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Teaching Strategies to Increase EFL Speaking Skills in a Communicative Learning Environment

Lärande strategier för att utveckla talförmågor i en kommunikativlärandemiljö

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Abstract

Even though developing speaking skills is the essential key to achieving proficiency in a target language, there are some pupils (grades 4-6) who do not participate in communication tasks in English classroom. Thus, the purpose of this literature overview is to investigate the reasons for the unwillingness of some young learners to speak and interact in English. In addition, a variety of effective teaching strategies will be observed and analyzed. The used methods were different electronic databases, such as ERC, ERIC and Google Scholar, to access relevant peer-reviewed journal articles to our research questions. The observed and analyzed articles showed that there are some pupils who do not interact because English teachers often focus too much on reading and writing skills rather than on speaking skills. The limitation of communication tasks and large classroom sizes are other mitigating factors. In addition, teachers often using the first language in class resulted in pupils doing the same. This contributes to a lack of motivation and confidence in speaking English for some learners. This study identifies teaching strategies and activities that can be used by the teacher to raise motivation and confidence in speaking English. Results have indicated that the use of Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory was very useful to involve every pupil in authentic communication tasks, which also provided a supportive communicative environment. Task-based and theme-based learning, such as stories, songs, games, project work and pair work is shown to be beneficial to increase pupils’ motivation towards speaking.

Keywords: Communicative classroom, speaking ability, interactive environment, language development, motivation, anxiety, sociocultural, pragmatism, EFL.
The individual contributions to the literature overview

We hereby certify that all parts of this essay reflect the equal participation of both signatories below:

The parts we refer to are as follows:

• Planning
• Research question selection
• Article searches and decisions pertaining to the outline of the essay
• Presentation of findings, discussion, and conclusion

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**Introduction**

Interaction and communication are fundamental aspects for pupils with English as a foreign language. Research has proven that interaction is the main goal for language development where pupils get opportunities to express themselves (Gibbons, 2015). Furthermore, pupils need to participate in social contexts where they are using the English language as a comprehensible output. When learning contexts require pupils to focus on the spoken language, and how knowledge, thoughts, and opinions are expressed, the learners unconsciously develop grammatical skills (Gibbons 2015). However, many researchers have shown that in every classroom and in every learning context the teacher meets pupils who do not have the courage and motivation to participate in the communicative tasks (Savasci, 2014). EFL (English as a foreign language) learners are more often willing to participate in reading, writing and listening skills, but feel unwilling to speak English. In order to develop speaking abilities in a language, it requires that teachers consciously use different strategies in learning contexts to engage pupils in various communication tasks.

In addition, the pupils do not acquire a language if it is only the teacher who speaks in the classroom, this is because the pupils do not get opportunities to imitate words and phrases. Gibbons (2015) reaffirms that the communicative classroom includes opportunities to use language in different contexts, where learning experiences are exchanged. The communicative classroom establishes learning environment where interaction is a foundation for language development, it also creates great abilities for pupils to be involved in their own learning process. By working together, they do not only increase the repetition of words and phrases, but it also has an abundant impact on pupils’ listening, writing and reading. Therefore, communication becomes essential for pupils who have fewer experiences with speaking English (Gibbons, 2015).

The Swedish national curriculum (skolverket, 2011) requires pupils to interact and to participate in different communicative situations during English lessons. According to the Swedish national curriculum (2011), the language is a tool used for thinking, communicating and learning. Pupils should be encouraged to develop all-round communicative skills to express themselves and make themselves understood. Language skills promote several perspectives and enhance opportunities to discover the surrounding world. English communication skills provide the confidence of using the English language for different purposes as well as different social and cultural situations. The
teacher with her/his learning competence should facilitate pupils’ abilities to communicate about familiar subjects such as everyday situations, interests, places and other subject areas where English is used (skolverket, 2011). However, it is noteworthy to address that Sweden is a multicultural and plurilingual society, where a large number of Swedish population have the capability to communicate in several languages. This means that a lot of pupils already speak Swedish as a second language where they speak it at home rather than English. In Swedish educational contexts, English is considered as a foreign language rather than second language (Lundahl, 2014). Therefore, it is more relevant in this study to refer to English as a foreign language in Sweden.

Lundahl (2014) claims that speaking becomes crucial for young learners to learn a language because speaking skills are the heart of language acquisition. Learning a foreign language requires that all the learning skills, which are writing, reading, listening and speaking, should be involved in the learning. The English teachers should provide a language-rich environment to increase pupils’ exposure to the target language. The oral communication provided pupils to participate in different social context, which prepare the pupils for real-life interactions. At the same time, the Swedish school inspectorate’s survey (skolinspektionen, 2011) observed 22 elementary schools, which showed that there was a lack of communication and interaction in EFL classrooms (Lundahl, 2014).

During English lessons, many of the observed schools showed that the teachers preferred to use the first language to introduce tasks, explaining grammar rules as well as sharing learning experiences. When English was not constantly used by the teachers, some pupils found various difficulties with speaking the target language. Lundahl (2014) argues that the use of the first language is one of the many reasons for pupils not speaking English, which leads to language anxiety among learners. The results from the survey also indicated that traditional teaching, based on writing, reading by using textbooks, is fundamental to master acquisition of a foreign language (Lundahl, 2014).

Implementations of Vygotsky’s sociocultural learning theory have been highly recommended by researchers, which emphasized communicative tasks to create meaningful learning circumstances (Lundahl, 2014). According to this view of learning, communicative tasks should be ongoing activities between the teachers and the pupils, where the tasks should be meaningful, involving, supporting and language developing. A principle of this learning view is the zone of proximal development which provides scaffolding by adapting tasks to pupils’ knowledge. Lundahl (2014) stated that, according to Vygotsky, learning occurs when pupils are given opportunities to
participate in a range of different communication tasks. When learners work collaboratively, they exchange thoughts, knowledge and experiences, which include scaffolding where words and phrases are expressed in different ways. In this way, many pupils move forward in their learning process by the support/scaffolding of more knowledgeable peers. It is also important that the teacher include pupils’ previous knowledge experience in the learning to increase development. Since the pupils have different knowledge experiences, it demands different learning tasks based on pupils learning levels and interests to increase their motivation and engagement in their learning. When the pupils find interest in the communicative tasks, they get more motivated to learn the spoken language. To make this possible, the learning environment needs to be supportive, collaborative and acceptable (Lundahl, 2014).

Furthermore, Chou (2012) confirmed that games, songs and role plays make the pupils more engaged in the language learning. Collaborative works, such as pair and group works, have shown positive impact where pupils heard several new words and phrases spoken by their classmates, which increased their vocabulary. Collaborative works are also supportive for low-proficiency pupils, where they master more advanced words. When working together, the pupils become more confident to speak and to use advanced words to interact with others and make themselves understood. The teacher has a very important role in engaging pupils in the learning. When the teacher becomes more engaged in the tasks, the pupils also feel more willing to participate (Chou, 2012).

Based on above information, it could be concluded that speaking is one of the most significant learning factors for language development. Therefore, it is incredibly important to highlight the reasons why some elementary pupils are unwilling to speak, and communicate in the EFL classroom. The investigation of teaching strategies that promote a supportive and communicative environment classroom would thus also be emphasized.
2. Aim and research questions

In this study, we will investigate the benefits of a communicative classroom which promotes the development of spoken English in foreign language contexts. Researchers have suggested many positive advantages of a communicative classroom where the spoken language becomes a crucial key to achieve knowledge. Despite the activities that support the communication between pupils and the teachers, there are still some pupils who do not participate in the communicative tasks for many reasons.

Our research will thus be divided into these two questions:

- What are the reasons for and problems behind some EFL pupils for not speaking and interacting in the classroom?
- What strategies and activities can be used by the teacher in an EFL classroom to make pupils more confident about speaking?
3. Method

To be able to answer and analyze the research questions, we used a variety of methods to collect relevant information related to our study. Different electronic databases via Malmö University Libsearch have been used as our primary source to access peer-reviewed articles that include relevant information to our research questions. Our secondary sources have been two different scientific books in which have been mainly useful in the introduction of this paper. To sum up, the used books are *Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: teaching English language learners in the mainstream classroom* (2015) written by Pauline Gibbons and *Texts, topics and tasks: Teaching English in years 4-6* (2014) by Bo Lundahl. These two books are about learning a foreign language and they have been useful in our previous courses.

3.1 Research delimitations

As we started to collect information, we began to limit our electronic sources to three different educational and electronic databases, Google Scholar, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) and Education Research Complete (ERC). Google Scholar has a great amount of journal articles from academic publishers, professional societies and university articles. Databases ERIC and ERC are from EBSCO (Malmö university databases) and provide access to reliable journal articles for education researches.

Further on, we started to generally look at the databases and then wrote in keywords which were related to our interest. Keywords such as, “communication in classroom” and “EFL or English as a foreign language”, “Communication Skills”, “Language Anxiety” AND “EFL”, “Communication strategies”, have been useful in our searching. We got thousands of results, which was a great number of articles. To narrow down the information we limited our search to only peer-reviewed articles. During the search we narrowed the year from 2000 and forward. By limiting our research, we got more relevant articles related to our questions.
3.2 Inclusion Criteria

Searching for information we were evaluating the articles that would be included in our study. In our search we only included journal articles that approximately were about pupils in grades 4-6. To get related information to our questions we decided to only include peer-reviewed articles in our paper. Since learning language have been a huge area in researching and a lot of learning perspectives have been discussed over the past decades, we limited the date-range from year 2000 to 2019. This is because we only wanted to focus on new researches which are relevant for nowadays’ educational purposes.

3.3 Exclusion Criteria

When searching for articles, we focused on communication, speaking and interaction in the classroom. We had to exclude articles which were published earlier than year 2000, and we even excluded articles that were related to high school, college and university students, which are not relevant for our target group. Since, English is a foreign language in Sweden and in many other countries; we decided to exclude articles that highlighted English as a second language. To be more accurate, we have listed the criteria for inclusion and exclusion in a table below.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of interest</th>
<th>Total number of references</th>
<th>Number of references used</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EFL speaking anxiety</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching strategies and activities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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4. Results

In this result section, the relevant information and perspectives to our chosen research area will be presented. The result will be divided into two parts, where the first part will address the problems with and reasons behind some pupils not participating in communicative classrooms tasks. In part two, strategies and theories that increase motivation towards speaking tasks will be highlighted.

4.1 The reasons behind some EFL pupils not speaking and interacting English in the EFL classroom

Many sources affirm that some EFL pupils’ unwillingness to speak English in the classroom is due to a lack of motivation and anxiety. A qualitative research made by Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) aimed to investigate the reasons for foreign language anxiety among young learners. This study was based on 15 pupils aged 13-14 years in an elementary school in Greece. All the participants had been studying English for 5 years. Semi-structured interviews, group discussion and direct observation of pupils were used to collect the data analysis. The assessment of the data collection showed many reasons why some pupils were unwilling to participate in speaking activities during English lessons. One of the main reasons was that pupils experienced English language speaking anxiety because many thoughts that they were not good at speaking English and would get a negative evaluation from their classmates. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) concluded that the negative evaluation occurs because teachers often focus on writing and reading rather than listening and speaking. This means that the pupils do not get many opportunities to participate in speaking activities. During the few communications tasks used in the lessons, the pupils, especially anxious pupils, felt uncomfortable speaking in front of others. When the target language was not used enough, where pupils felt that they were expected to produce faultless sentences, this resulted in the pupils focusing on grammar rather than on the meaning of the communication. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) found that the pupils usually compared their speaking abilities with each other negatively, which often affected their social image negatively.

Similar research presented by Liu and Chen (2013) examined EFL (English foreign language) pupils’ language anxiety in relation to multiple intelligence (MI) and learners’ attitudes toward interacting in the English classroom. The participants in this research were 216 learners in
grades five and six from two different elementary schools in Taiwan. Pupils had various English learning experiences. In total, 78% of the participants had extra English lessons outside the school to get the chance to speak with native speakers. To assess EFL pupils’ language anxiety, a Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was used. The scale was revised to be appropriate for the fifth and sixth grades, where five subcategories were involved: mathematical, linguistic, social, introspective, and visual. Implementation of the study gave the pupils’ opportunities to score on a 6-point scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The study showed that more than 50% of the participants agreed that they felt language anxiety in the EFL classroom because of many reasons, for example, the fear of failing their English course and the constant fear of not being prepared to answer unexpected questions from teachers. This indicates that the pupils do not have a supportive atmosphere to use the language where they have chance to experiment without feeling threatened by the teacher correcting their mistakes and asking them to answer unexpected questions. The participants admitted that the different English levels in the classroom was another factor that led to many of them avoided speaking in classroom. This statement was most common among pupils with low speaking abilities. The findings in this study indicate that there were tends among the participants to underestimate their performance abilities, where some teachers focused on correcting pupils’ errors in front of others. Therefore, it was not uncommon that some pupils had negative attitudes towards speaking activities.

Finally, Liu and Chen (2013) added that pupils who had extracurricular English lessons had a more positive attitude to speaking tasks due to their great opportunities to develop their language outside of the school.

Al Hosni (2014) investigated oral communication problems and the circumstances where speaking problems are constructed in an EFL classroom. To find the speaking difficulties encountered by fifth grade pupils, one basic education school with four English teachers and three classes were included. In this study, lesson observations, recorded interviews and curriculum analysis were used as the research instruments. The qualitative data collection supported that there were a range of factors that contributed to speaking difficulties among young learners. The observations and interviews with pupils showed linguistic difficulties such as grammar and sentences structure when speaking English. Participants argued that they struggled with the appropriate vocabulary related to the chosen topic. Insufficient vocabulary and the weak sentence building were results of teachers allowing pupils to use their first language to share their learning experiences. This means that some pupils were too shy to speak the target language, because of the fear of making linguistic mistakes in front of their peers;
therefore, they unconsciously focused on the form rather than on the content of what they are expressing.

Al Hosni (2014) maintains that the most important part of language learning is the speaking skills because when pupils can use their language in different social context, it is more important than just knowing about the language. This statement was supported by all the interviewed English teachers, who emphasized the importance of speaking skills to achieve proficiency in a foreign language. However, the majority of teachers argued that they do not have the time to prepare the pupils for oral language acquisition, since every lesson contains more prioritized objectives. The objectives pursued by the teachers were based on those contained in the textbooks, which was a requirement of the school supervisors. Thus, the teachers focused on the grammar and vocabulary aspects that usually appeared in textbooks instead of focusing on speaking activities. The limitation of speaking tasks in the textbooks did not encourage the pupils to use and develop their speaking skills. Even when there was an opportunity to involve communicative tasks, the teachers felt more secure teaching reading and writing skills instead. The teachers considered pupils mastering grammar rules and vocabulary as enough to help pupils develop their speaking skills. The teachers were convinced that the few speaking tasks in the textbooks, in the form of asking and answering questions, were enough to give the learners speaking skills. In addition, Al Hosni (2014) showed that the use of the first language was another mitigating factor as well as the shortage of time and willingness to finish the content of textbooks. The vast majority of the interviewed teachers claimed that they used their first language to explain grammar points and the meaning of new vocabulary. Al Hosni (2014) concluded that the first language was used due to the lack of speaking strategies among teachers. With the few communication tasks offered, the pupils rarely tried to speak the target language to clarify their point, since the teachers used the first language themselves. Additionally, the classroom observation showed that the pupils spoke very little, and it was mostly to answer to teachers’ questions. The answers were limited to just a word or two, or very short sentences. This means that the pupils are not provided with a variety of opportunities and activities to use English in authentic contexts.

Another study made by Su (2006) aimed to show difficulties teachers faced teaching English to EFL learners. The participants were ten teachers from ten different elementary schools. The data were collected through interviews, classroom interventions and another relevant document analysis. Results of this study found that limited teaching hours and large class size were obstacles that prevented language learning. Teachers integrated writing exercises to prepare the pupils for
tests in the sixth grade. Noteworthy in this study was that the teachers found more difficulties with promoting speaking skills through collaborative group work because of the high level of class noise and poor pupil commitment. Some teachers scaffolded the speaking activities through mixing pupils with different levels and English proficiency in groups, where they expected pupils to help each other. Unfortunately, some pupils still did not participate in these group activities. Due to the large limited time and large classroom, Ya-Chen (2006) concludes that the English teachers often struggled to plan lessons and find appropriate activities for pupils’ different levels. Therefore, the teachers limited themselves to only covering an amount of vocabulary, grammar and communicative activities such as role-play and games, and still some teachers found difficulties to motivate pupils with low proficiency to participate in communicative activities. Though, some teachers tried to provide a supportive learning environment and lessons tasks related to pupils’ previous knowledge, there were some pupils who had difficulties reaching their learning demands.

Finally, a qualitative research made by Chan and Wu (2002) affirmed reasons behind EFL pupil anxiety. A total of 601 fifth grades from 205 elementary schools and 9 English teachers were involved in this study. Classroom observation, interviews and questionnaires were the collected data. The interviews indicated that reasons of anxiety were grouped into five factors: low proficiency, negative evaluation, competition of tasks, anxious personality and pressure from pupils themselves. These occurred in relation to limited teaching time and the large classroom size. Therefore, pupils did not have the opportunities to be involved in communicative and authentic tasks. Due to the insufficient time and the large classroom size, teachers found it difficult to consider the pupils’ individual needs, which negatively affected pupils, especially low-proficiency pupils. The teachers found it impossible to find activities related to every pupil’s knowledge levels because of the great differences of English levels. Therefore, they limited their demands in speaking skills. Further, from classroom observations, Chan and Wu (2002) concluded that some teachers used both the first language and English to interact in the classroom. However, when they used English it was at an advanced level, thus often beyond the pupils’ current level of comprehension. The incomprehensible input and often rapid tempo of the teachers demotivated pupils to participate in communicative activities.

The findings above reported different reasons for pupils’ anxiety of speaking English in EFL classroom. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) and Liu and Chen (2013) agreed that some pupils avoided speaking the target language as a result of their fear of being judged by their peers. Often
the pupils negatively compared their speaking skills with their peers. Competition among pupils meant that many of pupils underestimated their speaking abilities. Al Hosni (2006) and Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) found that there was a tendency among teachers to focus on textbooks to cover the teaching objectives, where writing and reading skills were considered important to achieve the target language rather than speaking and listening. It was considered that teaching grammar and vocabulary would be sufficient to prepare pupils for oral language acquisition. Since the teachers emphasized the grammar structures, the pupils found grammar more important than the meaning of communication. To summarize, traditional teaching through textbooks was focused on; although this did not provide pupils with adequate tools and opportunities to develop their speaking skills. However, the teacher agreed that textbooks give pupils variety of words and phrases that is essential for communication tasks. Without a rich and widely vocabulary the pupil would not be able to express themselves in the foreign language (Al Hosin, 2006).

In contrast, Su (2006) and Chan and Wu (2002) agreed that limited teaching time and large classrooms hindered communication and authentic activities. The language differences and the poor commitment among pupils, especially low-proficiency pupils in the large classroom, were other reasons for the limitation of communication activities. The insufficient teaching time prevented adaption to pupils’ different English levels. This was the reason why many of pupils have insufficient exposure to English language. Moreover, Al-Hosni (2014) and Chan and Wu (2002) contended that use of the first language was highly common in EFL classroom and used by teachers mainly to clarify grammatical points. Al-Hosni (2014) added that the use of mother tongue language contributed to even fewer communication opportunities to develop speaking skills. The few communication tasks were not enough to motivate the pupils to speak English in order to reduce their anxiety. Due to the weak vocabulary and sentence building skills, many pupils were too shy to use the target language and preferred to use their mother tongue to express themselves.
4.2 Strategies and activities that promote a motivation to speak English in EFL classroom

Many studies have addressed what might constitute effective teaching strategies and methods to promote English-speaking skills in EFL classroom. A research made by Pérez (2016) intended to identify learning strategies to increase speaking activities among young learners, and task-based learning was implemented for this investigation. The aim of this study was to explore the effects of task-based learning on pupils’ motivation towards spoken interaction in English as a foreign language. Task-based learning is based on authentic communications tasks involving pairs and work groups, which is beneficial for pupils who have little exposure to English. To measure the benefits of task-based learning, personal domain, qualitative techniques, test (pre- and post-test), observation and oral interviews were included. These instruments purposefully observed pupils’ oral abilities in communications tasks. The participants were 24 girls and 12 boys, aged 14-17, in a public school in Colombia. The analyzed data collection emphasized that task-based activities provided interaction among pupils to solve various communication tasks. Pupils spoke freely and spontaneously to express themselves, without emphasizing pronunciation or being anxious about structuring sentences. Through task-based learning, every pupil was motivated in speaking activities regardless of their knowledge level and capability.

Task-based learning provided different communicative activities to increase pupils’ participation, rather than applying traditional teaching. The pupils were more curious because communication tasks provided interesting challenges to highlight real-life situations, such as their hobbies and interests (Peréz, 2016). As the task-based learning involved interactive group work and exciting role-playing related to pupils’ learning levels, the participation and motivation increased. The exciting challenges of solving tasks resulted in the free and spontaneous oral interaction of pupils without them fearing negative evaluations from others. Moreover, this strategy showed that learning skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) were developed because pupils were involved in activities such as thinking, matching words, grouping vocabulary and solving. The pupils interacted in English and were provided a relaxed learning environment which engaged shy and low-proficiency pupils in using the target language.

Another teaching strategy involved pupils in their own learning and increased participation was the teachers' emphasizing the importance of speaking to achieve vocabulary, accuracy and fluency (Peréz, 2016).
Chou (2014) investigated the benefits of applying theme-based topics to reduce anxiety among elementary pupils, and to encourage pupils to participate in a variety of communicative and interactive tasks. To collect qualitative data, classroom observation and semi-structured interviews were adopted in this study. The participants were a group of 72 grade 2 (age 8) to grade 5 (age 11) pupils and four English teachers from primary school in Taiwan. In this study, the teachers used theme-based topics, including songs, games and stories. The results that showed by adapting games, songs and stories to English lessons, speaking motivation in the EFL classroom improved. Most of the pupils had positive attitudes towards playing games connected to learning topics. The pupils agreed that playing games increased their vocabulary, which made them more confident in communicating with their classmates. Apart from using games, stories were also favoured by the pupils (Chou, 2014). The pupils were divided into four groups where each group sat around the teacher and listened to the stories. From the beginning, it was difficult because they were not used to listening to stories in English, but with the teachers’ encouragement in the storytelling, the pupils became willing to participate. The pupils became more encouraged to interact with the teacher and expressed opinions about the story and asked story-related questions. Chou (2014) argues that auditory stimuli was an essential tool for pupils to learn pronunciation and develop communicative skills with the teacher and their peers. Classroom observation confirmed that teachers’ encouragement and performance established a safe environment for the pupils’ participation in activities. The theme-based songs promoted repetition of words and phrases, which was useful for all pupils, especially for those who struggled with linguistic errors. The feeling of doing something together appeared to be effective for engagement in the target language. Involvement in these activities increased the improvement of pupils’ oral skills, where every pupil was involved in these theme-based activities.

Research by Janssen (2019) implemented the characteristics of teaching practices in a CLT (communicative language teaching) classroom and explained teachers’ practices in the EFL classroom. Vygotsky’s’ sociocultural theory and teacher’s pedagogical knowledge were the basis of the CLT implementations. The data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews with eight English teachers from three secondary schools and one elementary school. As the foundations for lesson-planning, the sociocultural perspective gave the teachers knowledge how to involve learning tasks purposely to establish a positive communicative environment. Janssen (2019) established four different teaching practices which required pupils to use English as a tool to communicate with others. First, starting the lessons with small talk in English were beneficial for promoting continual responses in the target language. Secondly, applying lead-in and presentation strategies, teachers used pictures, video
clips and games that encouraged pupils to use the vocabulary associated with the chosen theme. Thirdly, the teachers reacted positively to the pupils’ linguistic errors mistakes by not interrupting the pupils while they spoke in order to reduce negative evaluations. Instead, the teachers consciously increased pupils’ attention to the meaning of communication. The teachers corrected errors in other learning contexts, such as contexts, when explaining grammar points (Jansem, 2019). Lastly, semi-communicative activities were used to give the pupils opportunities to interact with other by exchanging information to complete different pairs and group works. Jansem (2019) concluded that application of these strategies provided theme-based communicative tasks where the students shared their experiences with each other by using the English. This resulted in an improvement of pupils’ overall speaking skills (vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) due to the supportive learning environment where pupils could speak without being anxious.

Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) also investigated interventions to overcome foreign language speaking anxiety among young learners. Interventions such as project work, establishing a supportive classroom atmosphere, teacher-students relations, and indirect correction were implemented. To increase the pupils’ motivation towards speaking, project work is essential. The advantages of project work is that pupils did not feel that they were constantly assessed, and the pupils had a more active role in the learning. This made them focus on the achieving goal rather than on accuracy. Moreover, it strengthened the self-confidence of low ability pupils. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) found that establishing a supportive classroom decreased pupils’ fear of making errors through the collaborative atmosphere. The pupils who struggled with speaking became more motivated to participate in several of the speaking activities. Another intervention to reduce anxiety was to create rules and norms, considered language mistakes as a natural part of the learning process. Moreover, the teachers consciously mixed pupils with different abilities in the same group to balance knowledge levels and to make opportunities for the pupils to learn from each other. Rules and norms encouraged pupils to support each other without being judged. The last intervention was to provide scaffolding through indirect correction of pupils’ speaking errors. Since making errors affects pupils’ confidence negatively, the teachers provided indirect correction rather than direct. This resulted in anxious and non-anxious pupils speaking without paying attention to the form of the language.

Su (2006) research about pupils’ anxiety in the EFL classroom but is also relevant in this question due to the suggested strategies in the study. The observed teachers in the study combined the traditional activities (such as worksheets, reading aloud and word-by-word translation) and communicative and authentic activities (e.g. storytelling, brainstorming and group discussion).
The teachers explained that when developing communicative skills the focus should not only be on oral-based tasks, but also on grammar-rules, phonics and sentence structure. Combining traditional and communicative activities gives the pupils skills to communicate appropriately in English (Su, 2006). When the pupils received a wide vocabulary and became aware of grammar points, their confidence in speaking increased. Since grammar learning is often seen as a boring and meaningless part of the language learning, the teachers used role-play from real life conversations and stories. These activities engaged the pupils in the learning as well as they made the pupils more responsible for their own learning (Su, 2016).

To sum up, the implementation of different teaching strategies and methods was in the research applied in EFL classroom to improve communication. All the researchers agreed that establishing a supportive, positive communicative environment was the key to increase oral interaction. Further, all the investigations concluded that teachers’ engagement to involve speaking in every lesson and to speak in the target language contributed to the safe learning environment where anxious and non-anxious pupils were motivated to communicate and interact in the target language.

Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) and Perez (2016) concur that adapting pair and group activities to pupils’ previous knowledge, hobbies and interests increased positive attitudes toward participation. By forming groups with mixed knowledge levels scaffolded the students and allowed them to involve in authentic communication tasks (Peréz, 2016). The implementation of task-based learning provided a variety of group work and active role-play, thereby giving the pupils opportunities to practice speaking skills, as well as problem solving and critical thinking skills (Peréz, 2016). Further, Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) highlight that using project works made the pupils more confident to freely speak, since they did not constantly feel assessed. In addition, Jansem (2019) argues that semi-communicative activities provided learners various opportunities to exchange information by using vocabulary related to the theme-based tasks.

In comparison with Peréz (2016), Chou (2014) claims that speaking development increased when using games, stories and songs. By using these activities, the repetition of words and phrases were very common in songs, stories and games. In this way, the grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation improved, which increased confidence in speaking and willingness to participate in oral interaction (Chou, 2014). Moreover, Jansem (2019) adds that using games is beneficial for increasing students’ vocabulary and to explicit their knowledge associated to the
theme-based activities. Last, creating rules and norms is a useful method to establish a supportive communicative learning environment, where every pupil has the opportunities to achieve the target language without being frightened of making errors (Janssem, 2019).

Moreover, Janssem (2019) emphasizes the importance of teacher’s reactions to pupils’ speaking performance. When the teacher did not directly pay attention to pupils’ language errors and grammar structure in linguistic activities, and instead focused on the content and meaning, the pupils were less anxious and more willing to participate. Similarly, Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) highlights that EFL anxiety is reduced when pupils and teachers considered linguistic errors as a part of the language learning process. Indirect correction gives pupils the confidence to interact without being interrupted by correcting the errors.

On the other hand, Su (2006) emphasized the importance of grammar and phonics to promote speaking skills. By combining communicative learning with grammar activities, the pupils learn the grammar rules while learning to speak appropriately. Su (2006) argues that when the pupils recognize their own linguistic errors and figure out the grammar rules by themselves, they became more aware of and involved in the learning and become responsible for acquiring new knowledge by themselves.
5. Discussion

The results of our first research question showed there are many reasons behind pupils’ speaking anxiety in EFL classroom. The purpose of this study was to investigate why some pupils do not interact in English. The studies analysed indicated several problems, such as use of first language, few communication opportunities and an emphasis on writing and reading, but also the teachers’ lack of teaching communication strategies. The studies used presented a variety of teaching methods and strategies to promote pupils’ engagement in communicative tasks and to decrease their anxiety regarding speaking and interaction. Many of the presented strategies are based on Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, where interaction between pupils and teachers is the key to achieving speaking and interaction in the target language. Furthermore, adapting songs, stories and games resulted in pupils getting opportunities to learn through the language, instead of about the language (Chou, 2014). This made the learning more meaningful and resulted in an authentic learning where the school tasks were linked to the pupils’ interests and hobbies (Peréz, 2016). A communicative atmosphere promoted low-proficiency pupils but also gave opportunities to achieve advanced phrases and words with help of their high-proficiency peers. Implementations of theme- and task-based learning included creative and exciting group work with tasks related to pupils’ previous knowledge. This provided the repetition of words and vocabulary. By working in this way, pupils move forward in their learning process (their zone of proximal development).

The examined strategies and methods were useful for communication in the elementary school classroom in Sweden since they are relatable to the Swedish national curriculum. Strategies such as providing a communicative atmosphere would encourage pupils to develop all-round communication skills as well as providing confidence in speaking English. In this way, pair and group work promote strategies for learners to understand and make themselves understood when their language skills are not enough. In this case, pupils get the opportunity to develop “Views, feelings and experiences” and “Language strategies to understand and make oneself understood when language skills are lacking, such as through reformulations” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 33-34). As teachers, we have a duty to give all pupils opportunities to enrich their development in all four skills, including speaking and interaction skills. There are some pupils who speak, but they are some who do not interact. This is a problem for teachers. The examined findings have shown that there is a problem in EFL classroom, where some pupils do not interact. Thus, the strategies presented will help the teachers to solve the problem and include every pupil in speaking, no matter reason for not speaking.
Further, findings indicate that anxiety might begin with teachers’ pedagogical choices of learning strategies and activities. Thus, the suggested teaching strategies and activities for developing speaking and interaction can be a basis for future teachers to use. Identifying why some learners are anxious about speaking and interacting is essential. Thereafter, teachers need to be open to various teaching method and strategies to give pupils opportunities to be succeed in their speaking development.
6. Conclusion

Our findings show that teachers using only a few communicative activities can be a contributing factor to some learners not engaging in speaking and interaction activities in the EFL classroom. Moreover, teachers need to place equal emphasis on speaking and interaction, rather than over focusing on the teaching of writing and reading comprehension. In addition, the learning objectives of some textbooks can be overused, thereby not ensuring a focus on all the learning objectives as stipulated in the curriculum. Teachers using the first language in EFL classroom can lead to some learners relying on their mother tongue to express themselves rather than in English. The fear of negative evaluations from their peers is another mitigating factor. During communicative tasks, pupils often feel the pressure to produce grammatically correct sentences, which makes them focus on grammar structure rather than on speaking skills. Limitation of time, large classrooms and too many teacher demands prevents a supportive and communicative classroom where every pupil feels secure to speak.

Studies in this paper present many teaching strategies that improve motivation and communication in the EFL classroom. Teaching strategies that use songs, games and stories that include the repetition of words and phrases increase pupils’ oral skills, as well as pronunciation and grammar structure. Janssen (2019) and Perez (2016) assert that theme-based respective task-based learning encourages pupils to use vocabulary related to the tasks. The involvement of pupils’ previous experiences, interests and hobbies increases a positive attitude toward speaking tasks. Task-based learning has a positive impact on vocabulary learning since it provides an authentic meaning and motivates the pupils to learn English. Indirect correction is successful because it allows pupils to continue to speak regardless of the learning levels and linguistic errors. As part of communicative language teaching (CLT), small talk, semi-communicative tasks and lead-in presentations of tasks in target language can create a communicative classroom. As mentioned in introduction, some Swedish elementary pupils struggle with speaking skills; therefore, these strategies would be useful in the learning context. By adapting the identified strategies and methods in the Swedish classroom, a communication-based learning environment would be established among EFL pupils.

Finally, for a future study it would be fascinating to see the impact of differentiation in a communicative classroom. Since pupils have different learning needs, abilities and language
levels, it is essential to apply differentiated instructions, in order to provide multiple approaches to a quality understanding of the task-instructions. The key to achieve a learning goal is the understanding of the instructions. The understanding of instructions facilitates the participation of the collaborative tasks (Tomlinson, 2004). This teaching strategy would be useful in Swedish multicultural and mixed abilities classroom, in order to promote speaking skills.
References:


