

Originally my plan was to have each interviewee raise their hand to speak, but I quickly discovered during piloting that letting the interviewees speak freely allowed for more natural conversations and discussions. This change was implemented in the actual interviews. Other than this no major changes were made to the interview guide, as the questions were effective in capturing the intended data.

3.3 Data collection

Focus group interviews were recorded using the Nettskjema-Diktafon app, as detailed in the Sikt approval. All the participants were also informed about the recording in the signed information letter before the interviews. Recording ensures that everything said is preserved for later analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is important to be familiar with your recording equipment before using it during interviews, as technical or human failure can cause a loss of all data or get unusable recordings because of audio quality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). To ensure this would not happen, I tested the Nettskjema-Diktafon app several times so that I knew how it worked and was sure the audio quality would be good enough for later transcription. During the interviews I also recorded the audio on two additional devices so I would have back-ups of the recording.

Transcribing data helps identify and locate patterns in the data set. It is therefore essential to consider which elements should be included in the transcript. Intonation, non-verbal communication, pauses and speaker changes are all examples to consider (Avineri, 2017). As my interviews were focus groups, it was important to note speaker changes, as to properly separate the opinions of the participants within each interview. Making decisions about what you should include when transcribing is an important part of the process, and there is not necessarily one right answer. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) argues that these decisions depend on whether a detailed linguistic analysis or a conversational analysis is warranted. As my aim was to listen to the participants' opinions and beliefs, it was of higher importance to transcribe their words verbatim rather than include hesitations or non-verbal cues. Therefore, the transcriptions consist of a word-for-word account of the informants' words.

Each interview lasted about 40-45 minutes and resulted in a large amount of data to transcribe. Transcribing is very time-consuming (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), and it is therefore beneficial to start transcribing shortly after the interview, as it is fresh in your memory. At the same time, notes taken during the interview can help retain some of the original meaning or thoughts you had that are less clear in the interview data itself (Dalland, 2017). During the interviews for this study, I took notes in addition to recording to capture any salient or important points or views in the moment. This was beneficial during the transcription process, as it helped me recall important thoughts and reactions at that time.

3.4 Sampling

Before conducting focus-group interviews, I needed to get in contact with informants. I started sending out emails through my network and through a contact I got the information of six teachers that were interested in participating in an interview. The potential participants were contacted through email and sent informal information about the project. They were later sent the information letter and consent form with Sikt approval, which is detailed in chapter 3.7 about ethical considerations.

As I wanted to explore beliefs regarding English pronunciation, I had to interview English teachers who have experience with this. The participants chosen to partake in this study were purposefully sampled and intentional in order to answer the research question (Johnson et al., 2020). Firstly, the participants needed to be teachers who have worked at least one year

teaching English in Norwegian schools. This limit was set in order to make sure all participants had at least some individual experiences from teaching. Secondly, two focus groups were formed to compare the differences between teacher beliefs in 5th-7th grade and teacher beliefs in 8th-10th grade. In total, six teachers in two groups of three were interviewed. They have varying degrees of teaching experience ranging from one year to 25 years, but all are currently working as English teachers in Norway. The decision of splitting the groups into 5th-7th grade and 8th-10th grade was based on the curriculum, where the competence aims are also split into these groups. This could reveal possible differences in teachers' beliefs, depending on what competence aims they are dealing with in the classroom every day.

All participants were assigned pseudonyms to keep them anonymous, see table below:

Pseudonym:	Currently working in:	Experience working in schools:
Anna	5th-7th grade	25 years
Thomas	5th-7th grade	7 years
Lisa	5th-7th grade	7 years
John	8th-10th grade	19 years
Stephen	8th-10th grade	2 years
Caroline	8th-10th grade	1 year

3.5 Data analysis

After the focus-group interviews were finished and transcribed, the data needed to be analyzed. The aim of a qualitative analysis is to identify patterns and themes in the collected dataset (Avineri, 2017). In this study, a mix of content analysis and discourse analysis was used. Mixing methods can be appropriate depending on the data, as well as the aim of the analysis. While content analysis is used to analyze "what" is being expressed during an interview, discourse analysis explores "how" something is expressed (Avineri, 2017). To reveal the "what" and "how", actual analysis must be done. Coding data is a standard way of categorizing data to identify themes or important aspects of the data. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), coding data entails connecting key words to a certain segment of interview material or categorizing concepts that reveal themselves in the dataset.

In this study, there were two transcribed focus-group interviews. In order to analyze the data, the first round of analysis happened by finding key concepts that were important in each interview. These were found by reading through the transcripts several times and writing down sentences, words and concepts that stood out in each interview. These were then written down in two separate lists, one for the focus-group interview with the teachers with work experience from 5th-7th grade, and the other for the teachers with work experience from 8th-10th grade. The process of noticing, collecting and sorting data into categories allows the researcher to begin creating a framework of thematic ideas for further analysis (Avineri, 2017).

In collaboration with my advisor, we wanted to see if there could be any differences in professional and personal beliefs. The second round of analysis therefore included another tier: the key concepts that were discovered in round one, were categorized as either professional beliefs or personal beliefs. The aim with making categories like these is to document the experiences and actions completely, as well as constantly comparing data in order to find similarities and differences that appear as the analysis is being done (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

As both focus-group interviews included a segment where the informants listened to a video clip of Jens Stoltenberg speaking, this became its own category in the results.

3.6 Validity and reliability

Research should aim to produce valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. This means being able to trust the results the research concludes with, in addition to presenting insights and conclusions that ring true to other researchers and members of the field (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In qualitative research there is a shift to use new terms in order to explain a study's trustworthiness. Thomas and Magilvy (2011) and Johnson et al. (2020) use the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These terms are recognized in qualitative research, but similar to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) this study will use the traditional terms of validity and reliability, though they are contested terms.

3.6.1 Validity

Validity is the idea that you are measuring what you seek to measure (Avineri, 2017). There are two types of validity, these are internal validity and external validity. Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As with all research, data cannot speak for itself, and therefore there is always an interpretation of it. Because of this, another way of looking at validity in qualitative research is using the term credibility – are the findings based on the data credible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)? Johnson et al. (2020) explains this as the researcher ensuring that the findings and evidence of the results accurately represent what was studied. An example is looking at the informants of the study. All the participants who partook in focus-group interviews are currently working as English teachers and have experience teaching pronunciation, which is relevant to this study. Having multiple participants also helps validating the research, as data is collected from multiple sources. This means the researcher can review transcripts and look for similarities within and across the participants (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describes this as triangulation, which increases the internal validity by countering the concern that the findings are simply a product of a single source or investigation.

External validity is the extent of which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The ability to transfer research findings or methods to another context is also called transferability, and aims to see if the findings still have applicability with other participants (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). To ensure external validity, or transferability, the researcher must provide detailed contextual information, so that others can determine if the results are applicable to their situation (Johnson et al., 2020). Generalizing qualitative data can be difficult, as the results from the findings can be too narrow to be generalized for an entire population. Sample size can be an example of this challenge, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Additionally, in qualitative research a non-random sampling is often the case, as the researcher wishes to explore one topic in depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study the sampling was not random but limited to English teachers with experience working with 5th-10th grade, not to find out a general truth but rather to explore their views. By being transparent with sampling, and other research instruments like the interview guide, the study can be replicated and therefore increases validity.

3.6.2 Reliability

Reliability in research is meant to ensure that anyone who analyses the same dataset would come to the same conclusions (Avineri, 2017). In other words, reliability is the trustworthiness of research (Dalland, 2017). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) notes that reliability can be problematic in qualitative research as human behavior is never static, which contradicts the traditional view on reliability in research design where there is one single reality where repeated studies will yield the same results. However, by explaining the research process thoroughly the reliability can be strengthened.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) recognizes how reliability can depend on word choice during interviews. If the interviewer chooses to word questions differently in interviews, this can potentially change an informants' answer. This can therefore impact how reliable a study is. The interviewer's questioning technique, knowledge of the topic being discussed and sensitivity regarding the social relation between the interviewer and the informant is therefore essential to ensure a good interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

This study's research is based on focus group interviews, and it can therefore be difficult to secure high reliability. Both the interviewer and the interviewee will affect the interview differently, which highlights the possibility that another researcher would get different results than those presented in this study. In an effort to make this study reliable, I have been transparent with all informants regarding what I am researching, in order to hopefully make them comfortable to answer my questions truthfully.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Prior to conducting focus group interviews, the project had to be approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (Sikt). A notification form was submitted with the working project title, research question and interview guide. Once the project was approved by Sikt I contacted my informants and sent them an information letter and consent form. The consent forms were signed by the informants and sent back to me. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), informed consent means that informants are notified of a study's overall objective and main design. Further, all possible risks and advantages of participating are disclosed. For my project, everyone was made aware beforehand that participation would entail partaking in a focus group interview with me and

two other participants. It is important to secure informants' voluntary participation, as well as inform them about their right to withdraw from the project at any time. This includes the right to not answer specific questions, or to completely withdraw. The informant does not need any reasoning to withdraw and can do so at any time (Dalland, 2017). For this study, every participant was made aware of their right to withdraw their consent without any consequence, and was reminded of this in the information letter, as well as at the beginning and at the end of the interview.

Anonymity is another important ethical consideration. All participants have the right to anonymity, as information revealed during an interview can be personal or otherwise identifying (Dalland, 2017). As this study was based on focus group interviews, the participants were not anonymous to the others partaking in the same interview as them. However, as the interviews have been transcribed, every informant was given a pseudonym and anonymized.

In case informants accidentally reveal personal information that the researcher should not hear, confidentiality is essential to gain the informants' trust (Dalland, 2017). This secures the informants' privacy, meaning that things said during the interview should not be possible to trace back to them afterwards (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). In order to ensure this, recordings that included their voices have been deleted after completing the transcription process.

Both interviews started by informing about how their information would be anonymized and kept confidential by deleting the recordings and any personal information after the end of the project. This information was repeated at the end of the interview. This was important for me out of respect for the informants who participated using their time to give me data about their self-understanding, beliefs, and experiences.

4 Results

In this chapter, I will present the findings of this study that have been gathered by conducting two focus group interviews with a total of six teachers, where three teachers have experience teaching 5th-7th grade and three teachers have experience teaching 8th-10th grade. The findings are based on the two transcriptions made after the interviews took place and will be presented in two categories, which are professional beliefs and personal beliefs. Direct quotes taken from the transcriptions will be written in quotation marks.

4.1 Professional beliefs

The teachers that were interviewed for this study have varying degrees of experience as English teachers, ranging from 1 year to 25 years as seen in the sampling table in subchapter 3.4. This means that some teachers have experience working with several curricula, while other teachers have only worked with LK20. In this section I will explore the findings based on the teachers' professional beliefs regarding pronunciation.

4.1.1 Communication

The six informants all mentioned that the aim of teaching English as a school subject is to equip students with the skills necessary to make themselves understood in English. When explaining further what being able to communicate means, the informants emphasized making their students feel secure enough to speak freely in their own words - using sentences and words that they feel natural - and daring to explore the language as important. Understanding what others are saying and being able to keep a conversation going was also mentioned:

"I think it is important that students can make themselves understood when going on a holiday, for example. Or like when they are talking to other people." – Anna

Anna's example of using English in a situational context like a holiday seemed just as important to the teachers with experience working in 8th-10th grade. John stressed that guiding his students to be able to use situational language in both formal and informal settings is essential for his teaching, as giving students the means to use English for their needs in later life is the most important part of an English teacher's job.

"Whether you are in a professional environment in higher education or a car mechanic, you need to be able to understand what is being said as well as expressing your own thoughts. To me, being able to communicate appropriately is the most important part of teaching English."
– John

In both interviews the teachers mentioned fear as a struggle they face when teaching English. Their experience from the classroom shows students that either refuse to speak or do not dare to speak in front of other students. In their interview, Lisa, Thomas, and Anna discussed this issue and highlights the challenge this presents when they have students who are exceptionally good at English in their classrooms:

"The downside is when you have two or three students who are really talented, because it makes the other students believe that is where they should be, talent-wise, and then they do not dare to speak as long as the good students are present." - Anna

Caroline also had experience with this in her classroom and found that slowly implementing more English in her classroom seemed to work. As the students progressed from 8th grade to 9th grade, she stopped speaking Norwegian in her classroom and now only speaks English. By being consistent, she was able to get students to speak English more often, even if it would just be simple sentences:

"I ask questions in English and some answer in Norwegian. But I am now noticing that they answer more in English, so being consistent with that seems to help creating conversations." – Caroline

Overall, the informants agreed that the most important aspect of students' learning was the ability to communicate. At the same time, they wanted to make English enjoyable and let their students have fun experiences with language, so that they would be able to converse and communicate with other people without feeling scared or shameful of their way of speaking.

4.1.2 Pronunciation awareness

In Caroline, John, and Stephen's interview, they discussed what role pronunciation has in their classrooms. Caroline stressed the importance of consistency in accent, saying how a consistent pronunciation is essential for effective communication to avoid disruption and

confusion. She also points out how she experiences insecurity among her students, making her pay less attention to accents and pronunciation. Both Caroline and John, however, note the importance of accepting variations of English as long as understanding is not compromised.

"It does not matter if you speak with a cockney accent or a Norwegian accent if you pronounce words correctly. You need to say 'pacific', not 'passfik'." – Caroline

"Accent is important in the sense that you pronounce things correctly. Like, you need to know the difference between pronouncing 'island' and 'Iceland'." - John

This attitude regarding accents was similar in Anna, Thomas, and Lisa's interview. Thomas pointed out that understanding English means that both teachers and students need to have a cultural understanding of language. Acknowledging different accents and dialects, how they are used around the world and implementing them in the classroom by showing different speakers and letting students experience different accents. In other words, having a general understanding and appreciation for these accents is an essential part of English as a school subject and for pronunciation awareness. Thomas had some clear pronunciation criteria, however:

"Knowing the difference between the 'V' and 'W' sound is important for pronunciation, though." - Thomas

Anna tied pronunciation to assessment situations, saying that there is a limit to how a person can speak, and that their mother tongue will influence a person's accent when speaking English. Assessing someone based on whether they can use an RP or GA accent is therefore not necessarily the best for their students. Assessment was also a point of discussion for Caroline, Stephen, and John. For example, Caroline pointed out how the term "good English" could be a challenge when assessing, because what is considered "good English"? Proper pronunciation or a perfect native-like accent is not enough to earn a good grade in 8th-10th grade. She had several experiences in the classroom with students who were constantly told they were talented English speakers, but when they reached an assessment situation they struggled because they believed having a recognizable accent would be enough to get a grade that reflected high competence.

"It 'crashes' with what we usually tell our students. Good language competence is knowing how to communicate and speak properly, yet you will not get a good grade if you cannot talk specifically about World War 2, for example... It is quite difficult." - Caroline

The struggle of finding out exactly what role pronunciation has when teaching English seemed like a challenge for several informants. Anna, Thomas, and Lisa all discussed how pronunciation is important to mention because of unfamiliar sounds, and eventually, students need to learn to speak correctly. Anna tied this to English competence in writing:

"There is a certain connection between how something is pronounced and how it is written. So, if someone's pronunciation is completely wrong, then that may cause other issues later." – Anna

Stephen mentioned language flow, noting how he would advise his students to work on their pronunciation if they consistently had broken phrasing, or stuttering speech with a lot of breaks and hesitations between words. Language flow was also a concern for Lisa, who said that this was something she focused on to help her students feel more secure when speaking English, as she had experience with students making fun of each other in cases where they would stutter or take time looking for words.

"I think it is important to have some rules. Then you avoid students telling other students 'Oh, that is not how that is said', and then they refuse to speak again for two weeks because they are embarrassed." - Lisa

To summarize, pronunciation was something all the informants focused on in their teaching, but to varying degrees. Wanting their students to pronounce words correctly to avoid confusion, ridicule and consistent errors when speaking and learning English. However, pronunciation is not the most important aspect of their teaching, and there was an agreement that understanding someone was more important than intonation, accent, and language flow.

4.1.3 Student accents

In both focus-group interviews the informants emphasized their students' abilities when discussing what role pronunciation has in English class. Embracing the unique needs and learning styles of each student to create a personalized learning experience that maximizes

their potential for growth in language learning seemed of high importance, both for the teachers with experience from 5th-7th grade and the teachers with experience from 8th-10th grade.

In the focus-group interview with Anna, Lisa, and Thomas, they defined their roles as English teachers as the person who acts as a role model, modelling the language for their students. Lisa explained how including unfamiliar vocabulary, accents and topics in her teaching was important to make students aware of why and how we use English in different settings. In her opinion, this would give all students a chance to find something enjoyable about English, and therefore create motivation to learn the language. While Anna agreed with this, she shared experiences from the classroom where she has seen another focus from her students:

"I see many students focusing on having a perfect American accent, maybe because this is what they see on YouTube and other social media, and then they expect to sound like that themselves." - Anna

While discussing this topic, it came to light that they all had similar methods of working against this attitude. Showing videos with different accented speakers, purposefully mispronouncing, looking for and describing words without saying them, and "forgetting" words to make the students say the correct word were methods they all used in their teaching. They agreed that by doing this, it would allow the teachers to correct mistakes without the students having to make the mistakes themselves in front of the entire class. It would also let them discuss what is wrong, and what is just a different way of saying something. Lisa mentioned how this is a low-risk approach to pronunciation and accent-teaching:

"Sometimes you have to act a bit dumb on purpose, but they get excited when they get the chance to correct the teacher, and it helps the students learn." - Lisa

In the focus-group interview with John, Caroline, and Stephen a different approach was used. They all had experience working with classes that contained a majority of multilingual students, which affected their approach to handling accents. John remembered having a student with a particularly heavy Indian accent when speaking English, and explained how other students, often the good students, would sometimes laugh when hearing them speak. He

pointed out that the student with the Indian accent was not any less talented than the other students, but that they seemed to focus only the accent rather than what was being said.

"I try to give a lot of credit to those who speak with heavy accents. After all, this student had good language knowledge and could speak freely without any trouble. So, it is important to give credit for that." - John

Caroline had experienced similar issues but saw it more as a coping mechanism for her students. She explained that her students would play up their accents to make fun of themselves, and believed this was caused by students feeling insecure in their own competence. To her, it was preferrable that her students would joke around with accents, rather than not speak at all. Stephen agreed, explaining he would get questions from students asking what accent they should speak with. To them, he explained that as long as they felt comfortable speaking and he understood what was being said, the accent did not matter.

From their experience, it seems that accents are a matter of concern in both 5th-7th grade and in 8th-10th grade. Students do pay attention to various accents and can sometimes make fun of or embrace their accents when speaking. It seems, however, that the teachers interviewed in this study have different approaches when it comes to handling it in the classroom. The most important aspect that was mentioned by the informants was that they should be exposed to several accents in order to handle meeting them.

4.2 Personal beliefs

In this subchapter I will explore the personal beliefs the teachers mentioned during our interviews. Personal beliefs can be convictions, attitudes and opinions people hold about themselves or the world around them. They can range from simple preferences to complex beliefs that shape how someone interacts with their environment. In the context of this study, the personal beliefs explored and analyzed are targeted towards pronunciation and the English language. As all six teachers have different experiences coloring their view of this topic, the findings will reflect their personal opinions as stated in their interviews.

4.2.1 Personal experiences

The focus-group interviews revealed that all the teachers had personal experiences with pronunciation, both positive and negative. These experiences were often taken from their own time in school. Stephen remembered a student in his own class with a strong Chinese accent who tended to get a lower grade because of his accented English, although he could participate in discussions alongside his classmates without issues. Caroline mentioned how she had noticed how British English used to be more popular, and how this has now changed to American English. She claimed this change was not something she thought about often, and that she did not prefer certain accents over others. She did mention, however, that non-native accents could be fun:

"I once had a lesson and spoke Indian English the entire time. Everyone found it ridiculous, but it was kind of fun, just messing around with it, because they still understood me." - Caroline

John noted how he used to care more about accents when he was a new teacher, showing a preference to native accents over non-native accents:

"I used to get 'blinded' and very impressed if someone non-native had a good British or American accent. I think, now, there is quite a big difference between teachers if they care about that stuff anymore or not." – John

This seemed like an important point for John, who has worked in schools for 19 years. He mentioned struggling after LK20 was implemented, explaining how he had initially been very negative towards the way LK20 handled pronunciation.

"When LK20 came, I was not looking forward to it, because I thought, like, is *nothing* considered correct anymore?" – John

In the focus-group interview with Anna, Thomas, and Lisa, they tried to narrow down how important pronunciation really was. All three agreed that pronunciation was not something they strongly cared about. Overall, it seems like Caroline, Stephen, and John had more personal experiences and beliefs with pronunciation and accents than Anna, Thomas, and Lisa when they were asked specific questions about it. While there can be several reasons for this,

Thomas questioned if the grade they work in might influence the difference between the two groups:

"I mean, we work in 5th-7th grade. Is it necessary to care about it?" – Thomas

4.2.2 Norwegian-accented English

During both focus-group interviews a video was played for the informants, showing former Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg delivering a speech in English. His English is strongly Norwegian-accented, and the informants were asked about their thoughts regarding his pronunciation. The informants were shown this clip in the last part of the interviews. An important note to mention is that Jens Stoltenberg was brought up by both Caroline and Lisa earlier in the interviews when discussing pronunciation before his name was mentioned by the interviewer. Both described him in similar ways:

"Jens Stoltenberg is the Secretary General of NATO, and his accent is… well. At least he is understood, but he should work on his accent." – Lisa

"Jens Stoltenberg! He works for NATO and can talk about super complicated topics, yet he sounds extremely Norwegian." - Caroline

While Lisa was more negative toward Jens Stoltenberg's accent than Caroline was, this shows that accent is commented on even if someone is considered fluent in English. Several informants reacted negatively to his pronunciation. In the focus-group interview with Anna, Thomas, and Lisa, the reactions came already at the beginning of the clip. When asked if they could hear the sound, Anna was quick to reply "Unfortunately, yes.". Both Thomas and Anna described his English as "choppy", and claimed the rising and falling intonation was distracting.

"It sounds like he is trying to emphasize every single word!" – Anna

Lisa claimed the lack of language flow in Stoltenberg's pronunciation made her ears tired, saying that the heavy Norwegian-accented English created a "mismatch" in her head because it sounded like a mix of Norwegian and English, although Stoltenberg only spoke English in

the video they watched. She did, however, point out her own judgement, saying that she did not notice this when other non-native speakers spoke English:

"I think, being Norwegian myself, you have that in the back of your head and the 'Norwegian-ness' of his speech become very clear. Maybe you just notice it more when it is your own mother tongue?" - Lisa

In the other focus-group interview, John, Stephen, and Caroline had a similar discussion. Caroline pointed out that while Stoltenberg is a talented speaker and she understood him well, she thought he sounded "staccato". She also mentioned that he swallowed several vowels and consonants, which she thought could potentially cause listeners to not understand him well.

Both Stephen and John described Stoltenberg's pronunciation as charming. John pointed out how he earlier in his life would get embarrassed and think someone was dumb when they spoke like Stoltenberg, but now he found it funny. He noted his own change of opinion as interesting, saying that it might relate to having been exposed to more non-native variants of English in later years. Caroline also noted how her opinion of non-native accents had changed, saying that she remembered having laughed with classmates when listening to someone speaking with heavy Norwegian-accented English in the past.

4.4 Summary of results

Initially during the focus-group interviews the aim was to explore whether there were any differences between teachers with experience working in 5th-7th grade and 8th-10th grade. The analysis shows that the teachers interviewed found pronunciation to be important, but not the most important aspect of oral English. One thing all the teachers agreed on is how communication is the aim of what students should achieve during their school years in English class. They should be able to communicate with other people in both formal and informal settings and be able to adapt language to the situation at hand.

During the analysis both professional and personal beliefs regarding pronunciation revealed themselves. The main aim in pronunciation teaching is, according to the informants in this study, to avoid consequent errors and confusion when speaking with other people. A common experience several informants had was that their students had beliefs regarding accents. Either

students preferred native accents or reacted by laughing or mocking when hearing non-native accents. This attitude was something all the informants wanted to work against, as they themselves wanted to teach the belief that accents should not matter if a person can communicate with others. This is an interesting tension between the teachers themselves and their experiences from the classroom.

The informants also had personal beliefs regarding pronunciation, and here another interesting tension is found. While they all claimed pronunciation and accents were not of huge importance, this was something they all commented on after listening to the video of Jens Stoltenberg speaking. Negative attitudes about his heavily Norwegian-accented English were revealed, with several informants claiming that while he clearly is a good communicator, the accent could be distracting or take away from his ability to be understood by others. Some informants noticed this discrepancy themselves, and wondered if their experiences of being exposed to non-native variants of English through the years might combat their preconceived biases towards heavily accented English.

Overall, the informants had both professional and personal beliefs regarding pronunciation and accents. In some cases, these beliefs appear to contradict each other, and although they said non-native pronunciation was not negative, it was one of the main features of language they commented on and judged when listening to an example of it.

5 Discussion

This chapter will discuss the results presented in the preceding chapter in light of relevant theory and previous research on the topic. The findings are discussed by using the same headings as in the presentation of the results: professional beliefs and personal beliefs. Later in the discussion the tension between these beliefs will be discussed.

5.1 Professional beliefs

During both focus-group interviews, the participants mention communication as to what the general aim for English education should be. Furthermore, the teachers believe students should be able to produce language freely and use it naturally in different situational contexts, without limiting themselves because of pronunciation or accents. This connects to a general principle in ELF communication, where speakers should be able to negotiate and accommodate their language to other people when communicating in English (Bøhn & Hansen, 2018). In the 5th-7th grade focus-group interview both Anna and Lisa mentioned using accommodation work to teach language learning skills. Making deliberate pronunciation mistakes and forgetting words, in addition to making their students help them were some of the methods that they used frequently. By paraphrasing and reformulating words, what the informants are doing with their students is accommodation work, which is important in ELF communication, as it emphasizes the language used by speakers rather than traditionally fixed language items like grammar, lexis and pronunciation (Cogo et al., 2021). This approach to language teaching also goes against the traditional approach where native speakers are seen as superior. It also ties to the LK20, where the aim for pronunciation is to use key patterns for pronunciation rather than aiming to sound like a native speaker (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020). Thus, it shows that the teachers in this study are working actively to put aside their historical and traditional views of native-speakerism, and instead focus on using ELF as a guideline for pronunciation teaching.

The beliefs the teachers held regarding communication moves away from the traditional native-speakerism, as presented by Holliday (2006). Swan et al. (2015) argues that copying native speaker pronunciation upholds the traditional idea of the native speaker as the perfect example of language teaching. In the focus-group interviews, several teachers reported experiences with students who refuse to speak or participate in communication because they fear not being "good enough". This was reported in both interviews, which means it is an

issue that teachers meet both in 5th-7th grade and in 8th-10th grade. Anna highlighted another side of this struggle: if some students are very good at speaking with certain native-like accents, this makes it even more difficult for those students who are already insecure in their own abilities. Seeing native-like accents as the ideal language variant is therefore an issue in language teaching, and upholds the ideology that native speakers are superior to non-native speakers (Kiczkowiak & Lowe, 2021). This view is supported by an earlier study by Simensen (2014), who discovered how some students believe sounding like a native speaker is beneficial in school settings, especially in assessment. This agrees with Caroline's experience, who has seen students going back to speaking Norwegian, rather than speaking in non-perfect English in front of others and being judged for it. Therefore, the fear of not sounding enough like a native speaker could be detrimental to students' learning, according to the participants in this study. It is therefore important that teachers focus on this aspect of their teaching in order to make their students understand that the current criterion for pronunciation is not sounding like a native speaker, but rather having the ability to communicate.

While discussing what English as a school subject should look like, the participants in both focus-group interviews mentioned that pronunciation should not matter. At the same time, however, pronunciation was important to them in certain instances. Pronouncing words correctly in order to not cause confusion was something both Thomas and Caroline mentioned. Thomas used the example of knowing how to differentiate between the vowels "V" and "W", as not knowing how to pronounce these differently could negatively impact understanding when speaking to others. This view on pronunciation is comparable to how the LFC refers to pronunciation. Knowing vowels, consonants, and prosody are the core areas for understanding English in a lingua franca context, and should be the focus in English learning and teaching (Barrera-Pardo, 2022). Thomas' example also correlates with Jenkins' aim with the LFC: having teachable and learnable pronunciation targets based on common errors among L2 speakers (Dauer, 2005). Anna also mentioned L2 errors, saying that the limit to how a person can speak is often influenced by their mother tongue, and that their native accent will often influence their English pronunciation. Ugarte Olea (2019) claims this is the benefit of the LFC and says that aiming for comfortable intelligibility is a more realistic target for L2 learners. The teachers interviewed in this study seem to support the LFC view, as none of them believed their students needed a native-like pronunciation to be competent English

speakers. Instead, the participants believed students should aim for understanding what others say as well as being understood themselves.

Both Stephen and Lisa mentioned flow as important when it came to pronunciation. Stephen believed that helping students to not stutter, and keep a consistent flow when speaking was important to someone's overall English competence. According to Lisa, this helped students to not feel insecure when speaking, and was therefore something she focused on in her classroom. Dauer (2005) argues that the importance of rhythm and intonation should be downplayed in an ELF teaching situation, as this is not essential for non-native speaker interactions. Therefore, one could argue that while the teachers of this study believe flow, intonation, and rhythm to be important, this is more of a traditional view of language learning, and leans toward native-speaker standards. As people's pronunciation, and therefore their intonation and flow, is affected by their native language, this shows how some native-like standards are still prevalent among the teachers interviewed for this study.

Embracing native-speaker norms can be a sign of supporting the Kachruvian belief that native speakers are the norm-providers of the English language, as explained by Canagarajah (2006). This example of native-speaker norms being used by English teachers today points toward the challenge with using ELF as a language model for teaching and learning. As English is constantly evolving and changing, finding standards for pronunciation that teachers can use in their teaching without falling back on native-speaker and Inner Circle norms seem like something the participants in this study find challenging. At the same time several participants highlight the issue with this, as they had clear beliefs that native-speaker English should not be the aim or the standard for English pronunciation. This correlates with what Higgins (2003) explains as taking ownership of language and not letting native speakers be the authority on how English is used in non-native countries and settings. By including non-native accents and pronunciation in their teaching, the teachers in this study use English in a more inclusive way by implementing aspects of language alongside the native-speaker standard.

During the focus-group interview, Caroline made an interesting point regarding the contradiction she faces when teaching and assessing students: while they claim being able to communicate is the essential part of English competence, her students cannot get a good grade unless they can specifically talk about a certain topic a certain way. Therefore, what role

pronunciation has in teaching was a challenging task to handle properly, as pointed out by previous research as well as the participants in this study. This means Caroline's thoughts about pronunciation are not new, as Bøhn and Hansen (2017) report that several teachers in Norway are struggling with the same issue: they find the curriculum confusing and vague, and therefore difficult to refer to in an assessment situation. Additionally, this seems like an issue that is common among Expanding Circle countries, as the same phenomenon is present in China, as mentioned by Nuske (2018). Teachers feel tied to native standards because of the Westernized tests, and therefore their freedom when assessing students is limited as it is tied to Inner Circle standards and native speaker norms. On the contrary, the beliefs of the participants interviewed in this study become clear by their words. A common point made by all six teachers was that non-native accents were not something they minded, and it would not be considered negative if a student chose to use a non-native accent in an assessment situation or in the classroom generally. This view can also be seen in other Expanding Circle countries, for example in the study conducted by He and Zhang (2010), where 55,4% of their participants did not see non-native accents as an issue in English communication, as they did not mind not sounding like an Inner Circle speaker. These examples show the complex situation teachers face in the classroom today, where their professional beliefs regarding pronunciation and accents do not match the standard set by curricula or testing criteria. Therefore, it becomes an issue teachers need to navigate in order to help their students and aid their learning. The way the teachers in this study handle this contradiction, according to informants like Lisa, was to acknowledge different pronunciations and accents and expose their students to more variations of English, so that they become aware and can familiarize themselves with accents that are not only the native-speaker or Inner Circle standard. Once again, this view is nearer the ELF approach than the native-speakerism approach. Although Rindal and Piercy (2013) argue that ELF can be difficult to use as a framework for teaching because it is not a stable language variant, this shows that the teachers in this study try to move toward an ELF approach to language teaching.

John, Stephen, and Caroline all mentioned that being positive toward students with heavily accented English was something they tried to focus on in their teaching. For example, John stressed how he had students who had been made fun of because of their accents, so to him it was extra important to reinforce that accents do not matter if the pronunciation is good and the person speaking could be understood. However, many Norwegian students desire a native-like accent, according to Rindal and Piercy (2013). Once again, this shows that while teachers

have the belief that accents and pronunciation should not matter, students themselves do care about it and want to sound native when speaking English. This is why the teachers interviewed in this study chose teaching methods that show the varieties of accents, as well as why they try to make accents be of lesser importance in their classrooms, focusing on communicative ability instead. Dauer (2005) stresses the point that most non-native speakers do not have the need for native-like pronunciation. John also mentioned this in his interview, claiming that it was much more important to aim for competence to use English in a situational context, and be able to adapt language to fit the setting someone is in, rather than be able to communicate in a certain accent. Being able to see this distinction is important as teachers, and one could argue that students being more obsessed with having a perfect accent than being able to produce language freely is negative toward their overall learning outcome.

5.2 Personal beliefs

In the focus-group interview with John, Stephen, and Caroline, they all had personal experiences with accents. Caroline mentioned seeing the change from British English being the accent and pronunciation aim, to seeing American English becoming more popular. Stephen recalled students in his class being graded lower than others because of their non-native accents. Both Caroline and Stephen are relatively new teachers, having only taught for a few years. It was therefore interesting to see how John's view differed from theirs, as he had been teaching for 19 years. He claimed that when the current curricula, LK20 was implemented, he struggled with changing his opinion about non-native accents, as he himself recalled having preferred native accents. Tishakov and Tsagari (2022) point to the fact that teacher age can be significant for some beliefs, as older and more experienced teachers have worked with several curricula through the years where accent and pronunciation was more important than it is today with LK20. John explained that he previously would get "blinded" by a good imitation of an American and British accent, as this to him was synonymous with being a good speaker with proper language awareness and competence. When listening to Jens Stoltenberg speak, Anna was also negative about his accent, saying it was unfortunate that she had to listen to him, as his accent was distracting. This showed she had an immediate negative attitude toward non-native accents, which could point to the disbelief mentioned by Holliday (2015), where the non-native speaker is seen as having a lower status than the native speaker. It is therefore interesting to point out that some participants like Anna claimed she did not mind non-native accents, when it was what she commented on first during the sound

clip. This contradiction can show that teachers' personal beliefs do not necessarily agree with their professional beliefs.

John claimed he felt confused when reading the new curriculum, and questioned why, in his words, "nothing" was considered correct anymore. This can be tied to the study by Bøhn and Hansen (2017), where they claim the curricula does not offer any help. This seemed to correlate with John's personal experience, although he claimed to have changed his mind now, after having experienced LK20 firsthand. However, what the participants say does not always agree with their beliefs. While they all said that accents do not matter, they all commented on it after listening to the video clip of Jens Stoltenberg. John mentioned how it previously would have made him embarrassed to listen to, and Lisa claimed her ears got tired of listening to it. In her article, Simensen (2014) mentions how teachers are positive toward native accents. In this study, however, the participants were not particularly positive toward native accents, but rather negative toward Norwegian-accented English. Other Expanding Circle Englishes like Chinese English and Indian English were used as examples by the participants during their interviews, but these accents were not met with the same negative attitude that Norwegian-accented English was. However, Lisa did question this, saying that she might be more negative toward Norwegian-accented English because that was her own mother tongue. The study conducted by Hordnes (2013) found a similar result. Former Prime Minister Thorbjørn Jagland's heavily Norwegian-accented English is criticized for being embarrassing, as his pronunciation is too poor for a man of his position. Interestingly, non-Norwegians listening to him speak did not mention any of this critique, showing that Norwegians themselves tend to be more critical of their own mother tongue influence. This does not, however, seem to be a Norwegian only issue. Rather, it could actually be seen as an Expanding Circle phenomenon, as a similar point was made by a participant in the study conducted by Nuske (2018): A native Chinese speaker noticed the bias she held against her own mother tongue when speaking English, and noted she was discriminating against her own people and language. This ties directly to the point made by Lisa and shows that being critical against one's own mother tongue and English accent is not a new occurrence, but rather something that happens when people still hold Inner Circle accents in a higher regard than Outer Circle and Expanding Circle accents.

While all the participants in this study listened to the sound clip of Jens Stoltenberg in the last part of the interview, he was mentioned by both Caroline and Lisa as an example of someone

who is a good communicator but has a prominent accent. Similarly, both participants mentioned that Stoltenberg's accent was "extremely Norwegian", and that he should work on improving his accent. Leonard (2019) argues that some believe Inner Circle Englishes, and therefore native-speaker accents to be more reliable producers of language. While both Caroline and Lisa mention Stoltenberg as a good communicator and a competent speaker, their views on his accent can point to the belief Leonard (2019) explains. Accent is something they comment on and notice even when the speaker is clearly competent, which contradicts their earlier statements where they claim accent is not important. As Norway traditionally has been placed in the Expanding Circle (Rindal & Piercy, 2013), their views uphold this traditional view on English speakers. At the same time, Caroline mentioned how Stoltenberg uses strategies like speaking slowly when communicating in order to make himself more intelligible. This was also pointed out by John, who believed this meant Stoltenberg shows a high degree of language comprehension. This shows a shift toward an ELF-centered view among some participants. Using language strategies is mentioned by Jenkins (2009), who argues that using linguistic strategies is important in ELF accommodation, whether it arises from a person's first language or from communicating with other English speakers. The participants in this study are therefore aware of this approach toward language, although they never mentioned these strategies in the ELF context.

Graddol (2006) points to the fact that there now are more non-native speakers of English in the world than native speakers. Therefore, the way we look at language teaching and learning cannot be based on the traditional way of looking at English, as this view does not consider the changes and local varieties that exist. The way teachers handle this change varies. John believed there was a big difference between teachers, with some caring more about pronunciation and accents than others. This difference could also be seen in the six participants in this study. Many of them revealed having biases against non-native accents themselves, either earlier in their professional careers or in their lives. Having a negative view on non-native accents can cause issues, as pointed out by Holliday and Aboshiha (2009), who found that non-native speakers can face discrimination because of their accents because the native speaker was automatically seen as more talented, and therefore a better speaker. Participants like Caroline claimed she spoke in an Indian accent an entire school lesson, which both she and her students found ridiculous. Holliday (2015) points out that this, from a native-speakerism standpoint, could imply the belief that non-native speakers, as well as non-Western speakers, have lower status than the native speakers. Using accents in a mocking way

might therefore be pointing toward the native-speakerism view rather than being the positive exposure that Caroline might have intended.

Several of the participants expressed negative beliefs toward non-native English, especially in the context of the video clip of Jens Stoltenberg. It shows some native-speakerism beliefs are still prevalent among the six teachers. The reasoning for this could be their own personal experiences, either as students in a school where British English or American English were considered the only correct variants. This shows that exposure to various accents can also affect how someone feels about non-native accents in later life. Borg (2015) argues that knowledge and beliefs can influence humans strongly. Based on the teachers' examples of their personal experiences and thoughts regarding pronunciation and accents, one could argue that Borg (2015) is correct, at least in the context of this study. John admitted to immediately being impressed by students with native accents, while other participants mentioned either laughing at non-native accents or seeing other people make fun of non-native accents. Consequently, this shows that the teachers in this study do have personal beliefs regarding pronunciation and accents, although their views have changed as they have gotten more experiences with English variations.

5.3 Tensions between professional and personal beliefs

The focus-group interviews revealed that there are tensions between teachers' professional beliefs and personal beliefs. What the teachers in this study believe regarding pronunciation from a language learning perspective does not necessarily agree with their beliefs when it comes to their personal experiences and thoughts. Tishakov and Tsagari (2022) conducted a study that revealed a similar, yet complex paradox: teachers' acceptance of multilingual ideas was contradicted by their beliefs, which showed monolingual ideologies. This paradox can be seen in this study as well. Regarding professional beliefs, participants explained that accent and pronunciation were important in their teaching, although less so than the ability to communicate, which was mentioned by all. Pronunciation was important in the sense that it should not hinder communication and should be focused on as to not cause confusion when speaking. Furthermore, the participants found it essential to use various accents in their teaching, as they believed exposure to different variations would be helpful for their students, as it would allow them to understand the cultural context of how language is used differently around the world. Therefore, one could argue that their professional beliefs toward

pronunciation in lingua franca communication is positive, as all the participants showed interest and wanted to include non-native variations of English in their teaching practices. However, their personal beliefs also came to light during the focus-group interviews and showed a different reality. While they believed they were positive toward non-native accents, the teachers still had negative views toward accented English. According to the study conducted by Bøhn and Hansen (2017), some teachers still find native accents preferable over non-native accents. While this study cannot conclude that the participants prefer native accents, they did show negative attitudes toward Norwegian-accented English, claiming it was tiring to listen to. This contradicts their earlier statements about being positive toward non-native accents, or not caring about accent at all. The discrepancies between professional beliefs and personal beliefs shows that pronunciation is a complex topic that needs to be discussed further, as the teachers interviewed in this study disagree among themselves and with themselves.

6 Conclusion

The research question for this thesis has been: *What are English teachers' beliefs regarding pronunciation in lingua franca communication?* In this chapter I will try to answer this question by looking at the discussion and theory, as well as previous research related to this topic. Further, I will mention the limitations of this study, as well as suggestions for possible future research that can be conducted on this subject.

6.1 Main findings

In this sub-chapter the main findings of this thesis will be presented in the same way as in the discussion, with a focus on professional beliefs and personal beliefs.

6.1.1 Professional beliefs

The six informants who participated in focus-group interviews all have experience working as English teachers in Norway, split between 5th-7th grade and 8th-10 grade. Their experiences are varied, both because of the number of years they have been working, as well as their different approaches to teaching. The findings show that the teachers generally do not mind non-native accents and believe it is important to expose students to different accents and pronunciation so that they are prepared to meet other English speakers in the world and use the language for communicative purposes. Consequently, pronunciation could be challenging, especially in assessment situations as Inner Circle standards still are related to competence criteria.

6.1.2 Personal beliefs

The participants had several personal beliefs regarding pronunciation, especially Norwegian-accented English. They found this accent to be tiring, and several participants showed negative attitudes toward it. However, a shift could be seen among several participants, where they revealed that accents and pronunciation were something they cared more about in previous years, and that they now found it to be of less importance. Some of the participants still found native-speaker English to be preferrable, and this shows that teachers are still affected by the native-speakerism view and attitude.

6.1.3 Conclusion of research question

This thesis has explored Norwegian English teachers' beliefs regarding pronunciation in lingua franca communication. Findings show that the teachers who participated in focus-group interviews are aware that pronunciation can be a challenging topic. While pronunciation is not the main aim for their teaching, the participants still found it important in order to prepare their students for using the English language in later life. Nevertheless, their personal beliefs still reflect certain beliefs that native speakers and Inner Circle English is superior to non-native English. As a result of this, a tension between professional beliefs and personal beliefs exists among the teachers interviewed for this study, which shows that pronunciation in lingua franca communication is something that needs to be paid attention to and studied further.

In conclusion, teachers seem to be positive toward a changing view on native and non-native accents and pronunciation, but there needs to be more research on the topic as to see how the reality is today. As it is a subject that is largely based on historic tradition and beliefs, it is a discussion that needs to be had on a national scale to ensure that all students are met with the same attitudes in the classroom, where personal beliefs do not overshadow teachers' professional approach to language teaching.

6.2 Limitations of the study

The results that have been presented in this study imply that there is still need for further research on this subject. Further, there are certain limitations to this study that means there needs to be caution before generalizing the results to reflect the beliefs of all English teachers in Norway.

Firstly, the sample size of this study is limited to six teachers. Due to the time limit of this thesis, the participants were chosen based on availability. However, all the participants do have experience working with pronunciation and accents in their English teaching. This was important in order to make sure that this study represented who it is meant to represent, that being teachers' beliefs regarding lingua franca pronunciation. To get an idea whether their beliefs reflect that of the majority of teachers, further research would be needed.

Another limitation is the fact that this is a qualitative study based on focus-group interviews. The participants only appeared in one interview each, and the data was based purely on those interviews. All the data is self-reported, and therefore only their views are presented in the results. Additionally, being focus-group interviews, the group dynamic might influence the participants' answers, as sharing beliefs in a group setting can be challenging. As no other method was used, it is impossible to say whether their answers reflect their actual practices, beliefs, and opinions, both in the classroom and outside it.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

While working on this thesis the need for more research revealed itself. While the topic of teacher beliefs has been studied before this thesis, the limitation of this study suggests that there exists tensions between teachers' personal beliefs and professional beliefs. By using classroom observations and further interviews with teachers, other beliefs and tensions might come to light. Pronunciation and accent are aspects the teachers in this study at times found challenging to handle, especially in assessment situations. Because of this, conducting observational studies related to oral presentations could be another way of researching teachers' beliefs.

Both theory and previous research points toward a changing belief amongst teachers. It also shows that students still find native accents preferrable, which causes a tension between teachers and students. While studies like the one conducted by Rindal and Piercy (2013) show that Norwegian students prefer native accents, it could be interesting to see if this is still the case today, ten years later. In the study conducted by Bøhn and Hansen (2017), some teachers still found native accents preferrable. After both these studies the new curriculum LK20 with new pronunciation criteria was implemented, so seeing how the situation and the tension between students and teachers appear today is something that could be interesting to look at.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Appendix 1 – Information letter and consent form

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet
"Speaking English – A Study of Teachers' Beliefs"

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å få innsikt i læreres tanker rundt muntlig engelsk. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Jeg studerer grunnskolelærerutdanningen 5-10 ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet med fordypning i engelsk. Jeg skal derfor utføre en kvalitativ undersøkelse for min masteroppgave der jeg vil intervjue seks lærere om deres tanker rundt muntlig engelsk. Prosjektet vil gi et innblikk i hva lærere tenker om muntlig engelsk og uttale.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Jeg skal intervjue seks lærere som har undervisningserfaring i engelsk fra 5.-7.-trinn og 8.-10. trinn. Kontaktopplysninger har blitt delt gjennom personlig nettverk.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Dersom du velger å delta i prosjektet innebærer det at du tar del i et gruppeintervju med to andre lærere og meg. Dette vil ta ca. 45-60 minutter. Her vil du få høre lydklipp som skal diskuteres med de andre som tar del i gruppeintervjuet, etterfulgt av noen spørsmål om muntlig engelsk og dine tanker rundt temaet. Du vil bli anonymisert, og det skal ikke være mulig å spore tilbake til deg. Intervjuet blir registrert ved lydopptak og eventuelle notater underveis.

Det er frivillig å delta

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

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket. Tilgangen til dine opplysninger vil kun være tilgjengelig for masterstudenten og veileder. Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil jeg erstatte med en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data.

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes 15. mai 2023. Etter prosjektslutt vil datamaterialet med dine personopplysninger anonymiseres.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet har Sikt – Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandør vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

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

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

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

- OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet ved:

  Lynell Chvala, førsteamanuensis, lynell.chvala@oslomet.no

- Vårt personvernombud ved LUI: personvernombud@oslomet.no

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til vurderingen som er gjort av personverntjenestene fra Sikt, kan du ta kontakt via:

- Epost: personverntjenester@sikt.no eller telefon: 73 98 40 40.

Med vennlig hilsen

Lynell Chvala   Helena Staahle

(veileder)   (student)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet *[sett inn tittel]*, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

☐ å delta i intervju

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

----

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

8.2 Appendix 2 – Interview guide

Innledende

1. Hva slags utdanning har du?

2. Hvor lenge har du jobbet som lærer?

3. Hvilket trinn jobber du på/har du erfaring fra?

Engelsk som skolefag

1. Hva er målet med engelskfaget for deg? Hva skal elevene ha oppnådd når de går ut av 10. klasse?

2. Hva legger du i gode muntlige ferdigheter i engelsk?

3. Hva legger du mest vekt på når du vurderer muntlig engelsk?

Uttale

1. Hva er dine tanker rundt uttale i engelskfaget?

2. De siste læreplanene (L97, LK06) beveger seg bort fra amerikansk/britisk uttale som et mål i muntlig engelsk. Hva syntes du om dette?

Lydklipp Jens Stoltenberg

1. Hvilke tanker slår dere når dere hører dette klippet?

2. Hvordan er hans engelskkompetanse?

Avsluttende

1. Er det noe dere vil tilføye eller noe dere ikke har fått snakket om?

2. Har dere noen spørsmål til meg?

8.3 Appendix 3 – SIKT approval letter

Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger
07.02.2023

Referansenummer

281078

Vurderingstype

Standard

Dato

07.02.2023

Prosjekttittel

Speaking English - A Study of Teachers' Beliefs

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

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

Prosjektansvarlig

Lynell Chvala

Student

Helena Staahle

Prosjektperiode

05.01.2023 - 30.05.2023

Kategorier personopplysninger

Alminnelige

Lovlig grunnlag

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

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 30.05.2023.

Kommentar

OM VURDERINGEN

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

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

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

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

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

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

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

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

Lykke til med prosjektet!