

**Independent Project with Specialization in English
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**The Importance of Speaking and
Interacting in Online Teaching for Upper
Secondary School**

Tala och Samspela i Onlineundervisning och dess betydelse i årskurs 7–9

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Abstract

The increased use of online teaching during the year 2020 has highlighted that there is still a lack of knowledge on how the virtual classroom affects interacting and speaking. Therefore, this study focuses on answering the following two research questions: To what degree does online teaching support speaking and interaction in the classroom? Also, what strategies can teachers use to facilitate speaking and interacting better online? To answer the research questions, the author collected information from six different empirical studies in the field. One key result is that it is of high importance to increase the amount of interaction and communication between students in the Upper Secondary School classroom. Furthermore, it is also highlighted that improving the design and structure can promote more purposeful interaction and communication between students and teachers. One implication of the study and for the field of research, in general, is that it only focuses on English as a second language and no other subjects. Another implication is that the study used only six empirical studies to collect the information which makes it difficult to generalise the results.

Key terms: *Online teaching, Interaction and speaking, English as a second language, virtual classroom, L2 learners*

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1. Introduction

The use of technology in many different areas has increased even further due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many companies have switched to long-term remote work, for example, Facebook, Amazon, and PayPal (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). However, not only companies have adapted to the pandemic but also, schools and universities, where we have seen an enormous shift from traditional teaching methods to the digital classroom through the use of a plethora of digital tools, Zoom being most notable. According to the literature, the influence of digitalization on the traditional classroom could already be identified in recent studies (Baumöl and Bockshecker, 2017). This trend will most likely continue in the following years (Crittenden, Biel, Lovely, 2019). From experience, acknowledgment of COVID-19 has led to rapid changes in university teachers' everyday teaching. The digitalization of teaching has, among other things, involved teaching from home via Zoom, no student meetings, and digitized examination. One major change is for example, how interacting and speaking differs from how it was ten years ago when the author was around fifteen years old and went to Upper Secondary School.

Back then most of the communication between students was face to face. Another impact on the education I have seen as a university student is the way we interact and speak. Before the covid-19, education was in the traditional classroom. Then, we had the possibility to talk with each other during the lecture, do simple and spontaneous group discussions, or even use the whiteboard to express our "ideas" ad-hoc. Moreover, it was also very valuable to reflect on and discuss with peers the lectures and seminars during short breaks or lunch. Being a student in a digital classroom made me notice a decrease in interaction and speaking. In other words, we do not interact and speak as much as we used to. For example, not only does the digital classroom influence the possibilities we have to interact during the lectures, but it also takes away the chance of having a short conversation with your peers in between the lectures or during lunch. In short, the level of speaking and interacting has noticeably decreased amongst my peers since the significant shift from traditional teaching to the digital classroom. This is also apparent in other levels of teaching: elementary, low secondary, and upper secondary high school.

Burns and Richards (2018) highlighted that learning English as a second language needs interaction and speaking for a better learning outcome. This is also claimed by Saeed, Khaksari, Eng, and Ghani (2016) who argue that to promote the speaking and interacting, activities, where the student communicates and interacts with each other in the classroom, is needed for the best learning

outcome. Bañados (2006) argues that online learning is a good option for the flexibility of studying English as a second language from anywhere in the world.

According to Burns and Richards (2018), one tends to associate social interaction with face-to-face discourse, such as conversation. Indeed, that is how interaction has traditionally been viewed in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). However, in today's increasingly technology-enabled society, social interaction includes a much broader set of language practices, actions, and semiotic forms (that is not just language but other visual and auditory information).

Some of the key factors that need to be addressed are interaction and speaking. Interaction can be defined as collaboration, a process where groups or individuals through their actions mutually influence each other (Hazy, Backström, 2013). Gibbons (1993) argues that it is through talking when the highest amount of learning occurs. She also argues that English as a second language (ESL) needs many opportunities to use spoken language to develop the students' language. In other words, oral language activities in the classroom are of high importance. Spoken language involves different strategies, one, for example, is group work which makes the students interact with each other (Dewing and Munro, 2013). Nuraini (2016) argues that if there is oral exposure for the learner, it will help them encounter a better understanding and better ability in speaking English. Describing speaking and interacting, one can say it is when L2 students can communicate with others by using English. Nuraini (2016) describes speaking as a message, which is delivered or sent through different speakers who interact. Moreover, students need to have activities that promote interacting and speaking. However, teachers need support strategies to facilitate them better online. There can also be some problematic aspects of interacting and speaking in class. Nuraini (2016) argues that these problems are the barriers for EFL learners speaking English. Some students find it difficult to speak and interact, and this can be because of their native language, age, exposure or motivation, and concern for speaking well English. Also, many learners lack the necessary vocabulary to get their meaning across, and therefore, they cannot keep the interaction going. If the student does not have enough strategic and communication competence, it also can be a reason for not being able to keep the interaction going. Therefore, some of the barriers can be even more difficult to overcome in the digital classroom when students interact and speak.

In the Swedish governing documents for English and modern languages, the oral ability applies to both speech and conversation. The central content of the syllabus indicates what production and

interaction should include. For example, the students should in grade 7-9 be able to: "Use different ways of processing own representations to vary, clarify, specify, and adapt them to their purposes".

Moreover, in the central content for production, the syllabus in English for compulsory school (Skolverket, 2011a) describes what is most often called turn-taking. What happens then is that two or more people talk about something to "contribute to actively participating in conversations by initiating interaction, giving confirmation, asking follow-up questions, taking initiative for new issues and subject areas and to end the conversation". Looking at the central content of the syllabus what students should learn in grades 7 -9, it is also important to investigate how the students learn.

Therefore, this paper will explore two different theories, understand how speaking and interaction in the English virtual classroom works and how it can be used in teaching practices. The first one, connectivism which is a digital age learning theory, states that technology has changed how we learn in the classroom as well as outside of it. Siemens (2017) argues that the theory promotes group collaboration and discussions, which benefits the learners' problem-solving ability, decision making, and understanding of new information. In general, connectivism is a theoretical framework for understanding learning (Kop et al., 2008). Furthermore, the connectivism model sees a learning community as one element of a larger network (Kop et al., 2008). A network consists out of two or more elements that are linked to each other and share the same resources. In contrast, elements have the possibility to vary in size and strength depending on the aggregation of information and the number of individuals who are part of this element (Kop et al., 2008).

In comparison to Siemens learning theory, there is another educational theory that focuses on the interaction between individuals to achieve better learning outcomes, which is Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Moreover, in his theory, the more capable person, for example, the teacher, the parents, or another peer with more knowledge, provides support or assistance to the learner' through interaction. When interacting with the teacher, the learner incorporates different learning strategies, such as analysing, synthesizing, planning, summarizing, and monitoring. In these examples of interaction, the student is getting guided into a further knowledge and understanding within a social context which Vygotsky refers to as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Eun (2019) argues that activities such as group work, can lead to language development for L2 learners where students do not get too much help, but it supports them to learn in the most effective and best way possible.

2. Aim and Research Questions

The first aspect of this study investigates if online teaching supports speaking and interaction in the English classroom. To address this, speaking and interaction as a concept will be explored. Also, recent research has shown the positive outcome of online teaching. However, there might be negative aspects, and this paper will explore and review these different approaches.

The second aspect that will be included in this paper is to investigate what strategies teachers can use to make speaking and interacting better online. Looking into what is the most beneficial strategy is of high importance since teaching in the future will most likely be even more digitalized than it is today.

The specific research questions are thus as follows:

- To what degree does online teaching support speaking and interaction in the classroom?
- What strategies can teachers use to facilitate speaking and interacting more efficiently online?

3. Method

In this research, articles, and studies relevant to this research paper were used. For collecting related data, keywords in the database Google Scholar were used such as L2 learners, Interacting and speaking, Online learning, virtual classroom, and learning theories. In this case, data was used to locate empirical studies relevant to this paper.

3.1 Search Delimitations

Most of the sources for this study was gathered from online libraries such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and webpages of the journals. Other sources used to conduct this study are organization and governmental publications and as well as books at the university library.

In this study, books, webpages, and/or governmental documents were used. It also includes articles that are from scientifically proved journals.

With the help of the different databases many different scientific publications could be found. The search web Google Scholar showed over 500 thousand results when searching for L2 learners. Therefore, using limitation such the publication year 2019 and other keywords help to narrow the search. Also, using ERIC with the keyword Digital learning showed 1696 results publication year 2019. Overall, the use of ERIC was founded more effective with different limitations such as, education level, location, and source.

3.2 Inclusion Criteria

In this study most of the articles and books were used in written English, but there were also Swedish books included. Inclusion of studies that were found are applicable for future teachers, as with valuable strategies, online learning can facilitate speaking and interacting better.

3.3 Exclusion Criteria

During the process of collecting material for the creation of this paper, the author also had to set several exclusion criteria in order to guarantee that only the, for the research question relevant information, was used. For instance, articles that contained information about online teaching through games and apps have been excluded. In particular, these studies showed how the English language was taught through apps such as Duolingo and WhatsApp, which did not seem to be relevant to answer the research question. A summary of the Inclusion and Exclusion criteria is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Area of interest	Total number of references	Number of references used
Online teaching	11	11
Interaction and speaking	5	4

4. Results

The following section of the paper includes an overview of those aspects that are relevant to the specific researched questions. In the beginning of this section, summaries of six different empirical research papers will be presented and thereafter analysed.

4.1 Summary of Empirical Articles

In their study Sahin, Keskin, and Yurdugül (2018) examined how students interact and speak in different e-learning environments. To be able to collect results, the authors used a lag sequential analysis method when students' system interactions were analysed sequentially. Furthermore, log and self-report data were used in this research paper. The log and self-report data from the 59 student participants were scaled on a 7-point Likert scale, which represents the level of readiness for e-learning of a participant. The results indicate that the sequential navigation abilities of the students differ according to the online learners' readiness structure. For instance, according to the data collected in the study students with high self-directed learning, learning ability, and learning motivation appear to have more consistent interaction styles than their peers with lower educational structure. However, it has also been observed that students with low-level educational structure desire non-persistent contact rather than persistent interaction because, the later results reveal that students with low-level educational structure, need mentoring and scaffolding in e-learning environments. These environments are, for example, computer use and internet use. Furthermore, these environments need basic skills for using instructional technologies, which are autonomous learning skills. It can be that students feel insecure and do not have the basic skills. Students with high self-directed learning and motivation levels, which are considered to be autonomous learning skills, are consistent in online interactions. Moreover, the authors highlight that online learning skills are lacking for these learners. Also, the authors point out that students with high self-directed learning and motivation levels, which are also considered to be autonomous learning skills, are more consistent in online learning interactions, than those students who are at lower levels. Students at lower levels tend to need more mentoring and scaffolding in online learning environments. Students need more mentoring in lacking self-directed learning and motivation levels. Also, it can be insecurity, and often then tend to ask for more help. Moreover,

this study concludes that this type of learner is not suitable for online learning environments without mentoring from a teacher or peer.

Based on the results of the meta-analysis, comparing 74 studies, conducted by Bernard et al. (2009), Abrami et al. (2011) further explored the importance of three types of interaction in distance education and online learning. The three types of interaction the research focussed on are interactions among students, interactions between teachers and students, and interactions between students and course content. To further explore the findings of Bernard et al. (2009), the authors also consider different perspectives of theories such as self-regulation, multimedia learning, and motivational collaborative learning principles. The results showed and confirmed the importance of student-student, student-content, and student-instructor interaction for pupils learning. Furthermore, the results indicate that, on average, small group learning had significantly more positive effects than individual learning on the overall individual achievements of one student (Abrami et al., 2011). These positive effects were even more enhanced when the small learning group of students either had some experience with group work or had specific cooperative learning strategies. According to Abrami et al. (2011), teachers need to use the insights delivered by this research, so they can improve the overall individual achievements of their students by promoting interactive learning in distance education and online learning. Moreover, the authors suggest that the next generation of distance education should also improve the overall design to promote more purposeful interactions.

Kent and Rechavi (2020) argue that interactivity is one of the most important tools for learning. The authors aimed to deconstruct online social learning processes. To investigate social learning from three different interactional perspectives (i.e., creation, consumption, and organization of content) can reveal a new layer of learning dynamics and new insights concerning community learning. Furthermore, they questioned if the separated exploration of the three sub-networks dynamics helps in assessing the efficacy of the social constructivist process, as shown from online discussions in learning communities. In order to collect the necessary data, Kent and Rechavi (2020) followed a network analysis framework for online discussions entailing both static and dynamic analyses of these types of interactions. They created three sub-networks deconstructed from online discussions in four different learning communities. These communities were active during eight to ten-week vacations from October 2014 to May 2016 in two different higher education classes that took place at two different universities in Israel. Both universities are traditional, non-profit, bricks and universities, both use mixed learning, both in the management faculties. The framework for analysis follows the paradigm of collaborative learning, and thus, it

investigates the dynamics of collective learning, rather than individual learning. Moreover, Kent and Rechavi (2020) utilized topological indicators, such as the distance between learners, reciprocity, and the individual's influence on the collective, to research the networks between learners and to explore their evolution during one semester. In general, the study found that interactional patterns in the sub-networks differ from each other and sometimes are also contradictory as the students might have different learning styles. Using social learning styles may be hard for some students to learn new things as a part of a group. However, Kent and Rechavi (2020) argue that interactivity is one of the most important tools for learning a language. This is an important tool, for it can be used by educators and policymakers when evaluating the collective behaviours of online learning communities. Furthermore, the results of the paper also indicate that social learning assessment should address different interaction types separately.

In their study, Wang, and Liu (2020) analysed the educators' training participation of three courses conducted by a teacher to explore the effects of the instructors' online teaching presence on the students' interactions and collaborative knowledge constructions. Overall, the courses had varying numbers of student participants, with an average of 60% female and 40% male participation rate. In particular, the first course had 25 participants, the second 28 participants, and the third 21 participants. The authors researched were following a.) What is the teaching presence patterns in the three courses? b.) What are the effects of the instructor's teaching presence on students' interaction? c.) What are the effects of the instructor's teaching presence on students' collaboration? To answer the formulated research questions Wang and Liu (2020) used a content analysis, social network analysis, and lag sequential analysis which was used to explore the mechanism of teaching presence on students' interactions and collaborative knowledge construction. The results indicate that having persistence of design and organization can benefit the student's interaction. Students' interaction and collaboration knowledge construction are depending on the teachers' assistance of online discussion. Therefore, improving the instructors' design and strategies can improve students' interaction and collaboration. Overall, the authors found that their results can give the instructors some results on online teaching practices. For example, the instructors do not always have enough professional development for constructing an effective teaching presence to facilitate students' engagement in online discussions. The effects of teaching presence on students' interactions and collaborative knowledge constructions can give the instructors some practical guidance on the online teaching process. Moreover, the authors also found some implication of their results as the difference of students in three courses can be an intervening factor. The differences illuminated the mechanism of the sub-dimensional teaching presence on students' interactions and collaborative knowledge constructions.

Bernard, Rubalcava, and St-Pierre (2000) provided a literature review of different practices and research that focusses on investigating the use of collaborative online learning in distance education. The authors used the method of exploring and examining the issues related to distance education in current literature in different steps. First, the authors investigate the traditional problems pointed out in other research papers. Second, they discuss what collaborative online learning encompasses and review the primary instructional design issues that relate to it. According to Bernard et al. (2000), these are (a) course preparation; (b) creating a good social climate and the sense of community; (c) the role of the instructor; (d) encouraging true collaboration; and (e) the effective use of technology. Furthermore, other key results indicate that using new technologies in combination with a collaborative online learning approach in distance education may prove to be highly effective when learner characteristics and the learning context are considered carefully. Moreover, the matrix of components and stages of collaborative online learning collected by authors may help to guide future research efforts in the field. Also, using these findings is just the start of the way towards understanding the complexities engaged with this sort of learning. Furthermore, if instructional designers and educators learn to use their potential, learners will receive great instructional support. Integrating collaborative learning strategies where the students interact and speak into the distance education model, allows learners to take advantage of more technically supported learning opportunities.

The literature review of Raffo et al. (2015) resulted out of the steadily rising expectations on online teaching in higher education. More specifically, the authors focus on the demand of balancing multiple responsibilities in an open-ended, changing, and, in comparison to the traditional classroom, relatively unstructured profession. As a result, Raffo et al. (2015) point out that having a strategic approach towards balancing the various facets of online teaching will ultimately improve a teacher's efficiency and effectiveness in a virtual classroom, which in turn will also improve the learning of students. To provide guidelines for improving efficiency and effectiveness in a virtual classroom, the authors concentrate on balancing the following four key online teaching facets: course design/development, delivery of the course content, assessments/feedback, and professional development. The authors state that their work is based on a review of various research papers in the field and also their own extensive online teaching experiences. Presented in a table, the key results of the research conducted by Raffo et al. (2015) are that regarding the course design and development online teachers must schedule course revisions with their students regularly to improve the teaching even during one course and not only after. Furthermore, the authors found that regarding the course delivery, it is important for teachers to understand upfront how much control they have of which aspects of their teaching schedule and the content delivered.

Moreover, the study found that to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of online teaching, it is also important to develop a balanced approach for online tests. Meaning, that the entire school should consider the different types of assessments, the amount of content of each test, and also the amount of feedback required for the students (Sheridan, 2006 cited in Raffo et al. (2015)). Also, the results of the research point out that when it comes to professional development it is essential to consider the best times for productivity and then think about the four different aspects (course design/development, delivery of the course content, assessment/feedback, and professional development) and how they would fit best in one's working day. Overall, the authors admit that their study has a rather unconventional approach to view faculty areas and balance the mentioned issues, but also that their results demonstrate how their approach can help to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of online teaching.

4.2 Synthesis

The studies mentioned above demonstrate how important interacting and speaking are for ESL learners in the classroom. Furthermore, researchers claim that interacting and speaking has different challenges for students in the traditional classroom, despite recent studies also indicate that these challenges might be even more severe in the virtual classroom. Therefore, this part will present different patterns and trends found in the above-summarized studies to gain further insight into the importance of interacting and speaking in the virtual classroom.

A general trend that all the summarized articles agreed on is, that it is of high importance to increase the amount of interaction and communication between students in the classroom. For instance, Kent and Rechavi (2020) argue that one of the most important tools for language learning is interactivity, which is why increasing the amount of students' interaction is crucial. Also, Abrami et al. (2011) investigated distance education and online learning. The results showed how important interaction is for students' language learning. Furthermore, Bernard, Rubalcava, and St-Pierre (2000) also highlighted some of the main advantages of interactive collaborative learning are encouraging active and constructive learning. According to the authors, it also encourages the processing of information and the stimulation of critical thinking, reasoning, and goal-based learning.

Despite this general trend, one could also identify different patterns in the summarized articles. The first pattern that could be identified in the articles is that several authors highlighted the influence of personality traits on the effectiveness of online teaching. The study of Sahin, Keskin,

and Yurdugül (2018), for example, found that students with high autonomous learning skills are more consistent in online interaction, while those students who have low autonomous skills are more likely to be weaker in online learning skills. Autonomous learning skills involve a high level of motivation which can be a barrier for some EFL students if motivational levels are low. Further relevant skills are self-directed learning, learner control, and motivation. Moreover, the authors highlight that the level of possessing these skills, learners' success in online learning may also differ. The influence of personality traits on the effectiveness of online teaching has also been underlined by Bernard, Rubalcava, and St-Pierre (2000). The researchers also point out that being motivated as a student is important since it can lead to higher participation and confidence, which in turn will play an important role if benefits are to emerge from online learning.

In contrast to the first pattern presented, the results in the summarized papers also indicate that external factors have a strong effect on whether online teaching supports communication and interaction. For instance, Wang, and Liu (2020) found that designing, organising, and promoting discourse can increase students' interaction and communication during online teaching. The research results showed that in all modules of three courses, the proportion of model one is the highest, indicating that the collaborative knowledge structure of students mainly focused on sharing information, which is consistent. Similar arguments are showcased by Bernard, Rubalcava, and St-Pierre (2000). The authors underline that the general availability of multimedia and communication tools such as email, bulletin, and video conference are affecting information about educational courses, learning material, and teaching practices. Moreover, they argue that collaborative online learning is the computer-based variant of the classroom version, and it is considered the most promising teaching method of distance education. This is also highlighted by Abrami et al. (2011), who suggests that the next generation of distance education should be focussing on improving the design and structure to promote more purposeful interaction and communication between students and teachers. Furthermore, Raffo et al. (2015) underlined in their research that course design and development are very important factors for online classes to be efficient and effective.

Despite the importance of theoretical preparation of online teaching, several articles also point out the importance of active guidance during the class. Sahin, Keskin, and Yurdugül (2018) results, indicated that students' interactions are intertwined and often have a low-level educational structure. This reveals that students need guidance and scaffolding in an e-learning environment. A similar recommendation has also been provided by Raffo et al. (2015), who argue that while

online teaching one should pay even more attention to the population of a course, since some students may require more monitoring and attention than others.

5. Discussion

Today, the world requires a shift from teachers to focus on developing language skills to develop language as part of social practice. The focus is shifting from teaching language to designing language-learning projects that engage learners in multimodal media practices (Burns and Richards, 2018). First, the paper wants to find out to what degree does online teaching support speaking and interaction in the classroom. Second, the paper wants to find out what strategies can teachers use to facilitate speaking and interacting more efficiently online.

In the following discussion, the author will connect the findings highlighted in the summary and synthesis back to research and theoretical approaches presented in the introduction, the curriculum, and the specific context of the communicative English classroom in Sweden.

Overall, all summarized articles agreed on the importance of interaction and speaking in the communicative ESL classroom (Kent and Rechavi, 2020; Abrami et al., 2011; Bernard, Rubalcava, and St-Pierre, 2000). This consensus can be connected in several ways to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Firstly, in terms of Vygotsky's theory, his approaches use social interaction (usually described as mediation, involving language and other means of communication), scaffolding (or regulated support from the more skilled tutor), and shared goal-focused activity as key factors in language, development and learning more generally. Similar has been claimed by Sahin, Keskin, and Yurdugül (2018), who argued that the results of their empirical study reveal that students need guidance and scaffolding in an e-learning environment for it to be most effective. Furthermore, Raffo et al. (2015) also suggest in their result section that in an online learning environment it is crucial to have a high amount of one-to-one interaction with the students for the lecture to be most effective.

Another important aspect that is presented in Vygotsky's theory, is the high relevance of understanding the humans' social and psychological processes for learning ESL (Eun, 2019). This aspect has also been identified as highly important by several of the summarized empirical studies. For instance, the study of Sahin, Keskin, and Yurdugül (2018) found that students with high autonomous learning skills are more consistent in online interaction, while those students who have low autonomous skills are more likely to be weaker in online learning skills. Also, Bernard,

Rubalcava, and St-Pierre (2000) underline that being motivated as a student is important since it can lead to higher participation and confidence, which in turn will play an important role if benefits are to emerge from online learning. Moreover, Raffo et al. (2015) also underline the fact that teachers should always pay special attention to the population of the course. Meaning that in an online environment it is even more important to be aware of the fact that some students may require more monitoring and attention than others (Raffo et al., 2015). This recommendation is again in line with Vygotsky's argument that understanding humans' social and psychological processes of learning ESL is important for improving the learning outcome.

Not only can the presented findings be connected to Vygotsky's theory, but also the principles of connectivism. Connectivism is described as the learning theory needed for the digital age. Some of the principles of connectivism are that unlike other approaches to learning, connectivism responds to the diverse ways in which knowledge is created, adapted, and exchanged through networks. Technological growth in online education indicates that we need to review the possibilities of connectivism or network learning (Siemens, 2017). The above-described aspects of connectivism can be connected to the arguments presented by Bernard, Rubalcava, and St-Pierre (2000). In their paper, the authors underlined the importance of the general availability of multimedia and communication tools such as email, bulletin, and video conference for students. Connecting the arguments of connectivism and Bernard, Rubalcava, and St-Pierre (2000) show that, the availability of multimedia and communications tools increases the exchange through networks and therefore also increases the knowledge created. Furthermore, the results presented in Raffo et al. (2015) are also in line with the principles of connectivism. The authors highlight the importance of starting an e-learning faculty learning community across different subjects for students and teachers to share ideas, give feedback, or conduct research on various subjects (Raffo et al. 2015).

Another important aspect that is presented in connectivism is that the theory promotes group collaboration and discussions, which benefits the learners' problem-solving ability, decision making, and understanding of new information (Siemens, 2017). The importance of this aspect has also been underlined by several of the summarized articles. For instance, Kent and Rechavi (2020) argue that interactivity is one of the most important tools for learning in the online environment since it also increases the amount of speaking in the virtual classroom. As a result, one could argue that interaction also helps to understand new information better and therefore also increase the amount learned during a lecture. Furthermore, the results of Abrami et al. (2011) study showed and confirmed the importance of student-student, student-content, and student-instructor interaction for pupils learning, which also confirms the aspects promoted by connectivism.

Furthermore, the findings can also be connected back to the curriculum (Skolverket). Looking at the findings of this study, several recommendations made in the national curriculum can be retrieved. First, according to Wang and Liu (2020), teaching English through interaction and speaking can develop communicative skills. This is also highlighted in the Swedish syllabus (2011b) which states that language is the primary tool, human beings use for thinking, communicating, and learning. Furthermore, it is stated in the Swedish syllabus (2011b) that communicative language teaching is emphasizing interaction with others as both means and goals for language development. In practice, this means that students will be able to learn languages by interacting with other students, with teachers, and with people outside the classroom, as well as with the help of various materials and digital tools. This has also been stressed by Kent and Rechavi (2020) who argue that interactivity is one of the most important tools for language learning, which is why increasing the amount of students' interaction is crucial. Despite, the Swedish syllabus (2011b) also highlights that learning languages through interaction and speaking becomes a success when it has meaningful content. This means that the teaching needs to be based on content that is relevant to the students and in authentic context. Teachers' role in communicative teaching is to plan and organise for interaction and in various ways to support students' learning process. The influence of external factors on the learning outcome of ESL learners is as well pointed out in multiple summarized empirical studies. For instance, Wang and Liu (2020) found that designing, organising, and promoting discourse can increase students' interaction and communication during online teaching. Moreover, Bernard, Rubalcava, and St-Pierre (2000) underline that the general availability of multimedia and communication tools such as email, bulletin, and video conference are influencing information about educational courses, learning material, and teaching practices.

When students work together in group tasks, they usually work at a higher level of cognitive and language than working alone. In the summaries of several articles (Abrami et al., 2011; Raffo et al. 2015) it is shown that well-designed and well-ran groupwork provides ESL learners with many opportunities for language development. Also, it improves students' understanding, peer support and it strengthens students' self-confidence. To make the group work effectively, it is fundamental that interaction and speaks tasks are integrated with curriculum topics. Moreover, allowing appropriate time, and helps students understand how to work in a group. The importance of group work is also highlighted in the Swedish syllabus (2011b) central content.

If given the opportunity to structure digital teaching sequence I would follow these three steps to ensure interaction and speaking in a digital environment:

Step 1. Before starting the planning of the course or class, find out how many students are participating, the different learning stages, the character traits, and how much attention each student needs or requires. Also being aware of other courses your students have at the same time and what workload they have on certain days. This can make a huge difference in their learning motivation.

Step 2. Consider that each lesson should not be longer than 30 minutes each time without a break since the attention level of the students is dropping faster in the online environment than in the traditional classroom. Also, consider that depending on the size of the class you might separate or split in half to keep the number of total students lower than 15. When planning group work considers the different character traits of your students that you want to put into one group. Think about making all the necessary online tools available to your students.

Step 3. When performing make sure to follow your plan, but also be aware that your plan might not be perfect. Therefore, it is important to take notes of things that could be improved during the class. However, make sure to not change too many things during one term, since it would create more confusion than improving.

6. Conclusion

Overall, this study provides evidence that interacting and speaking play an important role for ESL learners in the upper secondary school classroom. Furthermore, after summarizing six empirical studies it becomes clear that on one side, personal traits have an influence on the effectiveness of online teaching, and on the other side, that external factors can have an effect on whether online teaching supports communication and interaction or not. These findings show that it is very relevant for teachers to be considering different aspects if they want their teaching to be more efficient and effective for their ESL learners. In other words, this means that teachers do not only need to improve aspects they can have a direct influence on, such as the course design, the materials used, the exercises are given to the students, or the homework given, but also be aware of aspects they cannot control directly and try to manage them as efficient as possible. This could be for example the fact that different students need different amounts of attention and guidance during class. A teacher will most likely not be able to change this need or character trait of the student, but one could be aware of this and plan the lesson accordingly, by for example having smaller groups during group work exercises to make sure everyone gets the right amount of attention and guidance. Moreover, this paper also found that for students to get the most successful in learning, online teaching needs improved design, organising, and promoting discourse to increase students' interaction. This aspect is also very important to be considered by teachers, since especially now, during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic the number of online meeting tools available on the market has increased significantly, and with that also possibilities for teachers to conduct their lessons in more attractive ways. Despite this, the collected information highlights that collaborative online learning is the computer-based variant of the classroom version, and it is considered the most promising teaching method of distance education.

Despite the relevant findings, this study has also its limitations. First, one needs to consider that this study is only focussing on ESL learners and not learners of other subjects, such as physics, maths, or biology. Furthermore, the author used a limited number of empirical articles to collect the information presented. This implicates that the findings of this study cannot be generalized but can be used as indications of what could be important for teachers to consider when planning and having online classes. Moreover, this study does not differentiate between different age groups of pupils in the classroom, which could also influence the presented strategies, teachers can use to facilitate speaking and interacting better.

Based on the findings of this study, one could argue that it would be relevant to investigate if strategies to promote interacting and speaking in the classroom are experienced in similar or different ways by Swedish teachers. In other words, the information collected from the six different empirical studies has its origin in various countries and regions, which is why it might not apply to 100 percent of Swedish pupils and teachers. Therefore, the author believes that in the first step of future research it would be necessary to find more information and strategies that promote interacting and speaking. In a second step, the author would qualify or disqualify this information and strategies by Swedish teachers for ESL learners in form of an online survey. This online survey would consist out of a questionnaire with approximately ten to fifteen questions that can be answered on a 7-point Likert scale. This questionnaire would then be posted on webpage communities for English teachers, send directly to different Upper Secondary Schools in Sweden. For the results to be relevant the author would need to have at least 200 valid participants. The final results will hopefully give a clear indication on which strategies are more useful for online teaching of ESL learners.

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