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Improvisation:
A Playful Pressure to Speak

A study into student teachers' experiences with facilitation of spontaneous English speech and the development of speaking confidence in English

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A project like this has one name on the title page but it is not an undertaking of just one person. For years, I worked in the fields of music and culture before returning to my original profession as a teacher of foreign languages. I would like to thank Nord University for this opportunity to further my professional development.

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Anke Zondag

Preface

My formal education started with a four-year bachelor's in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in the Netherlands. While I continued my teacher education with a master's degree in English Language and Literature, I joined an improvisation course. I became an active improviser, training and performing regularly in Dutch. When I moved to Norway, I experienced learning a new language with the heightened awareness of being a qualified foreign language teacher. I realised how different learning a foreign language was in the country of the target language. My Norwegian class was open 24/7, and I was forced to master functional Norwegian quickly. After two years of immersion, I had become a fluent speaker and performed improvisation theatre in Norwegian. Alongside learning Norwegian, I had developed myself as an English and German teacher through formal training and several teaching positions.

My improvisation training was mainly based on Keith Johnstone's improvisation method (Johnstone, 1981, 1999). I worked as a freelance improvisation instructor for children, adolescents and college students alongside my day job. Over the decades, my professional teacher competence has been influenced by my practical improvisation competence. During the English, German and psychology classes I taught in upper secondary school, I applied improvisation techniques and received positive feedback from adolescents. Moreover, I observed the positive impact of improvisation approaches when coaching pupils with presentation anxiety.

Over the decades, I acquired advanced improvisation competence through courses and training, workshops and books, without receiving any formal credits. To update, consolidate and widen my improvisation competence for the project, I trained with international instructors and attended more than 20 improvisation workshops and a two-day intensive training on the Spolin method. Additionally, I developed my research competence through attending international conferences and completing coursework. These paths of practical and theoretical training contributed to my development as a teacher educator, improvisation instructor and researcher.

List of Recurrent Abbreviations

The list below contains the most recurrent abbreviations with their full forms.

CIPs Central Improvisation Principles

CLT Communicative Language Teaching

EFL English as a Foreign Language

FL Foreign Language

FLA Foreign Language Anxiety

FLCA Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

FLL Foreign Language Learning

IPA Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

RQ Research Question

TEFL Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Note on language use:

In academic English, “he/him” has been the long-standing preferred personal pronoun for participants. Due to societal changes, many scientific journals have changed their policy to being more inclusive and some journals now advise authors to use “they/them” as the preferred personal pronoun for participants.

Despite my personal support for inclusiveness policies, I chose “she/her” as the unbiased pronoun in the second article because female participants represented the majority in TEFL courses. In the rest of the project, I have consistently used “she/her” as the unbiased pronoun for participants. Through this project, I realised how unusual it felt to do so, whereas the opposite, “he/him” to refer to a female participant, has not caused such feelings. Language use matters.

Summary

Because most real-life foreign language speech is unpredictable, spontaneous speech must be practised in the English language classroom. Reluctant speakers are, however, a common challenge. This project explored how improvisation activities facilitated spontaneous English speech practice and stimulated the development of speaking confidence. The research focused on English teacher education and ensuing school practicums. The empirical material includes pre- and post-questionnaires, retrospective texts, interviews and trial logs.

The overall findings showed that improvisation activities provided safety through their enjoyable, collaborative and playful character. High levels of positive engagement among learners were found. Facilitation of spontaneous speech practice took place through embodiment, immediacy, engagement and enjoyment. The enjoyment of collaborative improvisation created a playful pressure to speak. A variety of language registers was practised through role embodiment. Student teachers who experienced high degrees of enjoyment and intense engagement, reached a "spontaneous speech mindset" and increased their speaking confidence.

The improvisation activities offered a contextual speech practice that facilitated taking language risks in the safety of a playful, engaging learning environment. Enjoyment is the key factor in facilitating spontaneous speech practice at university and in school. Based on the findings in this project, it is sensible that English teacher education were to provide student teachers with training in improvisation for spontaneous speech practice because improvisation can encourage the development of a "spontaneous speech mindset".

Sammendrag

Fordi det meste av fremmedspråklig tale i virkeligheten er uforutsigbar, må spontan tale praktiseres i det engelskspråklige klasserommet. Såkalte "reluctant speakers" er imidlertid en vanlig utfordring. Dette prosjektet består av flere studier som utforsket hvordan improvisasjonsaktiviteter kan legge til rette for trening av muntlige ferdigheter i spontan engelsk og stimulere utviklingen av selvtillit. Forskningsfokuset har vært på engelsklærerutdanning og påfølgende skolepraksis. Det empiriske materialet inkluderer pre- og post-spørreskjemaer, retrospektive tekster, intervjuer og praksislogger.

De overordnede funnene viste at improvisasjonsaktiviteter ga trygghet gjennom sin morsomme og lekne karakter og ved å invitere til samarbeid. Alle studiene viste høye nivåer av positivt engasjement blant elever og studenter og av språkproduksjon i klasserommene. Tilrettelegging for spontan talepraksis skjedde gjennom kroppsliggjøring, umiddelbarhet, engasjement og velvære. Gleden over å samarbeide i improvisasjonsaktivitetene skapte et lekent tale-press. En rekke språkregistre ble tatt i bruk gjennom kroppsliggjøring av rollespill. Lærerstudenter som opplevde høy grad av moro og intenst engasjement, nådde et "spontaneous speech mindset", noe som økte selvtilliten deres.

Improvisasjonsaktivitetene innebar en kontekstualisert talepraksis som gjorde det lettere å ta språkrisiko i et trygt lekent og engasjerende læringsmiljø. Glede viste seg å være den sentrale faktoren i tilrettelegging for trening av spontan tale både på universitetet og i skolen. Basert på funnene i disse studiene, er det hensiktsmessig at engelsklærerutdanningen gir lærerstudenter opplæring i improvisasjon for trening av spontan tale fordi improvisasjon kan oppmuntre til utvikling av "spontaneous speech mindset".

List of Articles

Article I:

The Influence of Improvisation Activities on Speaking Confidence of EFL Student Teachers.

Authors: Anke Zondag, Annelise Brox Larsen, Tale Margrethe Guldal, Roland van den Tillaar

Article II:

Student Teachers' Experience with Improvisation Activities for Spontaneous Speech Practice in English.

Author: Anke Zondag

Article III: Submitted to TESOL Journal

How to Get Pupils Talking: Facilitation of EFL Spontaneous Speech in EFL Classrooms Through Improvisation Activities.

Authors: Anke Zondag and Annelise Brox Larsen

Article IV:

Improvisation as a Communicative Method for Speaking English Spontaneously.

Authors: Anke Zondag and Annelise Brox Larsen

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1 Introduction

The main purpose of my project was to explore the potential of improvisation as a method for spontaneous English speech practice in teacher education. Along the way, a trial of improvisation activities in school practicums was added. The project focus has been on student teachers' experiences, with a central place for reluctant speakers. The project resulted in four articles, each addressing an element in the discussion of improvisation as a method for spontaneous speech facilitation. Unless specified, all mentions of improvisation from here onward will relate to improvisation within the field of drama/theatre.

This project adheres to Stinson's definition of improvisation as a drama-based approach during which people "do not use a script or fully predetermined scenario, but make up words and/or action" (Stinson, 2008, p. 206). In this first chapter, I will briefly introduce the project starting from its origin and continuing to its development, the research questions and the overall cohesion of the project. Along the way, I will explain key terms in this research project. Raw data such as excerpts from participants' texts are reproduced uncorrected.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

In this research project, I have explored my teaching practice in teacher education through examining student teachers' experiences with trying out improvisation activities for spontaneous speech. Despite years of applying improvisation in the English classroom, I had never taken an investigative and critical look at how student teachers experience improvisation as a didactic method. The project was aimed at gaining knowledge about the ways in which improvisation activities can facilitate spontaneous speech practice and support the development of speaking confidence in spontaneous English speech.

Over the years the research questions (RQs) have undergone alterations. Maxwell (2013) describes RQs as the heart of the qualitative research design. He contests the

viewpoint of regarding RQs as the starting point because they do not include "the interactive and inductive nature of qualitative research" (2013, p. 73). In qualitative research, one cannot normally produce RQs isolated from the design and its methodology and theory because there is a reciprocal relation between them (Maxwell, 2013). Consequently, one should be aware of the ramifications of a certain research question, consequences that will often only manifest themselves after one has gathered some experience with data gathering and analysis. This consideration has been part of the project and the RQs have been altered. Below you find the main research question and the final RQs numbered per article:

Table 1 *Presentation of Research Questions Per Article*

Articles	**Research questions**	**How can improvisation activities facilitate spontaneous English speech practice and the development of speaking confidence?**
1	RQ1	Do improvisation activities influence student teachers' confidence when speaking spontaneous English?
2	RQ2A	How have student teachers experienced participating in improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice in English?
	RQ2B	How have reluctant speakers experienced participating in these improvisation activities?
3	RQ3	How did improvisation activities facilitate spontaneous speech among pupils?
4	RQ4	How did student teachers experience trying improvisation activities for spontaneous speech in their school practicums?

The interpretative framework was applied to investigate the meaning that student teachers attribute to the improvisation experience. RQ1 was answered using a mixed-method approach to provide a platform for both quantitative (pre- and post-questionnaires) and qualitative (sample of retrospective texts) analysis. The other three RQs in Table 1 were answered through qualitative methods. Originally, the third article contained RQ3 and RQ4, which are both answered through analysing trial logs. RQ3 focuses on facilitation of pupils' spontaneous speech practice in school practicums. RQ4 has a university perspective with its didactic focus looking at improvisation as a method. Disseminating the findings in two separate articles (article 3 and 4) enabled

each angle to receive more attention and allowed for a deeper discussion of the findings.

1.2 The Personal Motivation to Undertake this Research

My research topic originates from my curiosity to understand more about the potential of applying improvisation in teacher education courses, especially regarding reluctant speakers. My background as an improviser, an improvisation instructor and professional teacher of English made this research project possible. The interest in reluctant speakers originated from my teaching experience in EFL secondary and tertiary classrooms. In choosing my research topic, I lean on Smith et al. (2009), who state that you should select a research topic that genuinely interests you. Nonetheless, I have been aware throughout the project that the improvisation interest may colour my perception and have thus used a variety of data collections to counter any possible influence.

Drama-based pedagogy can provide creative and practical instruction formats through which learners can be challenged. Incorporating drama in FL learning and teaching is still quite a young research field (Winston & Stinson, 2011), possibly caused by a lack of knowledge about drama in EFL teacher education. Despite its possibilities, few language teachers have been trained in drama-based pedagogy, or trained to incorporate drama and improvisation in their teaching practice (Cahnmann-Taylor & McGovern, 2021). Within drama, improvisation can particularly provide EFL learners with rich speech practice in semi-natural, oral communication because improvisation comprises spontaneous, active simulations and interactions of a semi-authentic reality (Galante & Thomson, 2017; Winston & Stinson, 2011). During their teacher education, student teachers could be introduced to applying improvisation in EFL classrooms.

As a teacher educator, I can merely observe learning processes from my own point of view. Of course, teacher educators receive student teacher feedback through informal and formal evaluations. Nevertheless, gathering insights into student

teachers' experiences of didactic approaches is not part of everyday teaching and evaluation practices. It is important, however, that teacher educators are reflective professionals in a continuous state of process (Lee & Dawson, 2018). Teacher educators must critically assess their teaching methods and revisit them for revision. Therefore, in this project, I have systematically examined student teachers' experiences with spontaneous speech practice through their participation in, and trial of, improvisation activities. I have studied improvisation as a didactic method for developing speaking confidence, to gain new insights into Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in teacher education.

Apparently, studies within teacher education are rather under-represented in Norwegian research (Hammerness, 2013). This project contributes to investigations into teacher education practices. Through analysing student teachers' perspectives on improvisation, I want to contribute to further knowledge about English teacher education methodology. Considering the fact that there has only been around 30 years of English didactics research in Norway (Rindal & Brevik, 2019), the field of Norwegian research in English teacher education is quite young, which may explain the low number of teacher education research projects. An informal inquiry among practising teachers in grades 5–10 at the beginning of the project indicated that the reluctant speaker is a common challenge for English teachers. When a large group of in-service teachers for grades 1 to 10 were recently asked to choose a recurring challenge in their classroom practices, most chose oral communication and speaking reluctance among pupils. Consequently, one may conclude that the project addresses a genuine need from the perspective of TEFL practice.

1.3 Terms

During the project key terms have been defined in the following way:

Table 2 *Key Terms and their Definitions*

Key terms	**Definitions**
Improvisation activities	Drama-based approaches where learners do not follow scripts or predetermined scenarios, but experiment with language by making up words and/or actions
In-service student teachers	Part-time students who work in schools and take EFL classes after completing primary education training
Learners	Generic term for all ages
Pre-service student teachers	Full-time students who take EFL classes as part of their primary education training
Pupils	Learners in the school practicums
Reluctant speakers	Learners who regularly and consciously avoid speaking English spontaneously despite advanced language competence
Spontaneous speech	Unplanned, immediate oral communication

The most recurrent terms have been abbreviated for conciseness. A list of recurrent abbreviations is presented on page VII.

1.4 Cohesion within the Project

The project took place in my teaching practice and student teachers' practicums, in an interaction between university and school classrooms. In my opinion, the cohesion of the project could be illustrated by a project bridge. This bridge is a metaphor to illustrate how a connection was formed resting on these four pillars in the process, starting chronologically from the left:

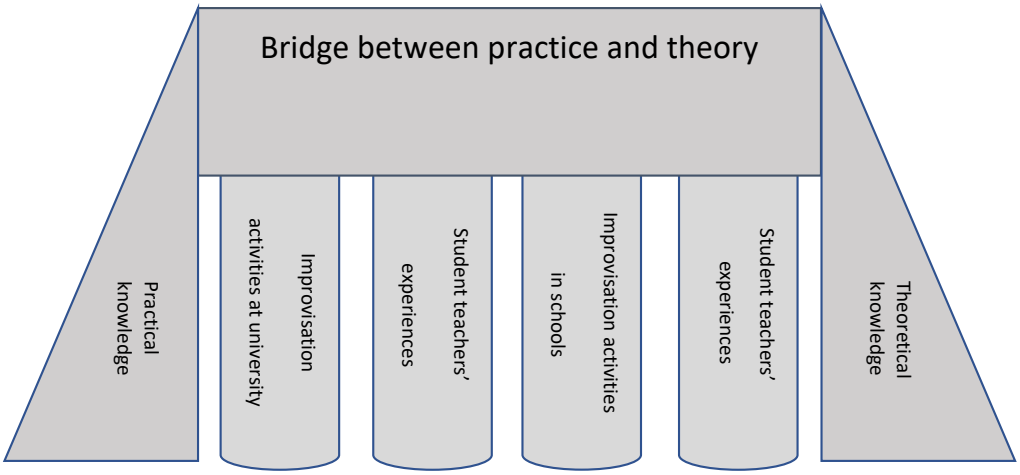

Figure 1 *Project Bridge Connecting Practice and Theory*

These pillars form the support for the bridge from the practical knowledge (left ramp) to the theoretical knowledge (right ramp). The project started with the researcher's practical knowledge as an improviser (left ramp). My teaching practice of improvisation was developed from my practical improvisation background and its derived practical knowledge. For the project, I selected and adapted improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice to be applied by non-improvisers. Thus, I taught student teachers improvisation activities for spontaneous speech in English courses at university (pillar 1). After student teachers' reflections were gathered in retrospective texts (pillar 2), the findings were systematised, analysed and resulted in a theoretical concept called "spontaneous speech mindset".

Based on their experiences in the university classroom, student teachers then tried improvisation activities with pupils in school practicums (pillar 3). Through recurrent reflections, student teachers gained insights into their experiences, which were shared through trial logs (pillar 4) with the researcher. These pillars form the support for the bridge from the researcher's practical knowledge (left ramp) to the theoretical knowledge (right ramp).

Although this process connects practice and theory, one should acknowledge the limited reality of school practicums. Although pre-service student teachers practise as teachers in school classrooms, the presence of other student teachers and qualified mentors cannot be overlooked. Their presence may have had an influence on pupils' behaviour, negative or positive. Nevertheless, this is the format of the school practicum provided for pre-service teachers in the current Norwegian teacher education and these circumstances were not altered for research purposes.

The project explored student teachers' subjective experience of doing and trying out improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice. Consequently, the research does not resemble a course evaluation but is a study of the perceived relevance, based on student teachers' perspectives, of a didactic method for facilitating spontaneous speech. Throughout the project, I have been mostly an outsider. In the university classrooms, I felt like the insider for improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice because I was the practised improviser. Nevertheless, I was never an insider in the meaning of being an equal to the student teachers. During school practicums, I was the outsider because I did not visit practicum schools. One could, however, argue that my presence may have been noticeable in the background as the teacher educator anyway.

The role of student teachers as knowledge constructors has been central in the project. They went from reflecting on their own improvisation experiences at university to reflecting on their experiences in trying out improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice in school practicums. Throughout the whole research project, student teachers have actively contributed to the research findings to different degrees and through various communication channels. As they have expressed, student teachers gained insights into various research methods along the way. My trust in the value of student teachers' contributions to the research has been the ethical basis of the project. The phenomenological perspective has provided the research angle to realise this project.

1.5 The Project in Short

This table illustrates the project design in short:

Table 3 *Project Design in Short*

Main research question	**How can improvisation activities facilitate spontaneous English speech practice and the development of speaking confidence?**				
Research questions	Do improvisation activities influence student teachers' confidence when speaking spontaneous English?	How have student teachers experienced participating in improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice in English?	How have reluctant speakers experienced participating in these improvisation activities?	How did improvisation activities facilitate spontaneous speech among pupils?	How did student teachers experience trying improvisation activities for spontaneous speech in their school practicums?
Design	Quantitative Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative
Data (sample size)	Pre-and post-questionnaires (n=57) Retrospective texts (n=23)	Retrospective texts (n=41)	Interviews (n=6)	Trial logs (n=19)	Trial logs (n=19)

Article 1 explored the application of improvisation activities in English teacher education, specifically to investigate their influence on student teachers' confidence when speaking English spontaneously. Speaking confidence was explored before and after the series of three improvisation sessions. The data were mainly quantitative. From the 2017 sample of student teachers' retrospective texts, qualitative data were added. Statistical findings showed significant improvements in student teachers' level of speaking confidence and degree of relaxation while speaking English. Findings of the qualitative analysis confirmed this, and participants stated that the fun, collaboration

and high degree of engagement had helped to increase their speaking confidence. The combined findings indicated that the improvisation activities had provided a valuable method for increasing the speaking confidence of EFL student teachers.

Article 2 explored the relevance of improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice according to student teachers. The data included retrospective texts and reluctant speakers' interviews. The findings showed that improvisation activities facilitated spontaneous speech practice and strengthened speaking confidence through enjoyment. The "spontaneous speech mindset" enabled participants to explore linguistic and creative boundaries. The study showed that applying improvisation activities is an excellent method for spontaneous speech practice in EFL teacher education.

Article 3 explored student teachers' experiences with facilitating spontaneous speech for pupils during school practicums. The student teachers tried the improvisation activities that they had previously performed themselves in university classrooms. They reflected on their school practicum experiences in trial logs before, during and after trials in English classrooms. The facilitative components were identified as playful pressure, enjoyment, engagement and collaboration. This study focused on pupils' spontaneous speech practice.

Article 4 explored how student teachers experienced improvisation as a method for communicative language practice in school practicums. The data were again trial logs, the same as in article 3 as well as retrospective texts. The student teachers managed to try the improvisation activities in school and confirmed drama-based pedagogy as beneficial for EFL spontaneous speech practice. The in-service student teachers adapted the instructions for the improvisation activities to provide scaffolding. They focused on language learning by activating prior language and modelling suitable language. In short, in-service student teachers were more active facilitators of the spontaneous speech practice than pre-service student teachers.

2 Contexts and Theoretical Background

The second chapter presents the contexts for the project. The project examines teaching and learning oral English in university and school classrooms. The project is firmly placed in the discipline of English didactics as its main field and relevant elements from the field and the school subject English will be presented in the first section.

Moreover, the project contains elements from other disciplines such as general pedagogy and drama. Improvisation is the approach for practising spontaneous English and is rooted in drama. The second section of this chapter presents drama-based language teaching. Psychology is a discipline in itself, however in this project the psychology-related elements are restricted to speaking confidence and speaking reluctance in learning environments and would therefore be related to general pedagogy. Together, these contexts form the theoretical background of the project.[1]

2.1 The School Subject English

2.1.1 The Subject English in Norwegian Primary Teacher Education.

Norwegian primary and lower secondary teacher education trains teachers for grades 1–10, which are organised as one school system. From 1992 onwards, student teachers qualified as general teachers after four years of teacher education. Most teachers had not been trained as EFL teachers because the subject English has never been a compulsory subject in Norwegian primary teacher education (Birketveit & Rugesæter, 2014; Hellekjær, 2010). English was formerly taught by 70% EFL teachers in grades 1–4 and 50% EFL teachers in grades 5–7 (Lagerstrøm, 2007) who did not have formal training in English.

[1] Asian literature, especially Chinese, was regarded as less relevant for the project. The Confucian reticence in speaking is a cultural phenomenon and difficult to transfer or relate to the Norwegian context of the project.

Norwegian teacher education has undergone major reforms in recent decades. Since 2010, student teachers have been trained as specialist teachers for either young learners (grades 1–7) or teens and teenagers (grades 5–10). From 2017, primary teacher education was restructured to a five-year master of education. The first group of specialist teachers (GLU 1–7) qualify to teach three or four school subjects in addition to their general primary teacher training, and the second group (GLU 5–10) would choose two or three school subjects (two of 60 ECTS each) to specialise in (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2016). There is no minimum grade threshold for selecting English as one of their specialist subjects, so students of English in primary and lower secondary teacher education are admitted based on their general admission to higher education, i.e. completing the compulsory English course in grade 11. This context is important to be aware of for teacher educators in Norway because student teachers may not have spoken English in an academic context for years when starting teacher education.

2.1.2 The Subject English in Norwegian Schools.

English is a compulsory school subject for Norwegian pupils from grades 1 to 11, yet fewer teaching hours are allocated to English in grades 1–10 (8% of the total available hours) than, for example, physical education (9%) and half of the hours for mathematics (15%). This meagre allocation may signal an attitude that Norwegian pupils do not need a great amount of formal education in English because they are immersed in English anyway, as on says. The position of English in the Norwegian school system may not be so central after all, based on the facts that English is not a compulsory subject in the final two years of upper secondary school in any study programme.

In the national Norwegian curriculum, the subject English has a separate subject plan and is taught from the age of six (*National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion*, 2020). Since 2006, English has no longer been categorised under foreign languages (e.g. French and German) nor recognised as an official or second language. Needless to say,

Norwegian children do not learn English through immersion in an English-speaking country as immigrant children would (Tomlinson, 2005). The appropriate use of EFL and English as a Second Language (ESL) or another acronym for English as Additional Language has been debated over the last few decades:

> But in many parts of the world, as English has been taken into the fabric of social life, it acquires a momentum and vitality of its own, developing in ways which reflect local culture and languages, while diverging increasingly from the kind of English spoken in Britain or North America. (Graddol, 1997, p. 2)

English is omnipresent in Norwegian private and professional contexts (Dahl, 2015), and Norwegians speak English as an international language (Burner et al., 2019). The debate around the role of English is reflected in the use of both EFL and ESL terms in recent Norwegian doctoral research, expressing the dynamic position of English for Norwegians (Rindal & Brevik, 2019). In their book on the state of English didactics in Norway, Rindal and Brevik observe that most of their authors uses the term "EFL" when describing the position of English didactics in Norway despite wide recognition of the special place of English in the national curriculum. Other scholars in Norway prefer the use of "ELT" as a neutral term for English language teaching, arguing that the term "EFL" can be misleading because it suggests English belongs to some nations and not to others (Bland, 2019). "ELT" could, however, be misunderstood to include native speakers of English, which is quite a different matter when it comes to teaching and learning the language. Despite the fact that Norwegian learners engage in particular with American English on a regular basis through out-of-school exposure such as online communication, gaming, music and TV (Burner et al., 2019), the Norwegian speaker is not immersed in an English-speaking society with active participation and wide exposure to a large variety of English language outside of the classroom (Lazaraton, 2014). It is important to consider the right term for the language learning context.

The spontaneous speech experience of non-native speakers is the topic of this project. This includes attending to their emotions and thoughts before, under and after

improvisation activities as part of the FLL psychology. The distinction between the impromptu speech act in a mother tongue and another language is therefore an important consideration for the research. To differentiate the speakers in the project from those of other research concerned with speaking confidence in first or second language contexts, the term "English as a Foreign Language" (EFL) is applied throughout this extended abstract. This term signals a feeling of foreignness, which may influence student teachers' speaking confidence in a different manner than in a first or second language. Choosing EFL for this project does not disclaim the use of other terms for learning and teaching English in non-native contexts.

2.1.3 Communicative Competence.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) emphasises communicative competence and played a significant role in the Norwegian school reform around the millennium (Simensen, 2018). Communicative competence was originally defined as a combination of grammatical and sociolinguistic competence (Hymes, 1972). Canale and Swain (1980) added strategic competence and communication strategies, which are important for keeping communication channels open. Moreover, they mentioned communicative performance, referring to the actual use of language, involving unpredictability and creativity when faced with a potential communication breakdown. Verbal and non-verbal communication strategies can compensate for inadequate language competence or performance variables (Canale & Swain, 1980). The practice of these strategies should therefore be part of FL learning, they concluded. Additionally, it is quite common for adolescents and young adults to overestimate their oral L2 skills:

> Adolescent and adult L2 learners often feel that they already know how to communicate with people because of their experience of their mother tongue. They tend to believe that they can participate naturally in any daily conversation after they have learned the basic structures and forms of the target language in the classroom. This rather naïve view of human communication underestimates the complexity and difficulty of controlling a discourse in context, especially when different cultures meet. (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 36)

As we have seen above, cultural and contextual factors play a part in FL learning (Burner et al., 2019). This aspect relates to the appropriateness of language use in the given context. One could say that the communicative language competences consist of these components: linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences. The last two competences are key elements of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is based on the widened concept of communicative competence (Savignon, 1987). The original CLT focused on the purpose and communicative functions of language, e.g. expressing an apology or an invitation. Canale and Swain (1980, pp. 27-28) formulated five guiding principles for a communicative approach:

1. Communicative competence is comprised of the equal components of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and communication strategies (also referred to as strategic competence).
2. The approach must respond to, and be based on, learners' communication needs.
3. Learners must have the opportunity to interact in meaningful communication with highly competent speakers.
4. Learners must optimally use communicative competence aspects from their first language.
5. The primary objective is to provide the learner with the information, practice and extensive experience to meet the requirements of their communicative needs in the target language.

Subsequently, the original CLT from the twentieth century has been developed into a modern version in the twenty-first century. Savignon (2007) defines modern CLT as an engagement of learners in communication in order to develop their communicative competence through an approach that sees language as inseparable from individual identity and interpersonal behaviour, even though CLT is not strictly related to face-to-face communication. In their summary of the more modern CLT principles, Byram and Méndez García (2009) highlight that teachers are regarded as facilitators, acceptability and fluency are given priority over grammatical accuracy, and non-interfering errors are only pointed out if the learner makes them regularly (pattern). They state that the learner must be given the opportunity to practise with interaction that reflects genuine communication. To achieve this, Byram and Méndez García (2009) emphasise that authentic material, creativity and unpredictability play a significant role because they require learners' development of coping strategies such as asking for information, seeking clarification and using circumlocution, which are all essential for a true negotiation of meaning. They conclude that this means that communicative competence depends on participants' cooperation. Richards' (2006) ten core assumptions of current CLT are very similar to the descriptions above, but he adds inductive or discovery learning, and creative use of language (including trial and error). In addition, Richards concludes that successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communicative strategies (2006). Modern CLT can be regarded as a post-method approach that does not prescribe any didactic method. CLT can be regarded as having originated from a multidisciplinary perspective that "includes, at least, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology and educational research" (Savignon, 2007, p. 209). Modern CLT focuses on the development of learners' communicative competence rather than linguistic facts (Hughes, 2013):

> CLT approaches are learner-centred rather than teacher-centred, and include contextualised teaching of vocabulary and grammar, meaningful interactions through pair and group work, and an emphasis on language for communication. (Winston & Stinson, 2011, p. 2)

In this section, communicative competence and CLT have been presented. CLT can be regarded as having originated from a multidisciplinary perspective that covers "linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology and educational research" (Savignon, 2007, p. 209). In the rest of the extended abstract, CLT refers to the modern version of the communicative language teaching approach.

2.1.4 Oral Communication and Spontaneous Speech.

Speaking English spontaneously is an essential lifelong skill that can be challenging to practise. Oral skills in the EFL classroom are generally practised in structured and planned situations like listening activities, individual and group presentations, and, of course, discussions about topics and texts. In the younger learner classroom, speaking often consists of reproduction and imitation (Becker & Roos, 2016). In their study, Becker and Roos emphasise the importance of providing younger learners with multiple, different opportunities to become communicatively competent language users. Improvisation, role play and non-scripted storytelling stimulate learners' autonomy through creative and productive language use (Becker & Roos, 2016). Most advanced learners are still challenged to participate in spontaneous, informal FL conversations (Hughes, 2013):

> Language awareness activities based around the norms of spontaneous interaction in the target language can provide both an increased understanding of the problems, pitfalls and skills needed for successful communication with native speakers, and provide the learner with a meta-language to ask further questions. (Hughes, 2013, p. 153)

Hughes (2013, p. 153) defines the basic aspects of spontaneous speech that both learners and teachers must be aware of as follows:

- speaking is an interactive process;
- speaking happens under real-time processing constraints;

- speaking is more fundamentally linked to the individual who produces it than the written form is.

The first aspect relates to Vygotsky's views on interaction as an enabling circumstance (Vygotsky, 1986). Learning in the zone of proximal development enables the learner to develop through a peer's assistance or an artefact created by other people (Lantolf, 2007). Improvisation challenges the learner to explore the risk of producing the FL in an unscripted setting, which could be regarded as a zone of proximal development, leading learners into attempting what they cannot yet do (Vygotsky, 1986). The interactive character of spontaneous speech is highlighted by Sawyer (2001), whereas the time pressure from the second aspect is emphasised by Bygate (2001). Moreover, Hughes's second aspect, time, relates to dramatic fiction, which can be applied to contextualise FLL experiences, thereby allowing learners to "focus on meaning rather than being overly constrained by correctness" (Stinson, 2008, p. 200). The emphasis on meaning fits the core skill of meaning making in CLT.

In this project, spontaneous speech was defined as unplanned, immediate oral communication, and improvisation activities refer to drama-based approaches where participants do not follow scripts or predetermined scenarios (Galante & Thomson, 2017; Stinson, 2008).

2.1.5 Oral Communication and Foreign Language Anxiety.

The interactional pattern in the EFL classroom is commonly the teacher initiation, learner response, teacher evaluation or follow-up (IRE) combination (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). If these cycles are omnipresent, reluctant speakers may not be offered ample opportunities for speech practice (Illés & Akcan, 2017). Furthermore, Heathfield (2016) claims that discourse is scripted in most EFL classrooms, which is seldom the case in authentic applications of a foreign language. Additionally, Bygate (2001, p. 16) emphasises that speaking in a second language demands the development of a particular type of communication skill because speakers need to decide on their message and communicate it immediately without reflection or correction. Oral

communication skills have to be practised through suitable methods in the foreign language (Bygate, 2001) in order to achieve a higher degree of confidence when speaking the foreign language.

In descriptions of didactic challenges in the EFL classroom, hesitant or inhibited speakers are commonly mentioned. Many speakers are more reluctant in their foreign language than in their mother tongue, termed "foreign language anxiety" (FLA) and "foreign language classroom anxiety" (FLCA) by scholars (Horwitz et al., 1986). This anxiety has been regarded as a situation-specific anxiety, hence the classroom reference:

> Not only is it intuitive to many people that anxiety negatively influences language learning, it is logical because anxiety has been found to interfere with many types of learning and has been one of the most highly examined variables in all of psychology and education. (Horwitz, 2001, p. 113)

Swain (2000) explains that FLA may be part of the language learning process of exploration in which learners need to produce linguistic form and meaning to discover which language output they have mastered and which they lack. Improvisation author Johnstone (1981, p. 77) emphasises that most children can operate in a creative way before reaching the age of 12, "when they suddenly lose their spontaneity". His observation is interesting in the light of the common occurrence of reluctant speakers among adolescent EFL learners according to didactic experts (Ahlquist, 2011; Harmer, 2015; Ur, 2009).

Language anxiety is essentially the only emotion which has been thoroughly researched in FLL (MacIntyre et al., 2019). Anxiety has been widely studied because of its debilitating effect on FLL performance (Dewaele, 2013; Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz, 2010). Such communicative anxiety refers to FL learners who "freeze and block when having to start a conversation, are very sensitive to error correction, avoid participating and generally adopt passive language learning attitudes" (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017, p. 207). Schumann (2001) explains that feelings arise as a combined result of the experience of

the present situation and images from earlier experiences. Horwitz et al. (1986) state that foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) is a *situation-specific anxiety*, whereas Dewaele (2013) finds a significant link between *anxiety as a personality trait* and FLCA. Consequently, Dewaele (2022a) regards FLCA as relating more to learner-internal variables whereas Gardner and MacIntyre (1992) categorised language learner traits into 1) cognitive traits (intelligence, aptitude and strategies) and 2) affective traits (motivation, self-confidence and anxiety).

Horwitz et al. (1986) suggest that teachers can either help anxious learners to cope with stressful situations or make learning contexts less stressful. This is an important matter for the EFL classroom. When inhibited learners do not engage actively in EFL speaking activities, it becomes self-enforcing because learners should be more orally productive to develop their speaking skills (Savaşçı, 2014).

Young (1991, p. 427) has a broad view on language anxiety and attributes language anxiety to six sources:

1) personal and interpersonal anxieties;
2) learner beliefs about language learning;
3) instructor beliefs about language teaching;
4) instructor-learner interactions;
5) classroom procedures;
6) language testing.

The first category includes social anxiety which despite not being specific to EFL classrooms, will affect FLL. FL learners who undergo avoidable levels of anxiety experience negative emotions and stress (Young, 1991) which will influence their learner belief. The English teacher should strive to alleviate stress and create a positive classroom atmosphere through avoiding anxiety provoking classroom procedures such as speaking in front of the whole class, Young advises. The EFL teacher plays an essential role in alleviating FLA.

2.1.6 Oral Communication and Willingness to Communicate.

Alongside FLA/FLCA research, the concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) was extended to relating to the attitude to speaking a second language (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The original WTC construct by McCroskey and Baer (1985) does not concern FLL and measured whether a person is willing to communicate in a particular interpersonal exchange such as public speaking or talking in small groups. Situational constraints influence WTC, however, and contexts were found to be less influential on WTC than a trait-like predisposition to speak (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). MacIntyre et. al. (1998) redefined WTC as "the readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (1998, p. 547). In their pyramid model, MacIntyre et al. (1998) possible impacts on WTC are illustrated, such as communication behaviour, situated antecedents, and affective-cognitive context. Clear predictors of WTC include communication anxiety, perceived communicative competence and FL mastery (Clément et al., 2003; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018). MacIntyre and colleagues (1998) conclude that a FL learner's wish to connect with L2 speakers, and to be part of their L2 culture, "has a powerful influence on their language learning and communication behaviour" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 551). Although FLCA, reluctant speakers, and WTC relate to apprehension around speaking a foreign language, WTC typically concerns L2 issues such as ethnic identity, affiliation with L2 and the frequency of contact between minority and majority groups. An example can be found in intergroup attitudes in the WTC model (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Learners may feel their linguistic and cultural heritage is threatened and resist speaking the L2 out of fear for assimilation into a majority group. The EFL learners in this project do not fall into this second language category, as also explained in section 2.1.2. Consequently, WTC is not regarded as central in the theoretical framework for the project although some similarities between the WTC construct and reluctant speaker focus in the project are acknowledged.

2.1.7 Positive Psychology in Foreign Language Learning.

The role of emotions in language learning has examined more in recent decades (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2020). In a meta-analysis study (Botes et al., 2020), emotions were found to have a significant effect on foreign language performance among students, confirming the negative association between FLCA and academic achievement in foreign language courses. Research on affective variables has for a long time been preoccupied with FL learners' negative emotions (Dewaele et al., 2018). The possibly potent effects of positive emotions have not been excessively studied in L2 learning (Macintyre & Gregersen, 2012). Although FLCA and foreign language enjoyment (FLE) complement each other, lower FLCA does not necessarily indicate higher FLE (Dewaele, 2022a). After decades of focus on negative emotions, there has been a shift in research focus regarding FLL.

In the last two decades, more attention has been devoted to the role of positive psychology in FL learning (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2015). The lens of positive psychology has added new perspectives on affect and emotions in language learning. Although the field of psychology itself is commonly known for its focus on problems (MacIntyre et al., 2019), researchers such as MacIntyre, Mercer, Gregersen and Dewaele have studied positive attitudes in the FL classroom extensively. It has been proven that the amount of speech by the teacher and the learners contributes towards FLE, which will in turn contribute to developing conversational skills (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018). Moreover, pupils' positive emotions and FLE are strongly linked to teacher characteristics and teacher behaviour (Dewaele et al., 2019) which could be linked to Young's sources (see 2.1.5). MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) state that positive emotion is known to broaden a learner's perspective whereas negative emotion tends to narrow a learner's perspective. They suggest further that positive emotion enables FL absorption while negative emotion limits the extent of possible FL input. Scholars nowadays advocate that teachers should rather focus on FL confidence (Williams et al., 2015) and FLE (Dewaele et al., 2018). Although the project is not

centrally positioned in the field of applied linguistics, some may see connections to these recent developments around FLCA and FLE.

2.1.8 Oral Communication and Speaking Confidence.

The significance of English as a global language does not mean that learners will automatically experience positive emotions in EFL education (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2022). Matsuda and Gobel (2004) emphasise the importance of furthering students' self-confidence in EFL classrooms. They conclude that self-confidence could be developed by encouraging student involvement in classroom activities, and by creating a comfortable atmosphere through, for example, games and role plays. FL teachers are strongly advised to focus on learners' enthusiasm and enjoyment while creating a friendly low-anxiety classroom atmosphere (Dewaele et al., 2018). Speaking confidence plays an important role in EFL classrooms because learners must collaboratively improvise to develop their conversational skills (Sawyer, 2001). In this research, the focus lies on spontaneous speech practice. The term "speaking confidence" was chosen in the project as a movement away from the restricting character of FLCA towards the facilitative character of improvisation as a method for oral communication.

Brooks (2013) argues for a reappraisal of pre-performance anxiety as excitement because anxiety influences self-confidence negatively. In her study (Brooks, 2013), participants' performances (in public speaking and singing) improved after reappraising anxiety as excitement before performance. Brooks concluded that regarding anxiety as excitement created an opportunity mindset instead of a rather debilitating mindset caused by anxiety. This changed attitude towards anxious emotions may relate to the growth mindset in which learners' perceptions of their abilities are key to their success (Dweck, 2017).

2.1.9 Teaching English Oral Communication in Norway.

In this section, I will touch upon main issues regarding oral communication within the school subject English. Since 2006, Norway has had a national comprehensive

curriculum covering the primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education called “Knowledge Promotion” (Skulstad, 2020b). Besides regarding learning as an individual, reflective process, the most recent version of this national curriculum, LK20, emphasises the principle of interaction, a core value of a social-constructivist view of learning (Fenner, 2020).

The subject English is the only compulsory foreign language in grades 1–11 and is an optional subject in the final two years of secondary education. In the national curriculum of 2006, called Knowledge Promotion, the topic oral communication was introduced as a separate area, distinguishing between prepared and spontaneous oral communication (Skulstad, 2020a). Skulstad argues that this distinction was valuable because it would ensure that the assessment for oral proficiency was not solely judged based on short, prepared oral presentations. Despite the early start to learning English, Norwegian learners may lack sufficiently advanced oral proficiency in English to meet the required English skills of their future professional lives. Norwegian companies report employees displaying insufficient English oral skills for international business (Hellekjær, 2010). In regard to English teachers, Coburn (2014) found low confidence in English teachers‘ own oral proficiency, which challenges their position as oral role models for their learners.

The Norwegian national curriculum does not prescribe any specific methodology; however, it contains obvious traits of CLT. Simensen (2018) observes that “politeness” is a recurring topic in the Norwegian curriculum, reflecting the first two points mentioned by Canale and Swain (1980); see 2.1.3). In the national curriculum, English is described as a central language subject for personal and professional communication, and a portal for personal development:

> English is an important subject when it comes to cultural understanding, communication, all-round education and identity development. The subject shall give the pupils the foundation for communicating with others, both locally and globally, regardless of cultural or linguistic background. English shall help the pupils to develop

> an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns. It shall prepare the pupils for an education and societal and working life that requires English-language competence in reading, writing and oral communication. (*National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion*, 2020)

The description above defines the purpose of the subject English with communicative competence as a central content. The language learning goals, or competence aims, in the curriculum are mostly functional or task-based using the language as a means to an end (Branden, 2006) rather than for linguistic purposes (e.g. syntax, spelling and vocabulary). As we can see from the quotation above, there are expectations towards English being the lingua franca, a language that builds bridges between global societies and its people. Learning how to communicate spontaneously should therefore be regarded as an important skill to prepare young Norwegians for their future.

It is clear that communicative competence is essential to oral skills as well. The description of oral skills in the national curriculum starts with creating meaning, a central element of CLT:

> Oral skills in English refers to creating meaning through listening, talking and engaging in conversation. This means presenting information, adapting the language to the purpose, the receiver and the situation and choosing suitable strategies. Developing oral skills in English means using the spoken language gradually more accurately and with more nuances in order to communicate on different topics in formal and informal situations with a variety of receivers with varying linguistic backgrounds. (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013)

Thus, central elements of the communicative paradigm are clearly present in the national curriculum guidelines (Skulstad, 2020a). Practising spontaneous oral communication through the creative method of improvisation could be regarded as a relevant research topic to explore within teacher education.

2.2 Drama-Based Pedagogy in Language Teaching

2.2.1 Terminology.

Drama in education has many names, such as “drama in education”, “applied drama”, “educational drama” and “dramatic inquiry” (Lee & Dawson, 2018). This project relates to the academic disciplines of FLL (especially English), general pedagogy (psychology) and drama. Terminology can vary among the disciplines. Seppänen et al. (2019) refers to a theatre-based improvisation method for his improvisation approach. Articles about improvisation being applied in different contexts use different terms for improvisation theatre and its games, for example:

Table 4 *Some Terms for Activities in Improvisation*

Terms	**Examples**
Improvisational theatrical technique	“The purpose of this article is to discuss the improvisational theatrical technique as a teaching resource that is creative, spontaneous and collaborative and can be used to improve ELL students’ language proficiency skills (oral and listening) and language competencies” (Piccoli, 2018)
Spontaneous speaking/speech activities	Activities to decrease foreign language anxiety, such as games, role plays and debates (Yalçın & İnceçay, 2014)
Theatre improvisation	A term used to distinguish it from dance and music improvisation (Vera & Crossan, 2005)
Theatre-based improvisation method	“This study examined the effects of a theatre-based improvisation method for promoting student teachers’ self-rated social interaction competence” (Seppänen et al., 2019, p. 2770)
Theatrical improvisation	“Theatrical improvisation is often used as a training technique for actors to develop their creativity and spontaneity (Poynton, 2008)” (Piccoli, 2018, p. 3)

In the table above, the pattern is to focus either on its origin (theatre and/or improvisation) or its purpose (speech). Throughout the project, I have continuously

evaluated the accuracy of the term for the improvisation in my classroom practice. Through this reflection process I developed and finally selected the most appropriate term, number 4, illustrated in this chronological overview:

Table 5 *Terms and Definitions Regarding Improvisation Activities in this Project*

Terms in chronological order	**Definitions**
1. Improvisational exercises	Theatre improvisational techniques adapted into improvisational exercises to stimulate a higher degree of confidence to speak spontaneously
2. Improvisation technique	An improvisation activity that can be used for speech practice in the English classroom
3. Dramatic improvisation	A didactic approach based on drama and improvisation
4. Improvisation activity	Drama-based approaches where learners do not follow scripts or predetermined scenarios, but experiment with language by making up words and/or actions.

From the table above, we can see that the focus of the project has slightly changed. Initially, investigating spontaneous speech exercises with their origin in theatre improvisation was central. The word *exercise* emphasises the functional focus on speech practice. Upon writing down my actual improvisation approach, I discovered the need for a more precise description of my teaching practice. Having relied on my practical and professional knowledge and competence before, I had never needed to write detailed instructions for the improvisation activities before. Over the years, I had internalised my practical knowledge.

The research project forced me to specify exactly, step by step, what the oral instructions were, as well as to specify the organisation of the classroom in detail. When the trial of the improvisation activities in the participants' school practice was added to the project design, another round of perfecting the instructions was necessary. This round of instruction revisions challenged me to consider how non-improvisers such as the participants could be helped to teach improvisation activities

for spontaneous speech practice. Paradoxically, though improvisation itself is typically unprepared, preparation for an improvisation session needs to be thorough, as Maples points out:

> Although a certain amount of spontaneity is required in improvisation, the teacher must plan and organise improvisational activities in a purposeful way for them to work effectively in the classroom. (Maples, 2007)

In the pilot project, the term "dramatic improvisation" was useful when distinguishing between music- and drama-based improvisation (Waade & Zondag, 2018). Moreover, it distinguishes the improvisation approach from performative improvisation with an external audience. While theatre generally refers to work targeted at a performance, drama refers to a non-performative process (Lee & Dawson, 2018). The phrase "dramatic improvisation" was abandoned at a later stage because it is commonly used for more emotional, often long-form narrative improvisation performances. Moreover, the project aims to engage English student teachers in a cycle of experience, action, and reflection as knowledge contributors. This insight was further developed when a participant argued for the use of the learner-centred term "activity" for the improvisation approach:

> So… that, I think it's very nice for pupils, to hear that «you can take on the role», because then it will be much easier for them to let go a little. And… yes, just focus more on the task than on, or just on the activity as a fun activity instead of the activity as a task. [okay] Then it does more for the pupils - for pupils, most pupils, dislike the word *task* because then they think of homework and home assignments and such. [ah] But when it becomes a fun activity then it becomes more… yes, "so we get to have fun, it's free play now?", then it is allowed to play a little and have fun, but well, they are still learning from it. (P304, interview transcript)

This reflection resonated with me, and the final term became improvisation activities. The improvisation activities are characterised by the unpredictable character of improvisation, often through an element of mystery or game. The second noun in

"improvisation activity" emphasises that the purpose of the approach is to activate and engage learners to speak spontaneously. The development of the term is an example of how practical improvisation knowledge has materialised into professional didactic knowledge through the intensity of examining my classroom practice, and how participants contributed to that process.

2.2.2 Drama and Improvisation.

Theatre may be described as covering the basic human need to understand and convey the world through symbolic form (Neelands & Goode, 2015). Neelands and Goode explain that theatre has traditionally been defined as a narrative art form, where the development of the storyline engages the audience to keep on watching. While theatre is typically product oriented where people work towards a staged performance for an external audience (Lee & Dawson, 2018), drama is the enactment of a written script, bringing a text to life through acting it out (Manuel, 2008). In improvisation,[2] however, learners experiment with language, rather than reproducing a scripted speech as in regular drama activities (Galante & Thomson, 2017). This project adheres to Stinson's definition of improvisation as a drama-based approach during which "players do not use a script or fully predetermined scenario, but make up words and/or action" (Stinson, 2008, p. 206). The improvisation used in the project contains full improvisation (unscripted without pre-established characters) and improvised role play (unscripted with semi-established characters). Improvisation and role play involve spontaneous interactions and often simulate real-life events (Winston & Stinson, 2011), creating a semi-authentic learning environment.

Improvisation originates from drama and theatre. Although it probably existed before, the medieval Commedia Dell'Arte laid the foundation for the art form with its established characters and an overall plot structure, called "scenario" (Sawyer, 2004). Since the 1950s, improvisation has grown extensively as a training and performance

[2] The reader may also be familiar with the abbreviations: American/Canadian abbreviation is "improv" whereas the British English abbreviation is "impro" based on the different pronunciations.

method, whereby improvisers collaborate to create most of the dialogue, story, and characters during the performance (Holdhus et al., 2016; Sawyer, 2015).

> Central in improvisational theatre is the communicative action of give and take and the importance of accepting the offers and actions made by the other performers as well as the audience. (Holdhus et al., 2016, p. 7)

There are many schools of improvisational theatre but there is no consensus as to where modern improvisation originated (Salinsky & Frances-White, 2017). The two leading pioneers in improvisational theatre are Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone, who independently developed improvisation styles and theories (Seppänen et al., 2019). Spolin and Johnstone's pedagogical approaches contain games and exercises to advance spontaneous, collaborative creation (Rossing & Hoffmann- Longtin, 2016).

Spolin (1983, 1986) originally developed her improvisation method to promote social interaction through the dramatic use of games that foster intuition and spontaneity (McKnight & Scruggs, 2008). She was an actor by training and an educator who developed improvisation games for children. Spolin regarded improvisation as a rehearsal and training method (Salinsky & Frances-White, 2017). According to Frost and Yarrow (1990), Spolin's book *Improvisation for the Theatre* (1983) was the first attempt to teach improvisational acting. In this book, Spolin stated that improvisation means being open to contact with the environment and other people, and showing a readiness to play:

> The ability to create a situation imaginatively and to play a role in it is a tremendous experience, a sort of vacation from one's everyday self and the routine of everyday living. (Spolin, 1983, p. 41)

Spolin started her community theatre work in the late 1930s and her improvisation theatre was not performative. When she asked for a suggestion from the spectators in one display of her methods, Spolin's example became an established ritual that was followed by improvisers for decades to come (Salinsky & Frances-White, 2017).

Johnstone, on the other hand, was a British playwright and teacher who focused on storytelling and relationships (Johnstone, 1981, 1999; Spolin, 1983, 1986). Johnstone originally devised improvisation games to facilitate the creation of narrative material for the theatre, thereby inventing a competitive improvisation form. His improvisation philosophy focuses on storytelling, characters and their relationships. The interaction taking place is a shift in the relational balance between the improvisers, also known as his concept of "status shift" (Johnstone, 1999). Johnstone was the inventor of Theatresports™, a short-form theatre improvisation based on a competition in which improvisers are supposed to make the other improvisers look good.

Through the twentieth century, improvisation developed from a drama tool into an art form of its own merit (Veine, 2006). Improvisation theatre can be described as theatre created in the moment, in which improvisers collaborate to create most of the dialogue, story and characters during the performance (Holdhus et al., 2016; Sawyer, 2015). Improvisation in the theatre is also defined as "the playing of dramatic scenes without written dialogue and with minimal to no predetermined dramatic activity"("Encyclopedia Brittanica," n.d.). Sawyer (2006) emphasises that the performance is collectively created by improvisers in front of an audience. Although improvisation theatre can create comedy or drama, improv comedy seems to dominate (Salinsky & Frances-White, 2017). Across the globe professional companies have developed different styles and established improvisation theatres that offer courses and performances, e.g. the former Second City theatre and ImprovOlympic in Chicago, USA, and Johnstone's Loose Moose in Calgary, Canada. Improvisation theatre in Norway is mostly known and used as a training method for actors (Veine, 2006).

The audience of an improvisation performance expects improvisational theatre to be fully improvised. Even though there is unpredictability, improvisers have often practised the improvisational techniques to master the procedures and routines for improvisation performances such as the Harold, Theatresports™ and

Micetro/Maestro™ (Salinsky & Frances-White, 2017). These routines act as a type of structure or scaffold to be filled with content during the performance, partly through input from the audience (Sawyer, 2004). Improvisation groups will often train in genres, characterisation and narrative techniques to construct a compelling collaborative story (Rossing & Hoffmann- Longtin, 2016). Groups will train in team collaboration because improvisation is a form of communication where participants must listen to each other and take responsibility for the development of the actions together (Morken, 2003).

Neither Spolin nor Johnstone's improvisation methods have rules. Nevertheless, Johnstone's Impro and Spolin's Improvisation for the Theatre contain rules for games. Spolin's game rules encouraged collaboration between improvisers who were together challenged by the game rules. Through these rules Johnstone and Spolin imposed some restrictions on a game structure and thus created experiential learning for improvisers (Stiles, 2021). According to Stiles, Johnstone applied such rules to remove the improvisers' fear of failure, so improvisers could blame the game rules if the scene went wrong. This fear is described as the universal fear of being looked at (Johnstone, 2007; Salinsky & Frances-White, 2017). They explain that young children innate love of play and have a curiosity for anything new; consequently, they want to participate as much as possible. Adults rather sit on the fence until they believe they can succeed: "Children want lots of goes, but adults want one perfect go" (Salinsky & Frances-White, 2017, p. 33). In their perception, which Johnstone shared, education should take responsibility for creating anxious adults with its focus on the right answer. Playful exploration has been curbed.

Stiles (2021) observes that there is growing concern among professional improvisers about rules for improvisation. Improvisation itself should not have rules that dictate the freedom of play and limit the improvisers' imagination, she states. One can wonder how improvisation as an art form could abide by rules (Bennett, 2019). Many improvisers prefer to talk about guidelines for improvisation rather than

principles, to expand the improviser's understanding (Salinsky & Frances-White, 2017; Stiles, 2021). Rossing and Hoffmann-Longtin (2016) reject strict rules for applied improvisation as well, advocating guiding principles and mindsets. This project has brought forth central improvisation principles, which will be presented at the end of the next section.

2.2.3 Drama and Improvisation in TEFL.

Drama-based pedagogy supports the development of oral FL proficiency according to several studies, see Floare Bora (2021) for an overview. The application of drama in FLL is not a new approach and drama-based activities are found in many FLL textbooks (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Maley and Duff's (1982) book has been influential in drama for language teachers. Of course, many typical drama activities are less suitable to apply in the cramped spatial conditions of EFL rooms full of furniture (Giebert, 2018; Privas-Bréauté, 2019). Furthermore, drama and improvisation formats must be adapted to the FLL context to suit the purpose of EFL lessons. Winston and Stinson (2011, pp. 2-3) divide drama methodologies into three categories:

1. Text interpretation and performance: drawing on performance skills and emphasising communication through characterisation and vocal and physical dexterity.
2. Improvisations and role plays: spontaneous, active interactions that often simulate real-life events.
3. Process dramas: use both but with a dramatic coherent frame.

This project applies improvisation and is based on the second category. Drama as an overarching discipline has been well established as beneficial for FLL because dialogue is essential in drama (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Since the prevalence of communicative language teaching, drama-based methodology has been an essential part of FL teaching (Giebert, 2014), yet drama competence is not mandatory for EFL teachers. Drama-based pedagogy includes strategies for the development of FL fluency,

pronunciation, syntactic complexity, and a reduction of speaking anxiety (Floare Bora, 2021; Galante, 2018; Göksel, 2019; Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013).

Drama-based pedagogy can make FLL processes more active, exciting, communicative, and contextual (Bessadet, 2022). A dramatic fiction can be applied to contextualise FLL experiences and allows learners to "focus on meaning rather than being overly constrained by correctness" (Stinson, 2008, p. 200). Drama provides a good learning environment for FL practice:

> Drama gives students the vicarious experience of a variety of situations, attitudes, roles and worlds. When students are involved in creating and maintaining dialogues in fictional dramatic situations – the primary purpose of drama – a range of significant learnings occur. For example, in order to move the action forward, students need to activate their language knowledge so that their meaning can get through. (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 2)

Drama supports CLT's focus on meaning. Lobman and Lundquist (2007) recommend improvisation as teaching strategy for language learning, history, writing and maths. Cahnmann-Taylor and McGovern (2021) provide these tenets of improvisational theatre for effective language learning practice using drama games:

1. Be present and pay attention: the skill of listening and awareness.
2. Say "Yes, and": the skill of accepting and building on what other speakers have done/said.
3. Take risks and be ridiculous: develop comfort with taking language and physical risks.
4. Endow scenes with meaning: add who, what, where and why to the scene.

They continue to explain that a variation of these tenets can be found in most improvisation theatre classes because they help make the performance more entertaining and engaging.

Scripted role play should be applied sparingly because its controlled language practice can reduce linguistic creativity and actual interaction (Heathfield, 2007). More improvisation-based approaches can offer better FLL opportunities than scripted drama activities:

> In order to enhance target language communicative competence in systematic ways, foreign language teachers also need to be able to create windows of opportunity for flexible, creative and partially learner-regulated and improvised target language use on a regular basis. (Kurtz, 2015, p. 73)

Stiles (2021) emphasises that learning should ignite curiosity and exploration, which improvisation can support. FLL textbooks describe drama-based activities like (semi-) scripted role play, prepared presentations and simulations as popular CLT activities, but not many textbooks seem to have integrated activities for non-scripted drama activities yet (Becker & Roos, 2016).

One may wonder whether teacher education has played a role in the lack of legitimisation of drama as an integral FLL methodology since there is little empirical research into drama-based and especially improvisation methodology in tertiary foreign language education. The majority of academic texts on drama in language education discuss its implementation in primary and secondary school and/or in general language learning, not among university students (Giebert, 2014).

Studies report that university students feel that drama activities in the EFL university classroom helped them gain self-confidence in speaking and developed their spontaneity (Stern, 1980). Research with adult learners by Galante and Thomson (2017, p. 1) indicated that "drama-based instruction can lead to significantly larger gains in L2[3] English oral fluency relative to more traditional communicative EFL instruction". In the context of these research reports, classroom language activities are found to be contrived and emphasise correct language:

[3] L1 = first language; L2 = second language

> These structured exercises may not best prepare students for the fast-paced, and frequently ungrammatical, conversational skills the outside world requires. (…) speaking a language involves paralinguistic cues and features such as gestures, facial expression and non-verbal sounds. (Stinson, 2008, p. 199)

Dewaele (2022b) emphasises that learners must be taught about emotional language in the target language, i.e. how volume, pitch, dramatic pauses, facial expressions and body posture express emotions in oral communication. Drama and improvisation could be the vessel for learning the importance of paralinguistic features of language, which are important as they can radically change the meaning of the words you speak or hear.

Improvisational techniques are already present in the EFL classroom through improvised role plays. In contrast to simulation, where pupils mostly play themselves in real-life encounters (Harmer, 2007), the teacher hands out the roles in an improvised role play. Improvisation can thus increase the authenticity of social interaction by not defining the problem or task, and even the roles can be fully determined by the pupils, which provides them with agency. The emphasis of drama in EFL classrooms is on the immediacy of improvised language activities, not on the performance quality (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). An example of a recent quantitative study into improvisation is that of Blonde et al. (2021) with teenagers who either participated in improvisation classes or were in the control group. Narrative elements such as vocabulary richness and coherence were found to be enhanced for the first group, with coherence being inherently connected to acceptance and elaboration. Improvisation has also been applied for writing inspiration in university courses (for example Holm, 2010; Kreiser, 2014).

Improvisational techniques from the theatre, also called "drama or improvisation games", have often been developed for training and later evolved into entertaining performances. This element of enjoyment could be a motivational aspect for reluctant speakers. Given the fact that the games are to be performed by all learners simultaneously in the classroom, without an audience, switches the focus from

performance to communication. When taken into the EFL classroom, drama consequently shares the underlying principle behind task-based learning, which is that "authentic learner interaction, motivated engagement and purposefulness are important in making progress in language learning" (Pinter, 2015, p. 114). In authentic FL use, oral communication is usually more spontaneous and aimed at a problem to be solved (relating to task-based learning).

> Moreover, role-play exercises are usually based on real-life situations; hence the speech they require is close to genuine discourse, and provides useful practice in the kinds of language the learners may eventually need to use in similar situations outside the classroom. (Ur, 1981, p. 9)

Another aspect that supports the use of drama in education is that the classroom has changed from being teacher-fronted to learner-centred in recent decades. Improvisation is a method where the teacher is a facilitator and an observer, and pupils or students are to a greater extent self-guided within their collaboration:

> In much current second and foreign language teaching, focus is placed on the constraints that language imposes. It seems important to encourage learners to use language to expand their worlds, and to understand their new language as a tool which can serve them affectively and cognitively. Students need to see themselves as agents in an emergent process of meaning-making." (Swain et al., 2011, p. 45)

One could argue that the unpredictability in improvisation can offer an even closer parallel to authentic FL use than traditional role play. In order to experience language learning progress and to become really communicatively competent, learners must manage to use the target language spontaneously and creatively (Becker & Roos, 2016). Berk and Trieber (2009) indicated that the aspects of collaborative learning and risk taking were major instructional reasons for using improvisation in their tertiary classrooms. Of course, the context for improvisers is based on the principle of acceptance, which means that they can take risks without their actions being judged by the other improvisers, i.e. "nothing is seen as a mistake" (Vera & Crossan, 2005, p.

207). The improvisation principle of recognizing everything as an offer or story input, indicates that improvisers cannot make mistakes and that errors should be interpreted as opportunities to develop the story (Rossing & Hoffmann- Longtin, 2016). According to Livingston (Horwitz, 1996), improvisation is an art form that depends on cooperation, teamwork and trust. Through practicing accepting and elaborating fellow improvisers' offers, an environment characterised by trust frees the improvisers to play and empowers them to take risks (Rossing & Hoffmann-Longtin, 2016). Veine (2006) claims that the hardest thing to learn for theatre improvisers is that it is safe to make mistakes, which probably sounds familiar to any FL teacher.

Based on the argumentation above, some improvisational techniques, such as guessing games, seem suitable for practising spontaneous oral production because they make use of compensatory strategies. Guessing games are especially useful for EFL learners because learners receive "feedback on their linguistic and paralinguistic performance in real time" (Cahnmann-Taylor & McGovern, 2021, p. 106). The games add enjoyment and a competitive interest to the English classroom, which may engage and motivate learners. Clipson-Boyles (2012, p. 108) described the advantages of role play for teaching English as providing real context and opportunities to practise language, and to take risks with new vocabulary and constructions in an enjoyable and non-threatening situation. Both improvisational techniques and FL production expose a person to a degree of anxiety about what is to come, about the unknown:

> For many, the psychological risk arises from the spontaneity of the situation, which means they do not know what to expect. Not being in control makes many individuals quite uncomfortable. Some situations require individuals to stretch their competency base and take on new behaviours. An individual must rely on, and support, others to carry out the scene. The spontaneous nature of improvisation taxes more fully the fundamental skills of listening and communication. It demands that individuals give their full concentration and attention to the moment, rather than being preoccupied by what happened, or what could happen. (Crossan, 1998, p. 597)

Nearly every improvisation activity can teach listening and speaking (McKnight & Scruggs, 2008). Teachings from theatre improvisation can easily be transferred to lessons in oral communication because the elements used in theatre improvisation are verbal and non-verbal communication such as posture, facial expressions and pitch (Vera & Crossan, 2005).

Based on these views, one can assume that FLL has a lot in common with improvisational games from drama classes: *risk taking*, *interaction* and *collaboration*. Neither speakers nor improvisers know what communication they will receive from the interlocutor or audience/fellow improvisers (Vera & Crossan, 2005). Consequently, speakers and improvisers must develop their communicative competence to fluently interact with, and collaborate about, manifold topics in various contexts. During the project, it has become clear that although there are several schools and approaches in theatre improvisation, they contain similar concepts for the facilitation of improvisation training and performance. The central improvisation principles (CIPs) I have formulated in this project are therefore as follows:

1. **Acceptance and elaboration (so-called "Yes, and"):** accepting whatever happens, including mistakes. Verbal and non-verbal cues are referred to as "offers" (Johnstone, 1981). Offers must be accepted without judgement and elaborated upon to establish communicative interaction and move the story forward (Johnstone, 1981; Spolin, 1983). This principle is central to the storytelling aspects of improvisation.

2. **Risk taking and spontaneity:** reacting to any situation without planning or censoring one's own ideas to allow spontaneity to arise (Johnstone, 1981). Spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom when improvisers are faced with a fictional reality, explore it and react without self-judgement (Spolin, 1983). This principle is central to the dramatic aspects of improvisation.

3. **Relations and status:** verbal and non-verbal communication expressing the relation or social position of an improviser towards other improvisers in a scene (Johnstone, 1981). All sounds or movements (such as posture and eye contact) signal the type of relationship to the other improvisers. This principle is central to collaborative aspects of improvisation.

4. **Attentive listening:** listening actively by being absolutely present in the situation, supporting other improvisers and attending to everything in the moment (Johnstone, 1981; Spolin, 1983; Vera & Crossan, 2005). This mode is a separate principle and supports other CIPs.

According to Winston and Stinson (2011), the application of drama in EFL is a growing field of research. There are many advantages to bringing drama into FLL classrooms, such as the embodiment of language learning:

> One of the key advantages that drama pedagogy can bring to the language classroom is its recognition of the centrality of the body in the learning process. Classrooms on the whole are still places founded on the Cartesian idea that the brain and the body are two distinct entities; that the brain is the site of learning and that the body gets in the way of this by being prone to fidgeting, doodling, getting tired and wanting to go to the toilet. Drama, on the other hand, seeks to channel and liberate the body's energies through play-learning – it foregrounds the communicative potential of bodies through their uses of non-verbal or "paralinguistic" signs. Gestures, facial expressions, body language – how I sit, where I stand in relation to other people, whether I have my back turned or not, whether I am crouched in a corner or standing boldly in the centre of a space – all of these communicate meaning. (Winston, 2012, p. 4)

Bygate (2001) underlines the importance of improvisation in developing oral proficiency, emphasising that creating spontaneous speech needs to be practised. According to Heathfield (2016), however, most classroom speech tends to be prepared. Suitable spontaneous speech activities could include improvisation

activities, as they can initiate language use that transcends formulaic and reproduced language (Becker & Roos, 2016).

Lobman and Lundquist (2007) state that improvisation is seldom used in American schools and that teachers lack awareness of the relationship between improvisation and learning. According to Kurtz (2011), the potential of improvisation for FLL in schools has hardly been researched systematically despite many teachers' positive experiences with applying improvisation in school, for example with pupils aged 11–13:

> Improvisational activities help students tremendously. Every year I have had students tell me how much fun they had, and I observe them change before my eyes. They are not as apprehensive about participating in class, whether it is reading aloud or doing presentations. These activities do not take up a lot of class time, yet the benefits are both social and academic. Not only can improvisation help with the social aspects of teaching, it can also bring literature alive and teach reading skills. (Maples, 2007, p. 275)

In process drama research, Piazzoli (2011) found that learners of Italian developed trust and a more supportive learning environment was established, where students could take risks and discard prior self-conscious FL attitudes. This enabled some highly anxious students to reduce their language anxiety and gain more self-confidence, which resulted in more spontaneous FL communication. Students' spontaneous communication was facilitated through a) roles, allowing them to drop their social masks and play characters with different status and registers, b) authentic contexts in a fictional reality, with interaction in natural and realistic settings, and c) dramatic tension (2011, p. 569). Drama could provide learners in language classrooms with the opportunity of opening up an affective space (Piazzoli, 2011), a mental space in which learners "become engaged emotionally with the thrill, tension or straightforward enjoyment of a developing story" (Winston, 2012, p. 3). Moreover, Stinson points out the possibility of learning through drama-based pedagogy:

> Because students move, speak and interact in roles, the cognitive, kinaesthetic and affective dimensions are harnessed to deepen and strengthen learning. (Stinson, 2008, p. 200).

The national Norwegian curriculum (LK20) emphasises deep learning as an overall purpose of education. This notion of drama-based pedagogy facilitating deep learning could be regarded as enhancing the relevance of drama-based pedagogy in the Norwegian school context. Being beyond the scope of this project, deep learning in this context will not be explored further.

2.2.4 Improvisation in Other Educational Contexts.

Berk and Trieber (2009) state that improvisation can be a powerful teaching method in university classrooms, and support their view with four main didactic arguments:

1. Improvisation is consistent with the expectations of the modern student towards an active, collaborative, social and learner-centred classroom experience.
2. Improvisation uses students' multiple and emotional intelligences for problem solving and active discovery, especially verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, bodily/kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal.
3. Improvisation encourages collaborative learning by helping to build trust, respect, listening, verbal and non-verbal communication, role playing and risk taking through spontaneous storytelling.
4. Improvisation stimulates deep learning through students' active engagement, as learner activity and interaction are inherent to improvisation activities.

These didactic arguments (referred to by number) can be related to other studies. Gallagher (2010) emphasises that in the context of learning, improvisation returns the body to its rightful state (body and mind) through its holistic approach (no. 2 and 4). Crossan (1998) discusses the psychological risk (no. 3) caused by the nature of improvisation containing spontaneity and dependence on others. Crossan explains

that the spontaneous nature of improvisation relies heavily on fundamental communication skills, thereby expecting students to dedicate their complete attention to the moment (no. 4). Collaborative language production (no. 3) is considered a central characteristic of spontaneous speech (Christie, 2016). With its focus on collaborative learning, this research could be placed within sociocultural theory, given its idea that people are essentially communicatively formed beings (Lantolf, 2007). Canale and Swain (1980) regard communication as grounded in sociocultural interpersonal interaction involving creativity and unpredictability.

In an intervention study, Seppänen et al. (2019) found that improvisation methods increased the interpersonal confidence of initially inhibited student teachers. Including improvisation methodology in teacher education curricula can improve student teachers' social interaction abilities and their teaching responses (Seppänen et al., 2019). In a follow-up study, the researchers use the term "improvisational mindset" to describe the mutual support, connection and collaboration that is developed by improvisation training (Seppänen et al., 2021). Moreover, comedy improvisation has been successfully applied by mental health professionals to treat psychological conditions such as social anxiety disorder (Phillips Sheesley et al., 2016). Participants in an improvisational theatre intervention demonstrated positive outcomes in terms of verbal productive creativity, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Schwenke et al., 2021). In a controlled experiment, middle school students who had been trained in improvisation performed better in divergent thinking and flexibility than the control group (Hainselin et al., 2018). Based on these studies, improvisation activities may help reluctant speakers practise spontaneous speech.

3 Philosophy of Science and Theoretical Underpinning

This chapter describes my ontological and epistemological stance.

3.1 Research Paradigm

Selecting a philosophical framework can be a major challenge. The researcher must make this decision based on her ontological position, what she regards as the truth. It is my belief, that the truth is created by humans, and reality is constructed in the human mind. In this project, the truth is constructed by the participants.

It may be tempting to start designing the research by selecting only from well-known methods within the field of interest. The solid connection between method and methodology to their origin in theoretical perspectives influences the research design and analysis process. The researcher must be able to choose and justify the methods that are most suitable for answering the RQs. Those choices rely on how the researcher understands knowledge (epistemology).

The responsibility of science is to produce and share knowledge and insights. To put it simply, some people have promoted thoughts and ideas that developed into theories while others have affirmed or confirmed these theories. The philosophy of science can therefore be described as the knowledge of knowledge. When there is an agreement around a set of ideas and principles, this paradigm is a way to observe reality (Thurén, 2012). These theories of ideas and principles are then referred to as science. Although there are major differences between the different scientific frameworks, such as inductive versus deductive and positivism versus naturalism, all researchers aim to make sense of their observations and findings to explain and understand our world. In a project, the researcher is expected to contribute with a morsel of her own in-depth knowledge of the studied subject, procured through the process of the project.

This process has broadened my understanding of scientific knowledge and consequently enhanced my research design. The theoretical discussion in this section is limited to its relevance to my project, which I regard as belonging to hermeneutics and constructivism. The purpose of my research is to gain knowledge about the potential of applying improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice in English. To that end, I will explore how the philosophy of science may help us to understand what qualifies as knowledge and connect that discussion to theoretical approaches that underlie my research.

3.2 Hermeneutics

In this project, a hermeneutic approach was applied with an IPA perspective when investigating the texts and transcripts for the participants' subjective experiences with spontaneous speech practice. Hermeneutics is both the interpretation itself and the study of this form of interpretation, according to Kjørup (2008). Hermeneutics appeared as a term in the seventeenth century and at that time it referred to the interpretation of Bible texts (Crotty, 1998). Although there are traces of interpretation in classic Greek texts from Plato, the blooming of hermeneutics took place later (Crotty, 1998; Kjørup, 2008). "Positivism" as a term for completely sure knowledge was popularised at Comté around 1830–1840. At the same time, another perspective, in contrast to positivism, appeared, namely hermeneutics. In the early 1800s, the German branch of hermeneutics started with Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Interpretation theory progressed from student to student, from Boeckh to Dilthey to Heidegger to Gadamer in the middle of the twentieth century. Through this development, the term "hermeneutics" has mutated from denoting a reasonably concrete interpretation theory in Schleiermacher's days to purely philosophical considerations about man as an interpreting being under Heidegger (Kjørup, 2008).

Schleiermacher is seen as the founder of modern hermeneutics (Crotty, 1998). In Crotty's definition of modern hermeneutics, what appears to be the meaning of the text depends on the common sense of humanity, and not just an abstract theorisation

of the text. Hermeneutics contains many German terms, such as “Verstehen” (understand) and “Erklären” (explain). Over the centuries, the term “hermeneutics” gradually gained significance, and in its modern meaning, hermeneutics includes the interpretation of written sources and unwritten sources such as human events and situations. Hermeneutics attempts to read these events in order to explain and understand them (Crotty, 1998). A key principle in hermeneutics is the hermeneutical circle. This principle assumes that "the part must be understood from the whole, and the whole must be understood from the parts" (Crotty, 1998, p. 92). In my interpretation, hermeneutics means that the whole text helps the researcher understand what words or phrases mean, and noticing words or phrases helps the researcher understand the meaning of the entire text. These are parallel processes. In my project, the analytical process employed an iterative circle when analysing the participants’ experiences in whole texts and investigating how the participants reflected on their experience with the spontaneous speech practice. After selecting meaningful statements, I have recurrently returned to the whole text, and in many instances increased the length of statements to better represent the context in which the statement was given. One could thus claim that there is a hermeneutic quality to the research in this project. There is an essential body of practical and professional knowledge that is at the centre of a good professional performance, which can be uncovered through a cyclical process of analysis.

3.3 Constructivism

The rise of constructionism or constructivism as an epistemological direction can be seen as a reaction to the dominance of the positivist approach from the natural sciences in the middle of the twentieth century. Constructivism holds that meaning comes into existence through one’s involvement with the diverse realities out there (Crotty, 1998). Constructivism is based on the premise that meaning is constructed when one begins to engage with the world one interprets, i.e. meaning is created in the interaction between subject and object. Different researchers may therefore

construct meaning in different manners. Constructivism informs a lot of qualitative research within the disciplines of sociology, psychology and philosophy (Flick, 2009).

Different types of constructivism have been established, where one type based on constructivism is social constructivism. Social constructivism is a philosophical direction in psychology and social sciences that states that man constructs his reality through linguistic interactions with others, i.e. where knowledge is not only created between subject and object, but where knowledge depends on the interaction between subjects (Crotty, 1998). In my project, social constructivism can be observed at two levels. First, it took place when participants collaborated during the improvisation activities. By adding content to the structure of the activity, the participants developed the language learning activity for that small group, thereby constructing a fictive, joint reality. Second, the philosophy of social constructivism can be found in the meaning making through words in the participants' oral and written reflections. The participants have reflected through writing and speaking about their experiences with doing and teaching improvisation activities. Through their engagement in these reflective processes, the participants have constructed meaning by interpreting their own experiences. Participants were informed from the beginning that their opinion was valuable, as expressed on top of the pre-questionnaire form: "I am interested in your personal opinion so there are no wrong answers."

My empirical starting point is the subjective meaning that participants attribute to the improvisation activities for the practice of spontaneous speech in English (Flick, 2009). The overall theoretical foundation for the research into improvisation activities is sociocultural theory, and it adheres to the interpretative paradigm:

> This seeks to describe and understand some aspect of teaching by identifying key variables and examining how they interrelate. The sociocultural theory of L2 learning has informed research in this paradigm. This treats learning not as something that happens as a result of instruction but rather as occurring within the interactions that instruction gives rise to. (Ellis, 2012, p. 27)

Based on this description, the approach with improvisation activities could be placed in sociocultural theory. Learning is a social activity, and people are fundamentally communicatively organised beings (Lantolf, 2007). Lantolf states that our mental and social activities are both mediated through speech. Researchers who support sociocultural theory assert that interaction is significant for second language development (Suksawas, 2011). From a sociocultural theoretical viewpoint, FLL will depend on both interaction and meaning, like didactic approaches within communicative language teaching.

Lastly, learning in the zone of proximal development enables the learner to develop through the assistance of another learner or an artefact created by other people (Lantolf, 2007). Improvisation challenges the learner to explore the risk of producing the FL in an unscripted setting, which could be regarded as a zone of proximal development, leading the learner into what he cannot yet do (Vygotsky, 1986). In my view, the three perspectives place this project in sociocultural theory and therefore constructivism.

3.4 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a theoretical perspective that was highly influential during the science evolution of the 1900s (Gustavsson, 2009). Edmund Husserl is a phenomenologist who believed knowledge starts in the pure experience of the world, "Erleben" (Husserl, 2013). This epistemology is aimed at direct experience, without constructing meaning as in constructivism or creating a collective meaning as in social constructionism, or in Husserl's words "to learn to see what stands before our eyes" (Husserl, 2013, p. 43). Another major influence on the field of descriptive phenomenology has been the work of Giorgi (1985, 2012) within psychology. His well-known and much used description of the phenomenological method with meaningful units originates in Husserl's reduction methods to create an immediacy. In this project, the immediacy of analysis is reduced by participants' meaning making – for example, through their reflections when writing the retrospective texts. The hermeneutic

phenomenological analysis provides insights into student teachers' subjective experience of improvisation activities.

Gustavsson (2009) points out that even though phenomenology started with Husserl, it has developed in diverse ways since. Contemporary phenomenology does not represent a particular concept, idea or methodology (Vagle, 2018). According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology is often applied in the social sciences and health sciences, particularly sociology, psychology and through pedagogical phenomenology in education (Van Manen, 2016). An example of a phenomenological method in L2 is a study into affect (Ibrahim, 2016). In my qualitative research, I have applied the perspective of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), an analysis that heeds the voices of the participants about their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The IPA perspective has given the thematic analysis a structure for deconstructing, segmenting, systemising, and reassembling participants' reflections. Simultaneously, phenomenology has provided a dynamic research design and allowed the researcher versatility, turning from one thing to another (see detailed methodology presentation in Chapter 4).

3.5 Practical and Professional Knowledge

Researchers in the field define the term "practical knowledge" differently even though there is some consensus. McGuirk and Methi (2015) state that it is common to describe practical knowledge as something different from theoretical knowledge. From this statement, one could infer that practical knowledge must be quite hard to describe when one must draw on an opposite. The idea is that practical knowledge takes its starting point from the concrete everyday experience of the professional. This knowledge is something a professional has, as it were, under her skin, which expresses itself through action. This definition coincides to a certain extent with the interpretation of practical knowledge by Wackerhausen (2017) as what is behind, enables and shows in the professional's practice. Svenaeus and Bornemark (2014) concur that the most common definition of practical knowledge is knowledge related

to the workplace. They challenge this restricted definition, however, by stating that in their view, practical knowledge exists in all zones of human activity whether it be at home in private life or at work in a professional context. Interestingly, in their interpretation, the body is regarded as the container for this unconscious knowledge, which challenges the common idea of knowledge being located in the brain. In Svenaeus and Bornemark's (2014) view, abilities that are closer to feelings and communication play a role in the practical knowledge of the body. Practical knowledge seems to be an embodiment, a rather holistic form of knowledge, which goes beyond ratio.

Another type of knowledge that has close connections to practical knowledge is professional knowledge. Within any profession, there is an essential body of knowledge that is at the centre of a good professional performance. This knowledge is partly acquired during the educational phase in which one gains specialist knowledge and partly during the actual practice of that profession. According to Molander and Terum (2008), professions have a theoretical basis through specific connections to tertiary education and research. Professionals apply knowledge in practice, which means the professional must connect theory and practice. Action-related knowledge that appears during the process may again influence the theoretical aspects of the profession (Molander & Terum, 2008).

3.6 Practical and Professional Knowledge in Teacher Education

In the modern world, a parent may challenge primary and secondary school teachers by expecting evidence-based pedagogical decisions and scientific approaches as the basis for their professional knowledge. Qualified teachers have of course been trained in pedagogics, including subject didactics, which has a long scientific tradition. Teacher education aims to prepare teachers for their profession, including recognising the value of practical and professional knowledge. It is known that moving from intellectual understanding of the theory to enactment in practice is a problem of teaching and teacher education (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Angelo (2016) defines

professional understanding as an analytical concept as well as a perspective to facilitate the development of knowledge. Angelo argues that teacher educators have no clear mandate:

> The field of teacher education has little formal regulation, and individuals therefore have a great ability to decide upon their own expertise and tasks, and to judge what is seen as good or poor professional practice. (Angelo, 2016, p. 109)

While the qualified teacher has a defined formal training as the starting point in her profession, teacher educators have highly varied practical and academic backgrounds, which challenges the definition of teacher educator expertise as being different from a teacher's knowledge (Angelo, 2016). Consequently, it is unclear what characterises a good teacher educator. In a literary review (Izadinia, 2014), the findings were that novice teacher educators experience considerable levels of stress and doubts about their performance in the new role of teacher educator. This resulted in challenges with establishing a teacher educator identity.

For Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), in the majority of practitioner research, the practitioner is seen as the agent and the knower. This project partially fulfils this condition. Their definition of practitioner research encompasses a wide array of different education research, such as action research, teacher research and self-study. In their interpretation, self-study refers almost exclusively to academics studying their own practice at higher educational level. According to Cochran-Smith's and Lytle's interpretation, this form of research draws on biographical, autobiographical and narrative forms of data collection, which is not the main part of the data collection in this project despite including some of my personal perspectives in this extended abstract. Therefore, I hesitate to define this project as self-study, although the self of the researcher is present throughout the whole project. The participants constructed knowledge as well as I did.

As one of the key elements in practitioner research, I have fulfilled the requirement of the dual role of teacher and researcher, i.e. the agent working from the inside. There are opportunities that arise as a result of this dual role. Essentially, the experiences of the student teachers have shown my practical and professional knowledge as a practitioner in teacher education, which could be regarded as a little step in the direction of the further research Izadinia calls for:

> Although there is a large body of literature related to the influence of factors contributing to the development of teacher educators' professional identity, little is known about how a teacher educator identity re/shapes under the influence of their relationships with student teachers. There certainly must be dynamics associated with the interaction between student teachers and teacher educators that are important to consider in achieving a thorough understanding of factors influencing teacher educator identity and its development. Further research in this area is needed to investigate the impact of the relationship between teacher educators and student teachers on teacher educators' identity formation. (Izadinia, 2014, p. 437)

Another key element of practitioner research is the idea that educational professionals have significant knowledge about their context and can generate scientific insights, together with their community, which is how one could regard student teachers. One should acknowledge, however, that being a practitioner also includes an awareness of one's own pre-understanding and expectations.

3.7 Gaining Access to Practical and Professional Knowledge

In my teaching practice, both in secondary and tertiary education, I have worked with improvisation as one of my didactic methods. Through applying my own practical knowledge of improvisation and drama to the English classroom, I aimed to provide learning opportunities in classroom environments. Due to the evanescent nature of improvisation, it has been challenging to record the events in the classroom without influencing the spontaneity in the process.

There is some similarity between improvisation and hermeneutic analysis. One of the main concepts of improvisation is being present in the moment. Only then can an improviser listen unconditionally and holistically, without any preconceived notions. She can then listen with all her senses to observe the bigger picture as well as observe the details that may create content for the story. Harvard and Wahlberg (2017, p. 33) state that "great improv scenes are based less on inventing and more on exploring. Pay attention and let your ideas and initiatives be inspired from what is already there." The improviser will try to make connections with the story that is being told while remaining present in the moment. The hermeneutic approach demands a similar analytical approach from the researcher, looking at the whole and the parts and back again. This holistic yet partial view bears resemblance to the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach and its partial-holistic text study.

3.8 Gaining Access to Student Teachers' Knowledge

In the early stages of the project, I wondered how I, as a teacher educator, can gain access to knowledge about the application of improvisation for spontaneous speech practice and grow an understanding through studying student teachers' experiences with improvisation activities in English. In the field of applied science, it is essential to discuss the importance of the professional's knowledge. Teachers gain practical knowledge throughout their career and could, during their teacher training, experience methods for accessing practical knowledge as part of their lifelong learning development. Writing reflective diaries can be a tool for teachers to uncover their own insights. In my research, student teachers participate in spontaneous and retrospective writing, as well as writing a trial log when trying improvisation in school classrooms. Through writing immediately after each improvisation session, the participants accessed their more spontaneous thoughts about their experience. Through writing the retrospective texts based on the three spontaneous diaries, they reflected on their experience as a whole and how the improvisation sessions have influenced them. This process underlines the value of accessing and developing professional and practical

knowledge through reflection. Reflections on experiences are central and critical components in teacher education programmes (Kartal, 2020). This is a key value within the teaching profession, and one would hope that the participants see the potential for their further professional development by writing and reading their first-person narratives (Erleben-Verstehen). In my research, reflection has been a recurring activity performed by the participants in written formats (diaries, retrospective texts, and trial logs), and for some in oral form (interview).

The aim of my research is to explore how improvisation activities can facilitate spontaneous English speech practice and the development of speaking confidence. Applying a phenomenological perspective to a thematic analysis, I chose meaningful descriptions in the data that convey the subjective experiences of student teachers involved in the improvisation activities. One could say that the project uses a bottom-up approach within teacher education, in which student teachers contribute to the development of didactic knowledge at the university as part of the learning community. The participants actively constructed knowledge about the improvisation activities. Through the phenomenological stance that participants control the degree of access to their own experiences, knowledge organises experiences:

> Experiences are structured and understood through concepts and contexts, which are constructed by this subject. Whether the picture that is formed in this way is true or not cannot be determined.
> (Flick, 2009, pp. 70-71)

Throughout the research, an accepting view of what participants had to offer was part of a non-judgemental approach which is in line with my epistemological stance. Gadamer et al. (2012) emphasise that understanding (Husserl's Verstehen) can never be completely free from prejudice, but the phenomenological approach excludes judgement of the phenomena and their actual existence (Snævarr, 2017). Rather than focusing on differences, the research focus was on common ground in student teachers' experiences as a group.

In this project, I chose Smith et al.'s interpretative phenomenological analysis (2009) as a perspective for the thematic analysis. This choice has enabled me to make sense of my teaching practice together with the most important people in the university classroom, namely student teachers. The participants' subjective reflections were accepted as the knowledge base for the research.

4 Methodology

The fourth chapter describes the various elements of the methodology in the project. An initial pilot study informed the project design, and the pilot study as well as the final project design will be described. Then the teaching procedures at university will be presented. Furthermore, the data collection will be explained. Finally, limitations and ethical considerations will round off this chapter.

4.1 Pilot Study

The project originated from an exploration of applying improvisation in my English classes. This pilot study was included in a peer-reviewed textbook chapter called "Improvisation in music and English education" (Waade & Zondag, 2018), which will be briefly described below. In this section, the term *students* will be used to clearly distinguish these pilot participants from student teachers in the PhD project.

4.1.1 The Pilot Study: Research.

Based on my competence as an improvisation instructor, I selected improvisation theatre games that I thought could provide good language practice. After adapting these games into improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice in the English classroom, the improvisation activities were tried out in a TEFL class. The pilot was held with 15 pre-service English first-year students in spring 2017. Based on feedback from the students in the pilot, some activities were adjusted for the PhD project, and two activities, the Ad Game and Take That Back, were eliminated.

Students filmed improvisation activities with handheld iPads supplied by the researcher. By filming the footage themselves, the students were active data collectors. Filming provided a useful outer perspective for the students to reflect upon improvisation activities, however, the sound quality was poor. The procedures around writing learning diaries as a base for a retrospective text were tried out. These experiences improved the later data collection in the PhD project.

The quality of the questionnaire design in the main project was enhanced by the experiences from the pilot project. Before the first and after the last improvisation session the students filled in a pre- and post-questionnaire. The questionnaire contained items covering, for example, the students' perceived anxiety and self-confidence, and self-assessment of language proficiency. For each item, the students were requested to visually express their assessment and feelings by placing a cross on a visual analogue scale (VAS), a horizontal line of 10 centimetres. This scale is commonly used to express a degree of pain or satisfaction. In addition, students wrote a retrospective text based on learning diaries, in which enjoyment of improvisation activities was a key experience. Students mentioned that improvisation activities were motivational and that they had learned something from the improvisation activities. The results of the pre- and post-questionnaire showed a significant improvement ($p = 0.02$) in their reported language level. Together with the retrospective texts, this finding gave an indication of the assumption that improvisation was a good method to facilitate spontaneous speech practice. Several students reported that they found it difficult to express their feelings on the VAS scale with this type of measurement because the horizontal line did not represent a clear value to them. The feedback from the pilot led to replacing the VAS with a six-item Likert scale.

As a further test of the teaching procedure, the revised improvisation activities were tried by a group of lower secondary teachers during a professional development day. Afterwards they provided feedback on the experience with the improvisation activities through direct oral responses and on anonymous post-it notes. They were asked for their informal view on the relevance of the improvisation approach for grades 8 to 10. Many teachers expressed an interest in the instructions for the improvisation activities in order to implement the activities in their own classes. Based on the pilots and the test of the teaching procedure (pre-service student teachers and secondary teachers), three improvisation sessions were adapted and taught to student teachers as an integrated part of TEFL courses.

4.1.2 The Pilot Study: Dissemination.

The implementation of improvisation in teacher education was explored before the main project and resulted in an anthology chapter. The chapter "Improvisation in Music and English Education" is part of an anthology about engaging learners. In the chapter, the potential of applying improvisation in teacher education is explored within two subjects, music and English. Through writing the chapter we attempted to define and position the concept of improvisation within teacher education. As authors, we discussed and compared the position of improvisation in our fields, and in the national curriculum for primary and secondary education. In contrast to music, the term "improvisation" does not literally appear in the current English subject curriculum for grades 5 to 10 (*National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion*, 2020). However, following Sawyer's views (2001) on improvisation and speaking skills, my position was that conversational skills include the development of improvised speech. We discussed the performance aspect of improvisation and learning as well. Language learning strategies have strong parallels with improvisation techniques: both are approaches to manage the unpredictability of spontaneous speech and improvisation, i.e. cooperation, interaction and taking risk. Finally, we discussed common challenges with adolescent reluctant speakers who limit their own and the classroom practice of oral language proficiency.

In the anthology chapter we considered whether all students could take performance risks in the safety of the university classroom or whether this ability might be tied to their personality. From a didactic point of view, we were prone to interpret this risk avoidance as a situational aspect. This led to the position that teacher educators could influence this avoidance behaviour by creating a safe classroom atmosphere and motivating students to believe enough in themselves to take the risk.

4.2 Project Design

Contemporary qualitative research is pluralistic and consists of many research philosophical methodologies and frameworks (Wertz et al., 2011). The project consists

of quantitative and qualitative research, which could be considered a mixed methods approach:

Table 6 *Overview of Locations and Methods in the Project*

	Locations	**Quantitative**	**Qualitative**
Article 1	University	X	X
Article 2	University		X
Article 3	Schools		X
Article 4	University and schools		X

Only in the first article, the research question was answered by a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The research took place in two locations with the student teachers as the researchers in the schools. During their practice, they made their observations based on the guidance in the trial logs (see Appendices) and gathered the research data.

4.2.1 Participants and their Contexts.

The project was based on the researcher's teaching of TEFL courses in line with practitioner's research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This means that the participants were selected as a convenience sample and in a non-representative manner, i.e., not representing a wider population. According to Ellis (2012), most classroom-based studies are not true experiments because 'logistical considerations generally require the use of intact classes, so random assignment of participants to groups is not possible' (Ellis, 2012, p. 34). In this project, improvisation activities were taught to all student teachers of English for grades 5 to 10 in the five courses and all student teachers in these courses were invited to participate. There was no control group as one may expect in experimental studies. Ellis (2012) resorts to the term quasi-experimental for many classroom studies with experimental elements which may apply to the current project.

In total, 65 out of 80 student teachers who were taught improvisation activities volunteered to participate (81% participation rate). Data were collected at the

beginning of the academic years, in the autumns of 2017 and 2018. Participants and data were anonymised. Each course was assigned a serial number (e.g. P100s, P500s) without any relevance to their study year (for example, first- or second-year students). Student teachers were then randomly assigned a participant number within the serial number for their course (e.g. P101, P513). It was deemed important to distinguish between the courses, for example pre- versus in-service student teachers. In the overall project, 52 pre-service and 13 in-service student teachers from TEFL courses, meaning English didactics courses, participated:

Table 7 *Division of Participating Student Teachers*

No.	Groups	Year	Pre-service	In-service
1	P100s (n = 16)	2017	16	
2	P200s (n = 13)	2017	13	
3	P300s (n = 8)	2018	8	
4	P400s (n = 13)	2018		13
5	P500s (n = 15)	2018	15	
SUM			**52**	**13**

The student teachers trained to teach English in grades 5 to 10 (pupils aged 10–16). Most student teachers took pre-service courses and consisted of full-time student teachers in their first, second and fourth year (mean age of 22 years). The in-service, i.e. part-time, student teachers were primary and lower secondary education teachers (mean age of 38 years) with an average of 11 years of teaching experience. In the original project plan, a comparison for age was one of the research interests. The 2018 in-service course was however cancelled due to a low number of enrolled students, which left the project with one group of in-service student teachers. Instead of a comparative study, the pre- versus in-service distinction was included in the articles when relevant.

In the project smaller samples were used as well. For the first article, only the retrospective texts from 2017 participants (P100s and P200s) were included in the qualitative group analysis. In two TEFL courses (2017 and 2018), student teachers from

P200s and P300s had school practicums. Nineteen student teachers (83% of student teachers in the two courses) volunteered to participate in the study. They performed the trial with the improvisation activities in their classrooms, see 4.3.3. In the autumn of 2018, 12 student teachers from two courses were invited to individual interviews after the improvisation sessions were concluded. Eleven student teachers participated in the interview. The initial intention was to identify and invite the reluctant speakers only as case sampling. Defining an absolute threshold for the reluctant speaker would demand a thorough personal investigation before the research onset, which may have influenced student teachers' own perceptions as speakers of spontaneous English. This individual focus might have influenced the findings and was not considered a good sampling strategy for the interviews. Instead, I decided to identify the most reluctant speakers based on their self-report in the pre-questionnaires. It was surprising to find that none of the 2018 student teachers scored solely on the outer values, i.e. 'strongly agree/strongly disagree', for the most relevant statements regarding speaking confidence, i.e. 7, 13, 14, 17 (fear and safety) and 9, 12, 16, 18 (confidence). This finding gave a different signal than the student teachers' answers to the open question about which physical reactions they experience during holding a prepared presentation (pre-questionnaire). To illustrate, student teachers in general mentioned, for example, their hearts beating faster, feeling tense and stressed, having sweaty palms, shaking, and blushing.

If the sampling threshold was based on the values 'disagree/agree' on the pre-questionnaires, however, two student teachers could be identified as reluctant speakers. In the retrospective texts, four other speakers described themselves as too shy, self-conscious and/or inhibited to speak, but they did not score solely on the outer two values for the pre-questionnaire statements. The notion of interviewing only the six reluctant speakers was abandoned because it might cause social ramifications when case sampling implied a focus on the most self-conscious speakers in the classroom. Instead, the interviewing sample became 2018 student teachers (n=12) that had been present during three improvisation sessions and handed in all written reflections. This

sample included the six most reluctant speakers. Only the data from the reluctant speakers have been analysed and included in the project, see article 2.

The written consent form emphasised that participation was voluntary. The form indicated that student teachers' reflections produced the knowledge base for the research. The improvisation sessions took place at the beginning of the courses. Consent forms were collected but only registered after improvisation sessions ended, to minimise influencing the teaching practice at university. The terms "student teachers" (learners in university classrooms) and "pupils" (learners in schools) will be respectively used.[4]

According to the course plans, student teachers were expected to have adequate English language proficiency to enrol in the courses. Following Clément et al.'s definition of self-confidence in FLL (2003), student teachers assessed their perceived English language proficiency and self-confidence in the questionnaires. In the next section, the project will be placed in its pedagogical context.

4.2.2 Research Methods.

Predominantly qualitative methods have been applied. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009) has been the main perspective for examining the qualitative data. The quantitative approach is part of the first article in which a pre- and post-questionnaire were used alongside a qualitative approach for the retrospective texts (see Appendices). The quantitative approach provided an initial impression of foreign language anxiety (FLA) and speaking confidence before and after the improvisation sessions were taught. In the questionnaires, student teachers expressed their perspectives on their speaking confidence and oral proficiency before and after experiencing improvisation activities. The comparison of the pre- and post-questionnaire was one of the two research methods for gathering information for RQ1 as to whether improvisation activities can influence speaking confidence. Through

[4] In articles 1 and 2 the term «participants» was used.

comparing the findings from the questionnaires with the theme of *confidence* from the sample of retrospective texts, RQ1 could be answered. The research design has gone through developmental stages from pilot study and initial design to actual data collection and further executions of the project (see Tables 8 and 9). Part of this process was deciding not to analyse all data that were gathered during the project – for example, the answers to all open questions on pre-questionnaires, the learning diary instalments, and interviews with non-reluctant speakers.

In the majority of the project, thematic analysis with a phenomenological perspective has been applied. All articles contribute to answering the main RQ, which is how improvisation activities can facilitate spontaneous English speech practice and the development of speaking confidence. On the one hand, the project could be regarded as a mixed-method study. The project combines qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the main research question of how improvisation activities can facilitate spontaneous English speech practice and the development of speaking confidence. The question is whether the quantitative method is integrated enough for the project to be regarded a mixed methods research project. On the other hand, the research design could be considered a qualitatively-driven mixed methods project despite the fact that one group of participants (P500s) solely participated in the questionnaires.

The project satisfies most of the characteristics that Creswell (2013) identifies for qualitative research: 1) it takes place in a natural setting (regular classroom in a regular course), and 2) the researcher is the key instrument for gathering data using multiple methods, focusing on student teachers' meanings through 3) an emergent design. Although the researcher was the key instrument for data collection, the student teachers gathered data during trials. A composite description of the essence of the student teachers' experiences was presented in the articles, thereby sharing the findings in a transparent manner (Creswell, 2013). The project contained the following phases:

Table 8 *Phases of the Project*

Phases	Descriptions
Introduction to the research	The student teachers were given written and oral information about the project. Pre-questionnaires were handed out and collected.
Improvisation session 1	Student teachers performed improvisation activities. Then they were given time to write a learning diary about their experience.
Improvisation session 2	Student teachers performed improvisation activities. Then they were given time to write a learning diary about their experience.
Improvisation session 3	Student teachers performed improvisation activities. They filled in the post-questionnaires. Then they were given time to write a learning diary about their experience.
Retrospective texts	Student teachers were requested to hand in retrospective texts based on their learning diaries and reflections on the overall experience with improvisation activities.
Interviews	Student teachers were invited to interviews to reflect on their experiences with improvisation activities.
Trials	Student teachers tried out improvisation activities in school practicums and wrote trial logs before, during and after trying improvisation activities.

The phases were always performed in the same order even though not all participants participated in all phases such as interviews and trials (see Table 9). The initial project design included focus interviews, which were altered to individual interviews to enable personal accounts. Some improvisation activities were filmed in the university classrooms. The purpose of filming the student teachers was to provide reflection prompts before writing retrospective texts and when being interviewed. This footage has not been used as empirical data for the articles (see 4.4.2).

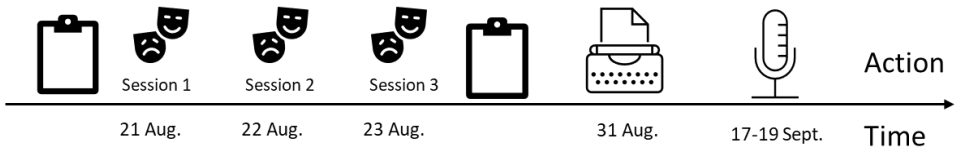

Figure 2 *Illustration of the Research Phases*

This figure illustrates the timeline for the research phases in one course (P400s). Pre-questionnaires were filled in first, after which the three improvisation sessions were taught. After the three improvisation sessions were rounded off, student teachers filled in post-questionnaires. On each improvisation session day, student teachers wrote learning diaries immediately after the session. These learning diaries formed the basis for their retrospective texts, due 31 August in the example above. In the data collection for 2018, interviews were added to the data collection.

Table 9 *Chronological Overview of the Overall Project*

	Aug 2017	**Sept 2017**	**Oct 2017**	**Interval**	**Aug 2018**	**Sept 2018**	**Oct 2018**
Pre-and post-questionnaires	P100s	P200s			P300s P400s	P500s	
Improvisation sessions	P100s	P200s			P300s P400s	P500s	
Learning diaries	P100s	P200s			P300s P400s		
Filming	P100s	P200s			P300s P400s		
Retrospective texts	P100s	P100s P200s			P400s	P300s	
Interviews						P300s P400s	
Trials		P200s	P200s				P300s

Table 9 shows the two rounds of data collection with their sequence. When communicating with student teachers about interviews, the term ”conversation” was deliberately applied to emphasise student teachers’ position as meaning makers and knowledge constructors. The term “conversation” did not reduce my awareness of my position and I made active efforts to lower my authority when communicating with the student teachers (see 4.4.4). The semi-structured conversations were based on an interview guide. In the extended abstract and the articles, the term “interview” is used throughout to refer to these conversations. Some student teachers (P200s and P300s) had school practicums shortly after the deadline for the retrospective texts.

4.3 Teaching Procedures

4.3.1 Improvisation Sessions.

This research was informed by sociocultural perspectives. Sociocultural theory focuses on collaborative, situational learning. Learning is a social activity, and researchers who support sociocultural theory assert that interaction is significant for second language development (Suksawas, 2011). From a sociocultural theoretical viewpoint, second and foreign language learning will depend on both interaction and meaning, such as can be found in the communicative language teaching approach (Richards, 2006). The approach can be given the predicate “experiential” because student teachers underwent the improvisation activities and reflected on them.

Student teachers practised improvisation activities as a didactic method focusing on spontaneous English speech practice. Three hours of improvisation instruction took place within three course days. A safe environment was created by emphasising that anything that student teachers said was right, and that there would be no judgement of the oral communication when improvising or written language, for example in the diaries. Student teachers were informed that they could take a short break from the improvisation activity if they felt it was too demanding. The improvisation activities had simplified rules with varied degrees of improvisation. Instructions were read aloud before each group activity, thereby activating the student teachers simultaneously.

The improvisation activities were selected for their suitability for EFL classroom use: 1) using oral communication; 2) adhering to improvisation principles (Berk & Trieber, 2009); and 3) fitting a regular classroom setting with tables and chairs. Each hour-long session contained increasingly more challenging improvisation activities in terms of expectations towards language and creativity. An overview of the improvisation activities can be found in Table 9.

The improvisation activities were mainly based on Spolin (1983) and Johnstone's (2007) methods, i.e. storytelling, conversations and Johnstone's concept of status, which is regarded as Johnstone's most important contribution to improvisation (Salinsky & Frances-White, 2017). Status is an important element in Johnstone's view on improvisation, defined as the conscious manipulation of our level of dominance in improvised social situations (Johnstone, 1999). The reasons for using improvisation techniques involving status are twofold. Firstly, Sawyer (2015) stated that improvisational theatre was easy to connect with everyday social encounters, which includes an awareness of social relationships and dominance. Johnstone (2007) states that teaching status interactions as exercises can give the improvisers something to do because it provides them with a purpose. When a character has a lower social status and plays high, a comedic effect arises (Johnstone, 2007). Secondly, some tertiary institutions include improvisation in teacher training and other professional higher education to enhance co-operational, communicative and creative skills (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Coppens, 2002; De Vries, 2010). Coppens (2002) explains, for example, that the ability to show and analyse status behaviour gives teachers a tool for directing learning situations. This aspect of improvisation training can be linked to sociocultural learning. One could argue that the interaction between student teachers in some improvisation activities takes place in semi-realistic situations. In addition, collaborative storytelling depends heavily on interaction between speakers.

In Berk and Trieber's study (2009) about using improvisation in college they present seven principles of improvisation that they used as guidance when selecting

improvisation activities and devising instructions. The improvisation activities in this project were selected for their suitability for EFL classroom use: 1) using spontaneous speech; 2) fitting a regular classroom setting with tables and chairs; and 3) adhering to principles of improvisation (Berk & Trieber, 2009):

Table 10 *Improvisation Activities Scored on Berk and Trieber's Improvisation Principles*

Improvisation activity	**1: Trust**	**2: Accep-tance**	**3: Attentive listening**	**4: Sponta-neity**	**5: Story-telling**	**6: Non-verbal comm**	**7: Warming up**
Zip, zap, zop	x	x	x				x
One word story	x	x	x	x	x		
Three sentence story	x	x	x	x	x		
Dice-based story	x	x	x	x	x		
Man on the street	x	x	x	x		x	
Customer service	x	x	x	x		x	
Noah's ark			x	x	x	x	
Forbidden letter	x	x	x	x	x		x
Downtown Abbey	x	x	x	x		x	
Meeting	x	x	x	x		x	
Park bench	x	x	x	x		x	

During the project, I came to understand the intentions of Spolin and Johnstone's improvisation at a deeper level. As a result, I established my own interpretation of their joint central improvisation principles (CIPs): acceptance and elaboration (CIP1), risk taking and spontaneity (CIP2), relations and status (CIP3), and attentive listening (CIP4). Some of Berk and Trieber's (2009) principles of improvisation above were combined in these CIPs. Acceptance and storytelling became acceptance and elaboration, also known as the tenet "Yes, and" in improvisational theatre. Trust is part of this principle

too, as well as of attentive listening, a principle that includes non-verbal communication. Consequently, I scored the improvisation activities based on central improvisation principles (CIPs):

Table 11 *Improvisation Activities Scored on Central Improvisation Principles*

Improvisation activity	1. Acceptance and elaboration	2. Risk taking and spontaneity	3. Relations and status	4. Attentive listening
Zip, zap, zop		x		x
One word story	x	x		x
Three sentence story	x	x		x
Dice-based story	x	x		x
Manon the street	x	x	x	x
Customer service	x	x	x	x
Noah's ark		x	x	x
Status walk			x	
Downton Abbey	x	x	x	x
Meeting	x	x	x	x
Park bench	x	x	x	x

4.3.2 Description of Improvisation Activities.

The activities had simple instructions and varied in degrees of direction, i.e. defined roles or undefined characters. In three sessions, linguistic and creative demands on the student teachers were increased. The first session focused on storytelling. The first activity*, Zip, Zap, Zop*, originates from Spolin's work (1986) and aims to develop skills in following directions, focus, listening and self-confidence (McKnight & Scruggs, 2008). A pulse is sent around the circle by clapping three times in a row accompanied by the words "zip, zap, zop", while sending the pulse clockwise. Everybody becomes tuned in to each other ready to react with the next word in the chain, focused on what will come next. To enhance spontaneity, the option element of switching the direction of the pulse either way was added. Afterwards, student teachers reflected on the challenging pronunciation of the voiced sibilant /z/ for Norwegian learners.

After this warming up of student teachers' attentive listening skills, the first session contained improvisation activities for storytelling. *One Word Story* (McKnight & Scruggs, 2008) and *Three Sentence Story* (Davis, 2015) cover listening, focus, oral communication, team building, acceptance of all ideas, and critical and creative problem solving. In the first activity, *One Word Story*, student teachers stood in a circle while each added one word at a time, constructing a collaborative fairy tale. This approach trained the student teachers to break their planning habit and accept the unpredictability of spontaneous speech. To give a joint direction to the collaborative story, the student teachers decided on a title before the story started. In the *Three Sentence Story*, student teacher A said the first sentence, e.g. "Jack walked into his kitchen". Then student teacher B said the second sentence, which started with 'Yes, and' building on the first sentence, e.g. "Yes, and he drank coffee, spilling it over his white shirt". In this improvisation activity, the acceptance principle was practised explicitly through the addition of the instruction that sentences 2 and 3 must begin with the phrase "Yes, and". With the last sentence, student teacher C tried to reach an ending, e.g. "He really hated Monday mornings". This activity was played in groups of three to four, and with one or two middle sentences.

The final improvisation activity in the first session, *Dice-Based Story*, was a storytelling activity based on images on Rory's story cubes (Zygomatic, 2020). Each group threw the nine storytelling cubes at the same time into the middle of a table, accepting thereby that the images that were shown were the input to their joint story. Then, each student teacher picked up one of the cubes at a time and used the picture as narrative inspiration. The student teachers initially took turns in a clockwise direction. Later they took random turns, depending on who wanted to continue the story. Together they told a story until all the cubes had been used once and rounded off the story with the final sentence. Then the cubes were thrown again, and a new story was told. I chose the name *Dice-Based Story* to avoid the negative association with *Die* Story, which is grammatically correct but ambiguous and ominous in meaning, and which might have influenced the story content.

The second session contained conversations in role plays through simulation exercises with an improvisational twist. Status is implicitly practised through the relations of characters. In the first activity, *Man on the Street* (Spolin, 1983), the student teachers were divided equally into reporters and members of the public who walked up and down the classroom. During the first round the public shaped their roles themselves. In the next round, the reporter (student teacher A) was instructed to clearly define the stranger in their greeting, e.g. “Hello, little girl…” or “Good afternoon, Prime Minister”. The other student teacher (B) had to accept the reporter’s offer and react in character. When their little interview had been rounded off, the student teachers both started mingling again to find other student teachers to talk to. Student teachers interacted at least once in this activity but there was no absolute number of meetings involved.

The next activity was *Customer Service*, a variety on the Repair Shop game. The customer returned a faulty product giving her first offer through non-verbal communication, showing the imaginary product. The product and its fault were a mystery to be solved by the customer service clerk. *Customer Service* has a valuable negotiation component (Anderson et al., 2008), which was emphasised by making the product and its fault unknown to the customer service clerk. The customer showed the product through non-verbal communication as a conversation starter. Both student teachers were then required to paraphrase to negotiate meaning and solve the issue with the mysterious product. Due to the necessity to ask for information and use circumlocution, this adaptation made the activity suitable for practising communicative competence.

The final role-play activity, *Noah’s Ark*, a variety on a persuasive speech activity, was a speech in which a small group of student teachers argued which animal should be awarded the absolute last spot available on the ark. To emphasise the element of play, the student teachers selected from a range of stuffed animals, including fantasy animals. They then wrote down keywords for their persuasive speech on a small sticky

note for a limited time. They started their formal speeches by standing up one by one, opening the speech by formally addressing the judges/jury, thereby indirectly setting the formal register for the pitch. The small-group members would afterwards choose the most convincing speech. All three activities invited student teachers to play other roles than themselves.

The third and last session focused on status. Improvisation activities involving status are used due to their connection with everyday social encounters (Sawyer, 2015). To create an understanding of the physical concept of status, student teachers performed a warm-up activity called *Status Walk*, in which they embodied an imaginary high and low status. The first status activity was *Downton Abbey*, a character-based activity inspired by the master-servant game (Johnstone, 2007) and the television series *Downton Abbey* (*Downton Abbey*, 2015). Within a small group, player A played the lady, hitting the servants (players B and C) with a balloon whenever she was dissatisfied with their efforts at serving breakfast or offering other services. The servants apologised and tried to please the lady again and again and again until the lady was satisfied with the offer. Then the student teachers swapped roles.

In the next activity, *Meeting*, student teachers randomly chose a spoon with a secret rank in the social order expressing status in a more realistic setting than *Downton Abbey*. They then played teachers in a planning meeting, showing subtle hints about their status (feeling like a number 1, 2 or 3). All combinations of status were possible – three student teachers with the highest status, three with the lowest status, etc. The meeting was over when the group had reached a decision (problem solving) about the meeting topic. They then guessed each other's status (attentive listening). The last activity, *Park Bench*, involved polite communication and an information gap described as a secret passion. The activity was a meeting between imaginary strangers where player A had a secret passion. She would tie in this passion in a natural way by dropping regular hints into the conversation. The purpose was to continue the conversation while player B figured out the secret passion.

4.3.3 School Practicums.

School practicums lasted three to four weeks, a relatively short period like most practicums during teacher education (Schepens et al., 2007). The practicums took place shortly after the improvisation sessions at university ended and retrospective texts had been written. Practicum schools were informed about the ongoing research and its focus on student teachers. All student teachers (participants and non-participants) wrote logs about school practicum experiences as part of the TEFL courses. According to teacher education regulations (NRLU, 2016), the main task of English teachers in grades 5 to 10 is to develop pupils' linguistic, communicative and intercultural competence. Moreover, school practicums should enable student teachers to develop their abilities to reflect on and develop their teaching practices for a communicative English classroom (NRLU, 2016). The project adhered to these regulations.

In the third article, the facilitation of spontaneous speech practice through improvisation activities was explored in school practicums. One group consisted of in-service student teachers who used their own classes for their practicums. The other group consisted of second-year pre-service student teachers for grades 5 to 10 who tried the improvisation activities during school practicums. In trial logs, student teachers reflected on their experiences with trying out the improvisation activities before, during and after school practicums (see Appendices).

Student teachers were instructed to try two improvisation activities with the same class twice and reflect on the classroom experience in writing. They then implemented an improvement for the second trial as part of an action research-inspired trial procedure. Pre-service student teachers taught grades 9 and 10 and it should be noted that they had only just met the pupils. Due to sharing one practicum classroom, P301, P306, P310 and P312 taught only one improvisation activity twice, instead of two activities; see below:

Table 12 *Overview of Improvisation Activities in School Practicums*

Activity	Pre-service	In-service	Total
Dice-based story	P302, P304, P305, P310	P203, P207, P208, P209, P211	9
One word story	P302	P202, P203, P207, P209, P210, P211, P212	8
Customer service	P304, P305	P202, P203, P204, P205, P211, P212	8
Zip, zap, zop	P312	P201, P202, P203, P205, P207, P211	7
Three sentence story	P301	P205	2
Man on the street		P201, P210	2
Downton Abbey	P306	P213	2
Noah's ark		P208	1
Park bench		P211	1
Status walk			0
Meeting			0

In-service student teachers taught several improvisation activities in their own classes, ranging from fifth to ninth grade with the majority being sixth and seventh grades. School practicums took place at small and bigger schools, with class sizes overall ranging from three to 27 pupils. Qualified mentors supervised pre-service student teachers as part of the standard school practicum routine. In the fourth article, improvisation as a method was explored, focusing on the student teachers' didactic experiences with trying out the improvisation activities.

4.4 Data Collection

The data collected in the project had multiple formats: written, audio-visual and oral. In the articles, uncorrected quotations from student teachers' texts illustrate the

findings. The data contained student teachers' perspectives and were collected from the groups listed in Table 13:

Table 13 *Data Collections Per Group*

No.	Groups	Year	Pre-quest.	Post-quest.	Filming	Learning diary	Retrosp. text	Interview	Trial log
1	P100s (n = 16)	2017	x	x	x	x	x		
2	P200s (n = 13)	2017	x	x	x	x	x		x
3	P300s (n = 8)	2018	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
4	P400s (n = 13)	2018	x	x	x	x	x	x	
5	P500s (n = 15)	2018	x	x					

Written data were among others gathered through student teachers' retrospective texts, which were collected through the learning management systems (LMS) It's learning and Canvas (see Appendices). The reason for using two systems was that the university changed its electronic learning platform during the duration of the project. Additionally, data were gathered through printed questionnaires before and after the completed series of improvisation sessions. The last group, number five, was only asked to participate in the pre- and post-questionnaires because I taught these student teachers improvisation sessions only as a visiting lecturer and therefore my access to this group was limited. For the other groups, I was either the only teacher or one of the main teachers in the course. Interviews provided oral data.

The data collections followed the following stages from improvisation sessions with written and, for some, oral reflections and/or classroom trials:

Table 14 *Stages, Data Collection and Data Format*

Stages	**Data collection**	**Data format**
Introduction to the research	Pre-questionnaire	Printed text
Session 1: Improvisation activities	Learning diary 1	Digital text
Session 2: Improvisation activities	Learning diary 2	Digital text
Session 3: Improvisation activities	Post-questionnaire	Printed text
	Learning diary 3	Digital text
Retrospective texts	Retrospective text	Digital text
Interviews	Audio recordings	Transcripts
Trial	Reflections: • Pre-trial • After first trial • After second trial • Post-trial question (2018)	Digital text

The qualitative approach enables researchers to obtain insights into the world as experienced by others. To gain access to student teachers' feelings and thoughts, they wrote texts at various intervals. Immediately after each improvisation session at university, they were asked to write a learning diary about the experience, a task that emphasised the value of their subjective view. Based on these diaries, student teachers reflected on the usefulness of improvisation activities in their retrospective texts.

During their school practicums, student teachers wrote trial logs before, during and after trying out the improvisation activities. School practicums were not recorded or observed to avoid any influence on the trial. My presence could have undermined student teachers' authority as classroom leaders and influenced the trial. During prior practicum visits, student teachers said that they find the presence of an extra set of eyes in the classroom uncomfortable.

4.4.1 Pre- and Post-Questionnaires.

A questionnaire about self-confidence and speaking English was designed to explore RQ1: Do improvisation activities influence student teachers' confidence when speaking spontaneous English? The questionnaire items covered, for example, student teachers' perceived anxiety and self-confidence, and self-assessment of language proficiency before the first and after the last improvisation session. Due to a lack of a valid scale for speaking confidence, the questionnaire items were inspired by the items from the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) and Cao and Philp's participant interview questions examining willingness to communicate (Cao & Philp, 2006; MacIntyre et al., 1998). You can find the pre-questionnaire under Appendices.

The questionnaire examined student teachers' perceived speaking confidence before and after the improvisation series. The researcher was present to answer questions. Student teachers filled in the questionnaires before the first improvisation session started and after the last improvisation session ended. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items which were statements. The instructions emphasised that the researcher was interested in the student teachers' personal opinions and that there were no wrong answers. Student teachers were to fill in their response per statement from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The midpoint answer may be an appealing choice for the insecure student teacher, which for this research project is an interesting participant. To avoid the midpoint attraction, the Likert scale was designed as a six-point scale (see 5.6). Only the pre-questionnaire (See Appendices) contained three open questions. The answers to these open questions were only used to find a group description for physical expressions of foreign language anxiety.

4.4.2 Filming of Improvisation Activities.

The initial purpose of filming was to provide prompts for reflection before writing the retrospective text. Due to sound issues in the pilot study, the 2017 student teachers were filmed in a little studio after the improvisation sessions had ended. In 2018, the

footage of student teachers was filmed by student teachers themselves in university classrooms during improvisation sessions:

Table 15 *Organisation of Gathering Footage of Improvising Student Teachers*

Year	Location	Equipment	Filmed activities	Filmed by
2017	On-campus studio	Three iPads on tripods External microphone on the table between student teachers	Dice-based story Customer service	A research assistant, another English teacher educator and myself
2018	Regular university classroom	Three mini-iPads, framed Two regular iPads, one with a frame One Samsung tablet No external microphones	Three sentence story Dice-based story Customer service Downton Abbey Park bench	Student teachers, taking turns

To stimulate reflection, student teachers were shown footage of themselves improvising in small groups. The 2017 student teachers were to access the footage through the university LMS before writing the retrospective texts. The 2018 student teachers were shown the footage during the interviews.

Originally the most reluctant speakers (based on pre- and post-questionnaires) were the only student teachers to be filmed. To mask this selection and avoid adding pressure, all 2017 student teachers were filmed while they practised two of the improvisation activities in an on-campus studio. There were some technical difficulties in accessing the videos due to heavy security measures in the university LMS and firewalls in student teachers' computers. Consequently, around half of the 2017 student teachers watched footage of their own activities before writing the retrospective text. Moreover, student teachers commented in their retrospective texts that the filming in the studio had made them nervous, partly due to the filming experience being in a new, static setting, but for one group additionally due to a native English speaker filming them while speaking spontaneously. Filming student teachers

in the controlled setting of a studio provided good sound quality but it contradicted the natural setting as one of the key characteristics of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Based on the 2017 student teachers' feedback, the on-campus studio was not used in 2018. Instead, student teachers filmed themselves with handheld or static tablets provided by the researcher. Student teachers filmed five of the ten improvisation activities, a selection based on practicalities.

4.4.3 Retrospective Texts.

RQ2A and RQ2B explored how student teachers, and especially reluctant speakers, experienced participating in improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice in English. To answer these research questions, student teachers were asked to write three learning diary instalments, which formed the basis for writing a retrospective text after the three sessions were over, see Appendices. The instructions for the learning diaries clarified the following purposes:

> This diary will be subjective, i.e. your view. The diary has two purposes. Firstly, through writing about how you think and feel as an English language learner, you may understand your own language learning process better. Secondly, the purpose is to provide general insight into foreign language learning as a teacher student. (Excerpt from learning diary instructions)

The learning diaries collected student teachers' perspectives in two ways: 1) to grasp their immediate impressions of the improvisation activities; 2) to provide a foundation for their retrospective text. Immediately after each session with improvisation activities, student teachers were given 15 minutes to write a draft of the learning diary to grasp their immediate reactions. The deadline for uploading each of the immediate diaries was midnight on the same day. Student teachers were asked to reflect on their personal experiences during each session as a whole and one activity from that session specifically.

The learning diary format, written in the first person, was chosen as a personal account of the language learning experience. In the instructions, the terms "subjective

view, opinion and personal reflections" emphasised the value of student teachers' perspectives. Before writing the first learning diary, the importance of an uninterrupted flow of thoughts rather than correct spelling and grammar was emphasised. At the start of each session, a list of the improvisation activities was written on the blackboard or smartboard to help student teachers write about specific activities. Student teachers were asked about the usefulness of the activities for their practice of spontaneous speech and the usefulness for future teachers of English.

The retrospective texts were to be handed in a week after the last improvisation session. Student teachers were asked to reread their learning diaries and a list of the improvisation activities was provided. The retrospective texts focused on student teachers' reflections, i.e. the subjective experience of practising spontaneous speech through improvisation activities. In total, 51 retrospective texts were collected. Nine of these had been written based on one session due to, for example, a delayed study start or illness. These nine texts were excluded from the retrospective text analysis because the texts represent merely a third of the improvisation experience. One in-service participant's texts were removed from the data collection because she did not work in school during the research. Consequently, the remaining 41 retrospective texts were included in the research.

4.4.4 Interviews.

After the first year of data collection, some alterations were made to enhance the quality of the project, such as changing the filming procedure. Another change was to invite a sample of student teachers for an interview in September 2018. The reasons were twofold. First, retrospective texts did not provide opportunities for follow-up questions to clarify student teachers' statements. Second, reluctant speakers were not focused on specifically in the group analysis. As a result, some relevant points from reluctant speakers did not make the threshold of 33% for the group findings for retrospective texts. This observation led to interviews being added to the research design. The interviews were to provide an interactive, dialogic reflection where student

teachers could go deeper and be prompted by footage and follow-up questions. The purpose was to collect data for answering RQ2B, namely how reluctant speakers experienced participating in these improvisation activities.

For article 2, only the data for six student teachers (see section 4.2.1.) were used to explore the reluctant speaker perspective on the improvisation approach:

Table 16 *Interview Length and Volume*

	P301	**P302**	**P312**	**P406**	**P413**	**P415**	**Average**
Interview length in minutes	57	47	59	45	50	44	50
Number of words	7511	5856	7464	2318	7098	5034	5880

A semi-structured interview was applied. The interview guide (see Appendices) contained seven questions and was checked by two Norwegian teacher educators for clarity. Through two pilot interviews with volunteering student teachers (non-sample due to their absence from one improvisation session), the interview guide and the interview organisation were tried out. Procedures to counterbalance the power position between student teacher and myself were included. Interviews were not held in the regular TEFL classroom, but a smaller group room used by students. Tea and biscuits were provided. From this experience, I learnt the valuable lesson that one must use paper cups because of the noise on recordings. Furthermore, the pilot did not uncover preferences for the timing of video comments (while viewing or after viewing). Lastly, student teachers seemed to need guidance in reflecting about themselves as EFL learners as well as prospective teachers.

Eleven student teachers participated in a face-to-face interview in a group room, instead of the regular classroom. To signify student teachers' position as important knowledge contributors, the term "conversation" was deliberately used in the invitation. Student teachers were offered tea or water and biscuits to enhance the

conversation atmosphere. At the end of the interview, student teachers were offered chocolate as a symbol of gratitude, but they were not paid or otherwise rewarded for their voluntary participation.

Student teachers were informed about the topic for the interview, but because the interview was a continuation of a written reflection process (retrospective text), exact questions were not provided beforehand. The interviews gave student teachers the opportunity to clarify and expand on their earlier reflections in their texts as well as add new reflections. To ensure that the asymmetrical power relationship was not weighted too heavily on the researcher's side (Sollid, 2013), the interview was conducted in Norwegian. The roles were reversed from the classroom situation: the researcher was now a fluent FL speaker, while the student teachers were native speakers and possibly empowered. Moreover, using their L1 could possibly enable them to express their thoughts and feelings about the improvisation activities in a different way than in their English retrospective texts.

To stimulate reflection, student teachers were shown footage of themselves during improvisation activities they had described as their favourites in the retrospective texts. Student teachers had been informed beforehand that they would watch and react to classroom footage. This approach is loosely based on video-stimulated recall (Mackey et al., 2012; Schepens et al., 2007). Stimulated recall is an effective tool for creating an understanding of students' cognitive and affective processes (Piazzoli, 2011). Some student teachers commented before the footage started that they were a bit apprehensive about watching themselves. The footage could support student teachers' descriptions of what happened during improvisation activities as well as support reflections upon how they experienced the improvisation activity, expressing their thoughts and feelings. Student teachers' immediate statements did not allow for a great amount of time to censor their own thoughts or reactions. It has been in line with the spontaneous speech practice of the research to examine student teachers' immediate reactions to watching themselves as other

studies have done, for example Schepens et al. (2007). According to my field notes, students were positive overall bout participating in the interview and the research project. Some expressed the view that this experience was interesting because they will need to design their own research project later in their master's course.

The interviews lasted on average 50 minutes (44- to 68-minute range), depending on student teachers' responses, the length of VCR videos and follow-up questions. Interviews were recorded on Dictaphones to ensure that all relevant data were preserved for ensuing analysis. These circumstances enabled the researcher to be fully present as an interviewer apart from making field notes during and after each interview. Interviews were transcribed in Norwegian, thereby altering the data from audio files to written texts. Interviews were transcribed verbatim in Norwegian.

4.4.5 Trial Logs.

To examine transfer improvisation activities from theory in teacher education to the practice in schools. RQ3 explored how improvisation activities facilitated spontaneous speech practice among pupils. To gather data for answering RQ3, student teachers were requested to write a trial log (see Appendices). Initially, this trial log was developed for in-service student teachers. Based on the impressions from the 2017 trial, the procedure was regarded as highly relevant for repetition. After the first round, it became clear that there should be more explicit focus on the experience of teaching improvisation activities so this was added as a post-trial question in the trial log instructions for 2018. The trial procedure was repeated with pre-service student teachers. One pre-service student teacher did not hand in the trial logs. One in-service student teacher did not work in school during the semester and borrowed a class in a random school for the trial. As this solution was not representative for the in-service teacher trial situation, nor the supervised school practicum, this trial log was excluded from the data collection, resulting in 19 trial logs (19 of 23 student teachers in these courses). Besides RQ3, the trial logs were used as data for answering RQ4 which looked

into how student teachers experienced trying improvisation activities for spontaneous speech in their school practicums.

Prior to school practicums, student teachers were introduced to a simple action research cycle of plan-act-observe-reflect (Burns, 2005; van Lier, 1994). After the first trial, student teachers were asked to consider which specific change they would make for the next trial. After the second trial with the same improvisation activities, they wrote up another part of the log. These reflection phases were inspired by articles on action research in language teaching (Burns, 2005; van Lier, 1994). Trial log instructions contained questions to support student teachers' reflection processes before, during and after school practicums.

Instructions for improvisation activities were provided to student teachers. The instructions deliberately did not specify target grades or ages, so student teachers needed to consider the suitability of activities for their pupils and their lesson objectives. The instructions for the first activities (*Zip, Zap, Zop* and *One Word Story*) contained information about objectives, such as "listening, self-confidence and focus". These words served as an example for purpose for each activity.

In the subject-specific part of the national curriculum (*English Subject Curriculum*, 2013; *English Subject Curriculum*, 2020), competence aims per threshold (grades 2, 4, 7, 10) describe the intended learner progression in English. In trial logs, student teachers were asked to include competence aims or learning objectives (LOs) for the spontaneous speech practice they were planning. The table below shows how often competence aims (marked with 7^{th} or 10^{th} grade) appeared:

Table 17 *Multiple Occurrences of Competence Aims and Learning Objectives in Trial Logs*

Aims: The pupil can…	**Occurr.**
Understand and use vocabulary related to familiar topics (7th) Understand and use vocabulary related to different topics (10th)	12
Introduce, maintain and terminate conversations related to familiar situations (7th) Introduce, maintain and terminate conversations on different topics by asking questions and following up on input (10th)	9
Use listening and speaking strategies (7th) adapted to the purpose (10th)	8
Use basic patterns for pronunciation, intonation, word inflection and different types of sentences in communication (7th) Use the central patterns for pronunciation, intonation, word inflection and different types of sentences in communication (10th)	7
Express oneself to obtain help in understanding and being understood in different situations (7th) Express oneself fluently and coherently, suited to the purpose and situation (10th)	5
Use expressions of politeness and appropriate expressions for the situation (7th)	5
Raise the self-confidence in speaking English in front of other pupils (LO)	4
Express and give grounds for own opinions about familiar topics (7th)	2
Use different situations, working methods and learning strategies to develop their English-language skills (10th)	2

Most of the competence aims above are categorised under oral communication in the curriculum. Many student teachers included vocabulary practice and conversational practice. Appropriate strategies for listening and speaking English were often mentioned. Language proficiency, including pronunciation and grammar, was central in their lessons. The most recurrent learning objective, which was not a competence aim, was the aim to raise pupils' self-confidence when speaking in front of others, also called "speaking confidence".

5 Analysis

In this chapter, the analysis of the various types of data will be presented. Table 18 below provides an overview of the different analytical approaches taken in the project:

Table 18 *Data Collection with Details of Format and Analysis*

Data collection	**Data formats**	**Data analysis**
Pre-questionnaire	Statements with answers on a Likert scale	Non-parametric
	Open questions	Not analysed, used as an illustration
Learning diary 1	Digital text (LMS)	Not analysed
Learning diary 2	Digital text (LMS)	Not analysed
Post-questionnaire	Statements with answers on a Likert scale	Non-parametric
Learning diary 3	Digital text (LMS)	Not analysed
Video footage from studio (2017) or university classroom (2018)	Media files	Not analysed, used for reflection stimulation
Retrospective text	Digital text (LMS)	Thematic with a phenomenological perspective
Semi-structured interviews	Audio file and interview transcript	Thematic with a phenomenological perspective
Trial log: • Pre-trial • After first trial • After second trial • Post-trial question (2018)	Digital text (LMS)	Thematic with a phenomenological perspective

As could be seen in Table 13, most student teachers have participated in some elements of the data collection, whereas group P300s has participated in the whole data collection. In the following sections, the analysis will be further explained.

5.1 Quantitative Analysis of the Questionnaires

The analysis of the pre- and post-questionnaires was performed in the software SPSS. Prior to this analysis, participants' answers on the Likert scale were scored accordingly in Excel:

Table 19 *The Likert Scale and its Scoring Value*

EXAMPLE	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Partly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
My listening skills in English are good.	1	2	3	4	5	6

The answers, which corresponded with the level of agreement with a statement, were scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). After each answer on the Likert scale was thus converted to a numeric value, the excel data were imported to SPSS version 25.0 (SPSS inc., Chicago, IL, USA) and analysed there. To investigate a lack of confidence, the positive statement "I feel confident when I speak in English class" from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) was reversed (6 = 1, etc.) when scored in the analysis.

5.2 Qualitative Analysis of the Retrospective Texts

For the retrospective texts, interviews and trial logs, a thematic analysis was performed, inspired by interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is a qualitative approach committed to the examination of people's experiences and originating in psychology (Smith et al., 2009). A phenomenological approach to understanding data was considered appropriate because phenomenology provides grounds for investigating and understanding student teachers' experiences (Ibrahim, 2016; Standal

& Engelsrud, 2013). Student teachers are regarded as sense-making human beings through their accounts of experiences. Some hold the truth claims of an IPA approach to be tentative (Smith et al., 2009). IPA accepts that these accounts are dependent on what student teachers share with the researcher, who interprets these accounts in order to understand student teachers' experiences (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is committed to the detailed examination of a particular case (Smith et al., 2009), which suited the focus of the project on student teachers' voices. The phenomenological perspective allows for a sensitivity to each individual student teacher's experiences, as expressed through their reflections.

Student teachers' role as contributors to insights into group experiences was an important value for the design of the project. Through a comparison of student teachers' experiences, and a reiterative process of analysis, returning again and again to the raw material, the convergence between the student teachers' experiences was examined. In the analysis of the retrospective texts, an interpretative phenomenological perspective was thus applied as a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach (Smith et al., 2009):

Table 20 *Stages with Actions (1A, etc.) and Outcomes (1O, etc.)*

Stages	Actions	Stages	Outcomes
1A	Holistic reading of retrospective texts	1O	General impression of content
2A	Initial noting and marking relevant text passages	2O	Meaning units
3A	Adding descriptive labels to each text passage	3O	Tentative themes
4A	Condensing further	4O	Themes
5A	Reassembling	5O	Findings

Following an iterative and inductive cycle, 41 retrospective texts were read holistically at least twice (stage 1A) to obtain a general feel for them (1O). The criterion for relevance of student teachers' statements must be seen in the light of answering the

research question: How have student teachers experienced participating in improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice in English?

After I had gained a general understanding of the retrospective texts, these texts were uploaded in NVivo, qualitative analysis software. NVivo helped me to store and to analyse the retrospective texts (Creswell, 2016). In NVivo, I highlighted text passages which were relevant for RQ2 with coding stripes (stage 2A). This highlighting action resulted in 200 **meaning units** (stage 2O). In the next stage (3A), I added **descriptive labels** as close as possible to meaning units. Both excerpts below received the descriptive label "more comfortable to speak":

> The activities have made me less afraid of making mistakes when I speak English, because most the activities have been very casual and funny, which has made me relaxed, and I have therefore gradually gained more confidence in speaking English. (P101)

> The activities we did are perfect for both learning English and to be more confident in class. I would say that all the activities are perfect for improving confidence in speaking English spontaneously. It was a little scary at first, but when you got a little in to it, it became fun! And you did not realise you were speaking spontaneously. (P106)

NVivo provided the opportunity to quickly move from a meaning unit to the whole retrospective text if more context was needed to decide which descriptive label fitted. NVivo enabled me to compare descriptive labels across all retrospective texts for convergence and nodes were created manually, as illustrated below:

- "play my character" was included in the node "role"
- "safety in small groups" was included in the node "safety"

The comparison of descriptive labels resulted in nodes with **tentative themes** (stage 3O) as shown in the example below for the tentative theme "Mistakes do not matter":

Mistakes do not matter included the earlier descriptive labels:

- Not dangerous to make mistakes
- No focus on grammar mistakes
- More relaxed when allowed to make mistakes
- Less afraid of making mistakes
- Less afraid of wrong grammar

As you can see illustrated above, the descriptive labels cover different aspects of the tentative theme *"*mistakes do not matter". **Tentative themes** were further reduced to **themes** of few words, e.g. "I used my creativity" to "creativity" (stage 4).

Table 21 *Themes in Retrospective Texts*

Themes
1. better fluency
2. better pronunciation
3. challenging
4. collaborative learning
5. creativity
6. differentiation
7. double-edged sword
8. finding the words
9. force
10. free choice of topic
11. fun
12. good experience
13. good practice for spontaneous speech
14. immediate reaction
15. increase in speaking confidence
16. increase my competence as a teacher
17. more comfortable talking
18. more confident
19. oral proficiency
20. role
21. safety
22. teacher relevance
23. uncomfortable initially
24. useful

A common challenge was that a highlighted text passage could refer to multiple themes. An example was “Making mistakes was fun” which could be sorted under the themes “fun” or under “Making mistakes does not matter”. I decided to place the text passage under “fun” because the wider context explained that making mistakes was experienced as positive.

Here NVivo came into play as a systematic software that enabled me to merge several **tentative themes** into one **theme**. For example, a generic theme like “good experience” was revisited in NVivo and all its text passages reread. The result was that the theme “good experience” became redundant because all text passages had been thus reorganised into more specific themes. The 24 themes from table 21 were thus condensed to **15 themes**.

Following the approach above, the retrospective texts were manually analysed in NVivo. I used the software to create, organise and reorganise nodes manually. NVivo was not used for automated analysis nor auto coding. NVivo provided a searchable overview of the nodes and an easy access to the retrospective text from which a text passage was taken, which facilitated returning to the text and reread for context. Throughout the project, I returned to each text in an attempt to make sense of the text as a whole (Smith et al., 2009). This cycle enforced my understanding of the student teachers’ perspectives. Initially the data were segmented into relevant text passages, then organised into themes through several stages, before finally being reassembled into a text about a theme again in MS Word (stage 5A).

For the first article, a write-up was done for a sample of student teachers (n = 23) to explain some quantitative findings for the pre- and post-questionnaires (stage 5O). The write-up was based on applying a phenomenological perspective on the retrospective texts from a large group of student teachers (Smith et al., 2009). A file containing all meaning units from NVivo concerning the theme **confidence** was compiled. This theme file was reread multiple times before writing a summary from memory as Smith et al. (2009) propose. Afterwards, I returned to the file to supply the

summary with details and added citations from student teachers' raw data (retrospective texts) to illustrate findings.

For the second article, a thematic analysis was performed with a phenomenological perspective to select the most frequently occurring themes in the 41 retrospective texts. There is a difference, however, between the emergence of a theme in a retrospective text (source) and the times a theme is mentioned (occurrences). One student could mention a theme ten times in one retrospective text, which would result in a high number of occurrences if the theme were mechanically counted. If this is the only student who mentions this theme, it is an important matter to this individual but not necessarily a recurrence for the student teacher group. The individual's experience is important in the phenomenological approach. Nevertheless, there should be some recurrence of a theme to be valid for the sample when using a large group of student teachers. Smith et al. (2009) mention a recurrence of a theme in over half of the cases as an example to enhance the validity of the findings of a larger group of participants (more than six). To give more weight to individual student teachers' experiences, the threshold for a recurrent theme was set at over one-third for the retrospective texts, i.e. 14 out of 41 retrospective texts. This would be in accordance with views expressed by Smith et al. (2009, p. 107), who point out that "doing IPA with numbers of participants constantly involves negotiating this relationship between convergence and divergence, commonality and individuality". This criterion may partly counterbalance a possible influence of guiding instructions in the learning diary such as when the researcher specifically mentioned confidence and competence in her instructions. By classifying the recurrence threshold as more than 33% of the texts containing a specific theme, more themes have been included in the article than with the original 50% threshold.

5.3 Qualitative Analysis of the Interviews

Because there were fewer texts, the interviews were manually analysed in MS Word. They were listened to twice in full before transcription started. The most effective transcription approach was to listen to the whole interview first, then listen to a snippet, write it as well as possible from memory, continue this for a few minutes, then replay these snippets several times, correct misheard words, and add missing words and emotions to the transcript. The interviews were transcribed verbatim in Norwegian. Upon completion of the transcript, it was listened to as a whole again, and repeatedly if necessary, and cleaned up again. Following Smith et al., it was deemed unnecessary to record the length of pauses or all non-verbal communication as preferred for conversation analysis (Smith et al., 2015, p. 74). The non-verbal utterances from the participants have been included, whereas the non-verbal acknowledgements from the interviewer were only included in the transcript if they were regarded as essential for the development of the interview, e.g. before introducing a new question. Analysis in IPA mainly aims "to interpret the meaning of the content of the participant's account" (Smith et al., 2015, p. 74).

The analysis of the interviews was performed in several rounds to explore the student teachers' experiences with doing the improvisation activities. Each interview was analysed separately at first. The interview transcriptions were copied into the left column of a Word document and excerpts were highlighted if they related to the research question: How have reluctant speakers experienced participating in these improvisation activities? Descriptive comments were added in the second column, and interpretative comments were added in the third column as illustrated in the next table.

Table 22 *Example of interview analysis P312*

Transcript P312	Descriptive Notes	Interpretative notes
I oppstarten har det vært mye improvisasjon. Og det var jo faktisk ikke så verst. [nei] for når du kom i gang med det, ble det liksom så mye bedre å gjøre det. [jaja] fordi du fikk – du ble eksponert for improvisasjon og da er det samme som med alt anna, om du blir eksponert for ting blir det jo enklere etter hvert. Så gikk det mye bedre utover, den første gikk kanskje ikke så veldig bra men på tredje økten gikk det på en måte «nå skal vi gjøre det, ja gjøre det liksom, ikke noe å tenke på.	It was not that bad actually because once you got going, doing improv became much better. Like anything else that becomes easier after a while, exposure to improv helped. During the first session it may not have been so good but the third time there was no thinking involved, just doing it.	The repeated exposure to improvisation has increased the positivity of the experience. In the third session, P312 experienced the will to improvise was present, it felt like she did not need to think anymore, she was just committed to doing improv activities. This underlines the need for repetition of the improvising practice to develop the improvising mindset, the habit of taking risk.

Each text was analysed holistically. Following an iterative cycle, highlighted segments were developed into descriptive comments, then into interpretative notes, and lastly into emergent themes (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, individual themes were compared for convergence, and superordinate themes were established:

Table 23 *Stages in the Analysis of Interviews*

Stages	Actions	Outcomes
1	Holistic reading and rereading of the texts	General impression of content
2	Initial noting and highlighting relevant text passages	Meaning units
3	Adding descriptive labels to each text passages	Descriptive comments
4	Rereading statements, descriptive comments and adding comments	Interpretative comments
5	Condensing comments	Themes per student teacher
6	Reassembling themes	Superordinate themes

The analysis took place in English and excerpts from the interview transcripts were translated from Norwegian into English by the researcher when used for the article.

5.4 Qualitative Analysis of the Trial Logs

The thematic analysis focused on the student teachers' experiences with spontaneous speech facilitation in their school practice. These data were summarised into a joint group impression, applying a phenomenological perspective of IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

The analysis of the trial logs was performed in several phases. Each text was analysed through a segmentation process. Following an iterative cycle, highlighted segments were developed into descriptive comments, then interpretative notes were added and themes emerged (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, individual themes were compared for convergence and superordinate themes for the groups were identified. The validation rests on the transparency of the analysis process. Here is a step-by-step illustration of the thematic analysis process:

Table 24 *Stages in the Analysis of Trial Logs*

Stages	Guiding questions	Actions
1	What first impressions does each text give?	Reading and rereading the texts
2	Which statements are specific reflections on teaching improvisation activities for speech practice?	Highlighting relevant, meaningful statements
3	How does the student teacher describe the experience?	Rereading and adding descriptive comments
4	How can these statements be interpreted?	Rereading statements, descriptive comments and adding interpretative comments
5	How can the interpretative comments be condensed to themes?	Establishing themes per student teacher
6	Which themes relate to each other across the student teachers' texts?	Sorting similar themes together and condensing to a summary
7	Which themes arise from the student teachers' texts?	Comparing and identifying group themes across both student teachers' groups

To enable comparison between pre- and in-service students' experiences, the analysis was performed per group. The findings were condensed as in this example:

Table 25 *Exemplification of Analysis Procedure of a Trial Log*

Extract from trial log for P209	**Descriptive comments**	**Interpretative comments**
The oral activity level in the first lesson were high, and everybody participated actively. Everybody felt included, and the pupils' self-esteem grew as the lesson went on. The fact that they got help from each other when they got stuck made them more secure about that they were in a "safe place". I think it is fair to say that we are on our way when it comes to achieving the aims.	The learners all participated and talked actively. They received help when needed from peers and the room was a safe place.	High level of oral activity for whole class. Their self-esteem grew, supported by peer assistance and the experience of a safe place for spontaneous speech practice.

One could say that wo stages of interpretations took place: first, student teachers described and reflected on their practicum expectations and experiences through their writing; second, student teachers' perspectives were analysed and then interpreted by the researcher.

5.5 Reliability and Validity

The quantitative research had four categories based upon a theoretical interpretation. The items included in each category had all high face validity, meaning that they appeared to measure the category. The reliability of the four categories was controlled by using a factor analysis with a Cronbach's alpha as pointed out by Hopkins et al. (2009). The Cronbach Alpha showed high reliability for each category in the pre- and post-test, which were all between 0.77 and 0.81.

Table 26 *Reliability of Categories in Pre- and Post-questionnaires*

Categories	Items	Reliability
General English language proficiency	1, 6	0.77
Oral communication skills	2, 15, 19	0.81
Fear and anxiety in FL	13, 17	0.78
Confidence and safety in FL	12, 18	0.78

The findings for the categories can be classified as highly reliable (Hopkins et al., 2009). The classroom setting made establishing a control group rather unnatural as the researcher taught the courses, see also 4.2.1.

In qualitative research, triangulation inherently occurs when the researcher codes, looking at different sources of information, such as the retrospective texts, and establishes themes based on the textual evidence (Creswell, 2016). For article 1, only the responses to the statements were used as data. By gathering questionnaire replies and adding a sample of retrospective texts (n = 23), this approach provided the opportunity to integrate findings as a mixed methods study and draw some conclusions based on the combined strengths of both data sets (Creswell, 2014). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) state that practitioner inquiry combines multiple data sources that inform, confirm and disconfirm one another. The data for articles 1, 3 and 4 were partially analysed and/or interpreted by the other authors. This involvement enhanced the validity.

As qualitative researchers, we must be aware of our personal interpretations. During the initial analysis phase of the retrospective texts, for example, I experienced that there are many decisions to make. Highlighting text passages is a selection procedure placing the researcher in great power of which one must be constantly aware. The challenge is to remain impartial and respectful of the student teachers' perspectives while remaining focused on the research question for the study. In an analysis notebook, I wrote memos while analysing to make my reflections around highlighting text passages transparent. This enabled me to return to these notes and

contributed to making the analysis consistent. Smith et al. (2009) point out that IPA includes a double hermeneutic because the researcher makes sense of the participants' statements who try to make sense of their experiences, here with the improvisation activities. They continue to emphasise that the researcher can only draw upon the reports by the participants for her meaning making of the participants' experiences. In the PhD project, this means that the students' perspectives in retrospective texts, interviews and trial logs are at the core of the research. IPA is phenomenological in the sense that the analysis enables the researcher to get close to the participants' experiences, yet one also must be aware that both participant and researcher have interpreted, made sense, of these experiences. Through a group focus, these interpretations have been strengthened.

5.6 Limitations of the Methodology

Despite generally positive feedback from former student teachers, I previously had no prior scientific knowledge of how student teachers experience improvisation activities. In my earlier courses, my own enjoyment of improvisation may have been projected onto the student teachers' laughter while they were doing improvisation activities. To limit this type of projection and bracket my preconceptions about improvisation, I have written a reflection text about my own experiences as a participant in a range of advanced improvisation workshops in Australia and New Zealand during 2016. The workshop participants were (semi-)professional improvisers and highly experienced improvisation teachers. Additionally, most were native speakers of English. By being exposed to expectations towards advanced improvisers in these workshops, I experienced the self-consciousness that the student teachers express when challenged beyond their comfort zones. These advanced improvisation workshop experiences increased my awareness towards creating a safe space in the classroom through developing clear instructions for improvisation activities for spontaneous speech. Through my own reflection text, I attempted to bracket my own bias and suspend my preconceptions (Smith et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, my belief in the improvisation approach was never absent from the university classroom because it is inherent in applying any didactic approach that teachers use what they believe may work. While student teachers were engaged in improvisation activities, I therefore deliberately busied myself on the teacher's computer and screen in the classroom. This meant I left the student teachers to figure the improvisation activities out together as much as possible. Outside the project, I would probably have been more proactive by walking regularly around the classroom to monitor the speech practice process. In the project, I warned the student teachers when time was nearly up. In another setting I might have adapted the approach to the specific group by providing more time, whereas the current aim was to teach in a similar manner in all groups. Slight adjustments had to be made regarding small group size (for instance, for P400s). As a result, the *Three Sentence Story* was adapted into a four-sentence story. Some student teachers decided of their own accord to let two customers return one faulty object to the *Customer Service* to facilitate a group of three instead of a pair.

One limitation to address is the choice of mid values in the Likert scale, i.e. slightly disagree and partly agree. In an attempt to offer no neutral answer to feelings about speaking spontaneously, the regular scale of five was increased to six. It could be argued that the six value scale may have forced participants to select an answer, and one might have offered an option out. One could debate whether participants can always express their feelings and whether a neutral value should have been included in a 7-point-Likert scale. Minor limitations could also be found in the writing instructions by specifically mentioning confidence and competence.

Another limitation could be that the group analysis of retrospective texts had a 33% threshold and caused the reluctant speakers to disappear in the crowd. To remedy this consequence of the IPA group analysis, interviews were held with a smaller sample. During the interviews, student teachers were stimulated through an interactive, dialogic reflection, prompted by footage and questions. The advantage of

digging deeper through interviews comes with the disadvantage of extensive time use per student teacher (interview-transcript-analysis).

Qualitative research reports participants' voices (Creswell, 2016). This project focuses on teacher education and student teachers. As a whole, the data collection consists of manifold steps that student teachers have taken toward constructing knowledge for the project. In another project, one could have chosen to gather data from the pupils who experienced the improvisation activities in the practicums as well. Considering the sensitive nature of speaking confidence in spontaneous speech practice, this type of data collection might have influenced the practicums. Student teachers' perspectives on improvisation activities were considered most relevant for the main research question: How can improvisation activities facilitate spontaneous English speech practice and the development of speaking confidence? Subsequently only student teachers' voices were included in the data collection, however, the limitation of this perspective is acknowledged.

5.7 Ethics and Considerations

The project was conducted according to the ethical guidelines of the Norwegian Social Science Data Protection Services (NSD) provided by the Norwegian Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities (NESH). The student teachers were informed of the research project both beforehand and at its beginning, using the heading "Improvisasjon i engelsk undervisning" (my translation: Improvisation in English classes; see Appendices). It was explained that student teachers' views and reflections generated the knowledge base for the project. The student teachers were encouraged to ask questions during the face-to-face information sessions. The consent form emphasised that participation was voluntary and participation or non-participation would not influence student teachers' grades. The consent form stated that film footage was going to be watched by themselves and the researcher for an outer perspective as a stimulus for reflective writing. Student teachers returned the blank or signed consent form in one envelope per group. These envelopes were

opened later in the semester. During the improvisation sessions or writing tasks as part of the course work, I did not know which student teachers were research participants.

Raw data were stored on a separate hard disc for the research. All personal information was anonymised to make sure that participants could not be identified. The analysis took place after the semester ended and examinations had been rounded off. Mentors and principals at the practicum schools were informed about the ongoing research project during the school practicums. I chose not to observe or film school practicums to avoid any influence on the research. My presence could have undermined student teachers' authority as classroom leaders. Qualified mentors supervised pre-service student teachers as part of the regular practicum routine at teacher education.

In this project I hold with Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) in my position of regarding the practitioner as a knowledge facilitator. Nevertheless, I had an outsider position because the student teachers were the participants and data providers, a group to which I do not belong nor share characteristics with. The student teachers are the knowledge contributors, facilitated by various reflective approaches. During the practicum, the student teachers were teachers and researchers. This duality enabled the student teachers to examine the trial of improvisation activities from the inside as data collectors (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In my dual role in this research as teacher and researcher, I am still one and the same person trying to balance the two simultaneously. As a teacher, I am an English teacher educator with the student teachers' development as my goal. As a researcher, I must reflect on my role in the classroom and its impact on the research. Due to this awareness, I avoided alterations to the improvisation instructions and classroom organisation. In my teaching practice, a lesson plan with the organisation of sessions is normally the starting point for the organic process in the learning environment with that particular group on that specific day. This plan will then be open for adjustments to meet the needs of the group; however, the research design depended on teaching the same improvisation activities

to various groups in the same order. These considerations may challenge the balance between good pedagogy and good research, resulting in a conflict of loyalty to the student teachers or the data collection. My awareness of the strengths as well as challenges of the dual position has increased throughout the project. In my opinion, I made minimal adjustments when needed for safekeeping of the teaching quality such as three- or four-sentence stories (see 4.3.2.).

I have observed opportunities in the dual role as teacher/researcher as well. In two interviews, the reluctant speakers showed some signs of physical distress as red marks around the neck towards the end of the interview. After the recording was stopped, I deliberately chatted about an unrelated and more positive matter. In one case, I asked about the self-chosen book the student teacher was currently reading for the course. The student teacher visibly relaxed. In the other case, I asked about her qualification plans. In both cases, the student teachers and I chatted a few minutes and the physical distress became less visible. Being the teacher and researcher, I possessed relevant information and could take the initiative to help student teachers relax before leaving the room where the interview took place.

For the sake of a trustworthy analysis of the student teachers' experiences, I must be conscious of my own beliefs and values before, during and after the analysis (presuppositions and pre-understanding). As a tool in this process of enhancing my awareness, I wrote a document about my own experiences as a non-professional improviser in improvisation master classes among international professional improvisers (2016–2019). Through a heightened awareness of my own state of mind and body while participating in advanced improvisation workshops, I was able to take notes both during and after these workshops. Through the process of writing these notes into a cohesive text, I expressed my thoughts and feelings that arose during these advanced improvisation workshops, thereby accessing and separating my pre-understanding of the research topic.

The circumstances of improvisation sessions will naturally differ in university classrooms. One example was that there was a power outage during an improvisation session with the story cubes, which made it impossible to see the images. While we waited for the daylight I had to improvise. I added the silent letter game as a filler game because the joint story made in the silent letter game relies on attentive listening but not visual images. The student teachers were divided into two rows. Two student teachers (A&B) took turns in telling the story without using the forbidden letter. They could not avoid the forbidden letter forever, obviously, so the other storytellers listened attentively ready to take over and continue the same story if either A or B used the forbidden letter. If this happened, A or B received applause from the others in the row, failing with a smile, and moved over for the next student teacher from their row to continue from where they left off. Luckily, the power came back after a while and the *Dice-Based Story* could begin. Because this activity was not part of the research, data mentioning the silent letter game were not included.

In my earlier practice as an improvisation instructor, children and teenagers chose to participate in improvisation workshops in their spare time. They were motivated to be part of the creative process and open to explore their imagination. In a school or university classroom, pupils and student teachers may or may not be motivated to develop their English in an improvisation-based approach. They may be familiar or unfamiliar with drama and theatre. Their willingness to improvise can therefore not be regarded as the common starting point as one can in improvisation workshops. The expectations of practising improvisation on a stage or in a drama room may be quite different from the expectations learners take into the EFL classroom. This had to be taken into account. Student teachers were informed that they could take a break from the activities at any time.

Filming the student teachers provided footage to be used as prompts. In 2017, some videos were used by the student teachers for reflection in their retrospective texts. In 2018, the prompt videos were shown during the interviews to stimulate

reflection. As a sample, the students were asked how they felt about filming themselves, which they said was fine. Many said they were used to filming each other on their phones in their spare time. There is a fine balance between best sound quality versus natural setting and classroom practice research.

Despite having habitually gathered the data in the pre- and post-questionnaires, gender was deemed irrelevant as a research parameter. Once I had realised this, I challenged myself to actively consider which pronoun to use for the individual student teacher. After some reflection, female pronouns were selected to represent the student teachers because the female gender was in the majority in these courses and therefore “she/her” would be the most representative pronoun for the student teachers in my project. Consequently, a student teacher is referred to by female pronouns (she/her) as the unbiased pronoun.

6 Main Findings

In this chapter, I will present the findings in short. First the findings for each article will be shared, then the synthesised findings for the project will round off the chapter.

6.1 Main Findings from Article 1

The combined findings indicated that improvisation activities had been a valuable method for increasing the speaking confidence of the student teachers. Statistical findings showed significant improvements in student teachers' level of speaking confidence and degree of relaxation while speaking English (items 7, 9, 14, 16). One may regard the first article with its pre- and post-questionnaires as a more product-oriented study (Ellis, 2012), focusing on the effects of the improvisation activities.

A significant effect was found in pre- to post-tests for items about oral communication skills (items 3 and 8) and items regarding FL confidence and safety. Student teachers reported more enjoyment while learning collaboratively. Ratings relating to speaking confidence in the English classroom (items 9 and 16) showed a significant increase, however no significant increase was found for the evident item about speaking confidence (item 18). In regard to oral communication, student teachers' self-assessed listening, expression and conversational skills remained stable whereas their speaking skills apparently improved significantly.

Nevertheless, some student teachers reported they would have wanted more preparation time. This finding may seem contradictory, but it provides insight into some of the difficulties that student teachers experienced when fully improvising. The act of suddenly expressing themselves in character or in an unusual situation may have shown some student teachers that they had certain gaps in their language competency (Swain, 2000), as some student teachers described in their retrospective texts. Some student teachers reported that they realised their English was not as poor as they previously believed and stated that they were going to be more lenient towards

themselves. The exposure to the collaborative narrative appeared to have increased student teachers' speaking confidence.

To further investigate the influence of improvisation activities on speaking confidence, a group analysis was performed on the retrospective texts from the initial sample (see 4.2.2 for an explanation). Student teachers were asked to write about their confidence during spontaneous speech, and in line with the statistical analysis, an increase in speaking confidence was reported. Most student teachers (16 out of 23) reported a positive influence on their speaking confidence, formulated as an increase or boost in self-confidence during speech. Student teachers mentioned that the practice made them more competent, which again enhanced their confidence. Student teachers reported that the enjoyment, collaboration and high degree of positive engagement had helped to increase their speaking confidence.

6.2 Main Findings from Article 2

Article 2 explored experiences of a larger group of student teachers with participating in improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice in English. The lack of scripted speech allowed the student teachers to speak spontaneously and explore their oral proficiency beyond a controlled outcome. The student teachers were asked to reflect on their personal language learning experiences with improvisation activities in written and oral form. The data collected were semi-guided retrospective texts and audio recordings of semi-structured interviews with reluctant speakers.

Most student teachers experienced improvisation activities as highly enjoyable (71%), beneficial for speaking confidence (78%) and facilitating spontaneous speech practice (88%):

Table 27 *Most Recurrent Themes in Retrospective Texts (n = 41)*

Theme	Number of texts
Good spontaneous speech practice	36
Increase in speaking confidence	32
Enjoyment	29
Safety	27
Creativity	25
Initial discomfort	21
Vocabulary	17

Findings for reluctant speaker interviews showed that improvisation activities could have two different types of influence on speaking reluctance. If student teachers were reluctant to speak and enjoyed themselves during the improvisation activities, they started to relax during the practice, thereby producing spontaneous speech. This was experienced as mastery or a victory, which again encouraged student teachers to take more language risks. The greater the enjoyment, the greater the engagement, and the easier it was to speak English, the reluctant speakers reported. Safety and trust were important conditions for the improvisation activities. If the student teacher was very reluctant to speak, improvisation activities were experienced as stressful. There was no feeling of mastery, which again confirmed the feeling of speaking reluctance. Instead of achieving a sense of mastery, they remained in a sense of discomfort.

In this article, it is argued that improvisation is a relevant method in EFL teacher education for developing a "spontaneous speech mindset" among student teachers. This view was supported when comparing the findings with Berk and Trieber's (2009) didactic arguments. Improvisation activities were related to Gallagher's point of embodiment (2010). The activities were learner-centred and empowering because student teachers had to fill the activity with content and complete the activity together. In addition, student teachers were stimulated to apply a variety of language and paralinguistic communication through embodiment of the role. Student teachers described how playing characters provided space for practising diverse spontaneous speech through creativity (Sawyer, 2003; Winston & Stinson, 2011). In conclusion, the

improvisation activities offered joyful, collaborative learning, which appeared to decrease the fear of making mistakes and to support varied spontaneous speech practice.

6.3 Main Findings from Article 3

Student teachers experienced that the improvisation activities facilitated good spontaneous speaking practice, enabling speaking confidence to be developed. Interactive, meaningful communication took place. The threshold for speaking unscripted English was lowered because the playful activities enticed all pupils to contribute. Consequently, the EFL learning environment may improve because the improvisation activities help pupils switch from L1 to L2, student teachers reported. Student teachers found the improvisation activities enabled differentiated oral speech practice. This resulted in a more active learning environment because all pupils actively contributed. Peer assistance was largely experienced as positive.

The success of the improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice relied mainly on the pupils feeling gently forced to contribute as well as feeling comfortable about speaking after abandoning their earlier focus on correct language. The game aspects made pupils unaware of learning English, it was reported. The improvisation activities engaged the pupils simultaneously, which created safety. Most improvisation activities allowed pupils to choose content, which empowered pupils. They were creative and took increasing language risks. The improvisation activities provided attentive listening practice through their unpredictability and reliance on elaboration. Pupils especially enjoyed collaborative storytelling.

The improvisation activities created a learning environment characterised by much enjoyment and high levels of positive engagement. This enabled pupils to practise their spontaneous English speech by taking greater risks in their immediate contributions to the activities. During the second trial pupils produced more language and demonstrated higher proficiency. It seemed as if they had warmed up and took more

language risks because they focused on contributing to the improvisation activities. Pupils listened more attentively. As a concrete result, the stories improved in narrative structure. Moreover, it was reported that the improvised conversations provided good spontaneous speech practice – for example, vocabulary practice. More advanced pupils were seemingly freer to express themselves creatively, which student teachers explained by pointing at their wider vocabulary. The overall finding was that the improvisation activities encouraged pupils to continue to speak, even reluctant pupils.

The trial log instructions inquired how student teachers knew competence aims had been reached. Some student teachers included statements and other forms of feedback from pupils. These represent a sample of pupils' perspectives and are not included in the current project. After the research had ended, two student teachers tried out the improvisation activities in a new school practicum. They explored pupils' views on the improvisation activities through surveys for their bachelor thesis. Similar indications of pupils' perspectives on the improvisation activities were reported by these student teachers.

6.4 Main Findings from Article 4

The fourth article explores improvisation activities as a method for communicative English speech practice. The article discusses how student teachers experienced trying improvisation activities for spontaneous speech in school practicums.

An interesting finding was that in-service student teachers offered more scaffolding in the first trial. They also adapted the instructions in the second trial. Some student teachers, both pre- and in-service, underestimated the preparation needed for the improvisation activities. In-service student teachers prepared the pupils for the improvisation activities by activating previous linguistic knowledge, with specific language support, models for conversations and explicitly reminding the pupils to listen attentively. The in-service student teachers appeared more focused on EFL

learning, both before and after the improvisation activities. Also in the second trial, in-service student teachers provided examples of suitable language and prompts.

In general, student teachers described their role as being attentive, encouraging, and playful facilitators in the student-centred classroom atmosphere. Student teachers could informally assess pupils' speaking skills while monitoring the speech practice. Learning environments were dominated by much enjoyment, relaxation, risk taking and mostly positive engagement due to the playful, non-threatening atmosphere. Pupils supported each other during the collaborative improvisation activities. Pupils were immersed in role playing and engaged in using language in meaningful, playful contexts.

6.5 Main Findings for the Project

Almost nine out of ten student teachers reported that facilitation of spontaneous speech practice was experienced during their own improvisation experiences in university classrooms. In the trials, student teachers reported that pupils actively contributed in differentiated spontaneous speech practice, enabling speaking confidence to be developed. According to the quantitative and qualitative findings in this project, the improvisation activities increased student teachers' speaking confidence significantly, with nearly four out of five student teachers experiencing benefits. The main research question for the project was how improvisation activities can facilitate spontaneous English speech practice and the development of speaking confidence.

Enjoyment was found as a major facilitative factor. Most student teachers (71%) reported they enjoyed the improvisation activities. The high level of enjoyment meant a high level of positive engagement, which made it easier to speak English and take language risks. Among student teachers, the reluctant speakers who experienced mastery during the improvisation activities reported that enjoyment was essential for their relaxation. Enjoyment enabled these reluctant speakers to achieve the

spontaneous speech mindset and take more language risks. The very reluctant speakers among the student teachers were found, however, to experience stress during the improvisation activities. This discomfort reaffirmed their speaking reluctancy rather than liberate them from it. Nevertheless, the overall finding was that trust and safety were important for spontaneous speech practice and participating simultaneously contributed to pupils feeling safe in a low-anxiety learning environment.

Another facilitative factor was collaboration. The findings show that collaborative improvisation increased student teachers' and pupils' enjoyment of speech practice. In the trials, pupils were gently forced to contribute while feeling comfortable about speaking spontaneously. The unpredictability of the speech production made attentive listening vital for content elaboration. The improvisation activities were learner-centred and empowered the group through collaboration and a focus on meaningful communication.

A third facilitative factor was play. The playful character of the improvisation activities created a safe learning environment. Play engaged student teachers and pupils to speak spontaneously and creatively. For both student teachers and pupils, there was a high degree of positive engagement during the improvisation activities. They appeared to take greater liberties with their language production as a part of their creative contributions to the improvisation activities.

Although in-service student teachers offered more scaffolding in the first trial and focused more on language learning, both groups of student teachers described themselves as being encouraging and playful facilitators in the trial classrooms. Communicative approaches are learner-centered and focus on meaningful interaction. The improvisation activities facilitated good communicative speech practice. Through their joyful, collaborative, and playful character improvisation activities encouraged spontaneous speech practice and facilitated the (further) development of speaking confidence of student teachers and pupils.

7 Discussion

In the first sections of this chapter, the articles will be discussed in two parts: one section puts a spotlight on university context and the second on school practicums. An important purpose of EFL teacher education is to equip student teachers with a didactic toolbox filled with flexible and suitable tools. In this project, the tool is an improvisation method for practising English as a Foreign Language spontaneously. In the last sections of this chapter, contributions to the field of English didactics, implications for English teacher education and limitations of the project will be discussed. Finally, opportunities for further research will be suggested.

7.1 Discussion of Findings for Articles 1 and 2

These articles investigated student teachers' own experiences with doing improvisation activities in university classrooms. It was explored whether the improvisation activities influenced student teachers' speaking confidence, and if so, what could explain this influence. In reply to an open question on the pre-questionnaire, student teachers described physical traits of speaking nervousness, such as, for example, heart beating faster, feeling tense and stressed, having sweaty palms, trembling and blushing. One may regard the first article with its pre- and post-questionnaires as a product-oriented study (Ellis, 2012), focusing on the effects of the improvisation activities. The second part of the first article explored and explained how the improvisation activities had the effect they did or did not have (Ellis, 2012).

According to the quantitative findings, student teachers experienced a positive influence from doing the improvisation activities. When asked indirectly about improvements in confidence and about their degree of safety during spontaneous speech production they reported an increase. These effects were validated by the findings of the qualitative analysis, which revealed that most student teachers in the sample reported a positive influence on their speaking confidence. Triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that the improvisation activities had a

positive influence on the student teachers' speaking confidence. These findings could indicate that student teachers have slightly changed their attitudes through a sense of achievement and a decrease of self-judgement.

A significant increase was reported in student teachers' ability to speak English. Their speaking confidence may have increased due to their mastery of spontaneous speech in improvisation activities. Some improvisation activities contained a guessing element, which demanded circumlocution and clarification of questions. Through solving the mysteries in these activities, student teachers may have felt mastery. Following the premise that self-confidence is a predictor of FLL success (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004), the findings related to speaking confidence are quite promising.

The decrease of self-judgement created a safe learning environment, which was beneficial for speaking confidence. There was a large increase in the categories of 1) feeling generally relaxed while speaking English, and 2) feeling more confident while speaking English in small groups. In their retrospective texts, student teachers explained that they had fun, which created a relaxed learning environment and a safe space for making mistakes (Felsman et al., 2018). These explanations confirmed the significant finding that these improvisation activities provided a low-anxiety learning environment with a high degree of enjoyment (Dewaele et al., 2018).

Items relating to speaking confidence in the English classroom showed a significant increase, yet no significant effect was found when student teachers were asked directly about increased speaking confidence in the questionnaire. This could be regarded as a contradictory finding. Interestingly, most student teachers reported an increase in their speaking confidence in their retrospective texts. This contradiction shows similarities with another study (Savaşçı, 2014), which found no reluctance among student teachers in the questionnaire analysis but reported reluctance in individual interviews. This led me to wonder whether interviews could provide a more suitable platform for reporting speaking confidence and speaking reluctance.

The anxiety-related scores in the questionnaires remained quite low on the whole. This may indicate that the student teachers felt safe in the learning environment, trusting both the teacher educator and their fellow student teachers. This finding is similar to an earlier study that established that more experienced FL learners report less FLCA (Dewaele et al., 2018). I might speculate that student teachers experienced less FLCA because of their adequate English language proficiency, and that they did not identify with the explicit item on speaking confidence as being relevant to their situation. Nevertheless, during the interviews it became clear that the very reluctant speakers were quite anxious about possible social judgement from their peers.

The analysis of both data collections uncovered a rise in appreciation for collaborative learning. The retrospective texts confirmed that, when the activity allowed for a great deal of freedom, e.g. in the storytelling activities, student teachers had to collaboratively improvise the direction of their communication (Sawyer, 2001). This finding could be explained as social development, as some student teachers expressed in their retrospective texts. They wrote that the learning environment became safer after a while because the inhibition, which is characteristic of being unfamiliar with each other, decreased. The second-year student teachers, however, also reported increased safety, so this familiarisation may indeed have been enabled by the improvisation activities. Lastly, student teachers may have become more aware of the shared pleasure of mastering a collaborative narrative. This interpretation is supported by Johnstone's characterisation of improvisation as practising interpersonal skills (Johnstone, 1999).

The initial analysis of some retrospective texts provided preliminary explanations for the reported increase in confidence. The student teachers referred to a high degree of fun, enjoyment of collaborative learning and intense engagement to the point where some student teachers forgot they were speaking English. As Crossan (1998) observed, the spontaneous nature of improvisation requires learners to devote their full attention to that moment rather than be distracted by what has occurred before or

may occur after. This state of presence in play may form a counterweight to FLA/FLCA. To a large extent, the findings of the first article resonated well with earlier identification of group cohesiveness, play, exposure and humour as the beneficial elements of comedic improv therapy (Phillips Sheesley et al., 2016). Play and humour created a suitable learning environment for the comfortable practice of spontaneous speech in small, supportive groups.

In the second article, I investigated the connection between Berk and Trieber's didactic arguments for applying improvisation in the classroom. Modern student teachers often learn through inductive discovery using experiential learning (Berk & Trieber, 2009). The improvisation activities were learner-centred because student teachers were responsible for completing the actual content together. Such an approach suits modern language teaching methodology with its focus on communicative and intercultural competences. For example, *Customer Service* and *Park Bench* contained an information gap so student teachers had to paraphrase to close the gap, thereby practising attentive listening (CIP4) and communicative competence (Richards, 2006).

The findings confirmed that improvisation activities are attuned with several intelligences and related to Gallagher's point of embodiment (2010). Any interpersonal communication displays relations and status (CIP3) (Coppens, 2002), which is partly expressed through paralinguistic cues. Practising FL speech includes the use of paralinguistic cues such as facial expressions, gestures and other forms of non-verbal communication (Stinson, 2008). In addition, student teachers were naturally encouraged to apply a variety of language registers through embodiment of the role, such as polite language required from servants. Student teachers described how playing characters provided space for practising diverse spontaneous speech through creativity.

Finally, the findings support the notion of collaborative learning as central to improvisation experiences and being related to acceptance and elaboration (CIP1).

One common explanation for decreasing the fear of making mistakes was enjoyment. For most student teachers, enjoyment of playing appeared to reduce psychological risk and support spontaneity (CIP2). Student teachers described enjoyment, improved interpersonal relationships and copious spontaneous speech as essential factors in improvisation sessions, which contributed to increased speaking confidence.

The overall findings could be described as an enjoyable spontaneous speech experience that enabled an increase in EFL speaking confidence. I defined this as attaining a "spontaneous speech mindset". The findings confirmed Stern's hypothesis (1980) that certain psychological factors were triggered, rendering student teachers more flexible, leading to psycholinguistic benefits. The improvisation activities created safe environments for spontaneous speech practice, which has been described as a positive atmosphere of openness and trust encouraged by mutual support (Schwenke et al., 2021). The improvisation activities challenged student teachers' oral proficiency in diverse situations. This resulted in exploration of their linguistic and creative boundaries, and for most student teachers in a "spontaneous speech mindset":

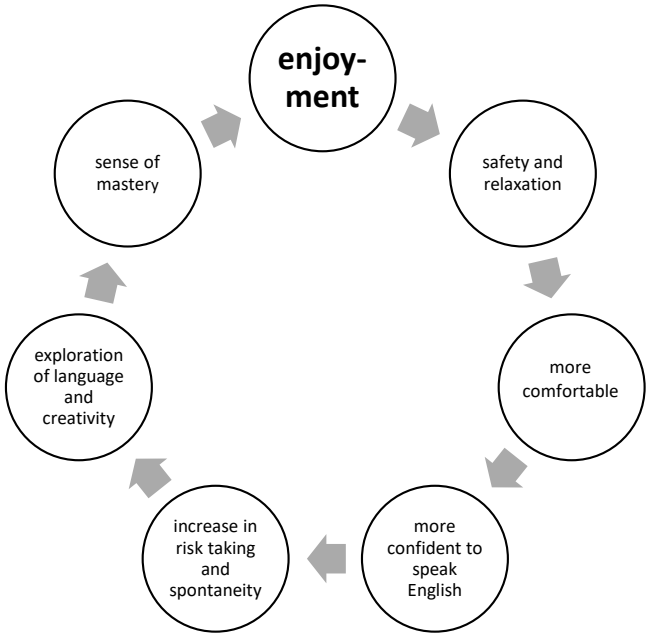

Figure 3 *Spontaneous Speech Mindset*

Student teacher experiences can be interpreted as a continuous circular process, with enjoyment as the main facilitating component for reaching a "spontaneous speech mindset". When their language contributions were accepted without judgement (CIP1), student teachers relaxed in the safety of spontaneous speech practice (CIP2). As student teachers became more comfortable, their speaking confidence could develop. This led to more risk taking (CIP2) in speech which I called attaining a "spontaneous speech mindset". Consequently, student teachers' speech became more fluent and varied. They experienced mastery, increasing their enjoyment of improvisation activities. If student teachers failed to communicate spontaneously, most still enjoyed themselves because improvisation activities were non-judgemental and playful with room for failure. Piccoli (2018) refers to laughter as a tool for establishing a trusting space in which students feel less self-conscious. The circle would be repeated and every time a speaker experienced enjoyment their "spontaneous speech mindset" would increase. The narrative creativity of improvisation activities (CIP1) stimulated student teacher imagination. This challenged their language beyond everyday speech and inspired the rediscovery of imaginative response (Johnstone, 1981). Student teachers explored their creativity (CIP3) when in character, surprising themselves by applying different language styles in their adapted roles. Student teachers were absorbed by collaborative stories (CIP4), with some reporting that they reached a level of being in synch or "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Improvisation activities supported and contextualised their spontaneous speech, as student teachers were expected to attempt new behaviour and stretch their competency base (Crossan, 1998). Student teachers explored different sides of themselves, coped with unpredictable situations, and (re)discovered more words and phrases by accessing their playful imagination.

Reluctant speaker experiences varied, and laughter turned out to express either stress or enjoyment. Very reluctant speakers experienced a "vicious circle of stress". This discomfort possibly hindered the experience of enjoyment required for relaxing into the "spontaneous speech mindset". The lack of control made very reluctant

speakers uncomfortable, causing difficulty with acceptance and elaboration (CIP1). Consequently, very reluctant speakers preferred random turn-taking in spontaneous storytelling because they could elaborate when they wanted, giving them some control. This finding is in contrast to Piazzoli (2011), who found that university students with the highest self-reported level of FLA had benefitted most from the process drama approach. Piazzoli's findings showed that language anxiety reduction was largest for university students with a high degree of grammar knowledge and a low degree of fluency. The short time frame of improvisation sessions may have been a limitation for very reluctant speakers. They may benefit from improvisation exposure over a longer time (Seppänen et al., 2019) or when provided as part of professional group therapy (Phillips Sheesley et al., 2016).

Conversely, other reluctant speakers experienced a "victorious circle of enjoyment". Repeated exposure to the enjoyment of improvisation activities decreased their need for preparation and increased their "spontaneous speech mindsets". These reluctant speakers realised they had mastered something beyond their learner belief, a realisation which strengthened their speaking confidence. Findings from reluctant speaker interviews highlight the importance of regularly leaving comfort zones under professional guidance. The reluctant speaker's mention of the double-edged sword in retrospective texts could be a reminder that there is a certain degree of risk involved in applying improvisation in EFL classrooms.

The findings in the first article relate to the debate around anxiety being static, i.e. personality trait, and dynamic, i.e. situational. Given that low speaking confidence originates from a situational anxiety, improvisation activities encouraged reluctant speakers to adopt a "spontaneous speech mindset". Two student teachers displaying social anxiety experienced a physical stress reaction during improvisation activities, which did not facilitate spontaneous speech for them.

It appears that teaching the concept of status in a short session of an hour is quite challenging. Moreover, the subtlety of status expressions in relationships can be hard

to express in a foreign language. Status-related improvisation activities (*Downton Abbey* and *Meeting*) were among the least chosen activities for school practicums. Johnstone expressed that teenagers always work with status as their daily concern for their position amongst other teenagers (Company, 2013). Around 50% of student teachers reported some initial discomfort. The timing of using the first weeks of the semester for the improvisation sessions was deliberately chosen. The reasoning was that student teachers could thus benefit most from the experience for the remaining semester and that they could try out improvisation activities in school practicums. The initial discomfort that student teachers reported may be related to the discrepancy between the playful approach and the academic context with its focus on cognitive learning.

7.2 Discussion of Findings for Articles 3 and 4

In articles 3 and 4, the transfer of the improvisation activities was made from TEFL courses at university to EFL classrooms in schools. Student teachers overall concluded that improvisation activities provided good spontaneous speech practice. Facilitation of spontaneous speech practice took place through the safety of acceptance and inclusion, embodiment, immediacy, engagement, and enjoyment. High levels of engagement and language production were observed. Pupils often seemed quite unaware that they were speaking English due to the high level of enjoyment and the high level of positive engagement, which equals a large amount of oral communicative practice.

This process mirrors the concept “spontaneous speech mindset” established in article 2 (Zondag, 2021). The facilitative conditions were firstly created by the accepting nature of playful improvisation in which there are no mistakes or judgements, a premise that provided instant safety in classrooms. The physicality of improvisation activities offered a kinaesthetic speech practice that can engage pupils through embodiment. This embodiment may also engage their emotions and assist in retaining spontaneous speech practice. Secondly, engagement was reportedly high in guessing

games (*Customer Service*, *Park Bench*). The mystery elements in guessing games create an authentic communication need, a purpose or motive, with meaningful exchanges of information. These information gaps are particularly valuable for EFL learners because they receive an immediate response to their linguistic and paralinguistic performance (Cahnmann-Taylor & McGovern, 2021, p. 106). Moreover, guessing games made learners rather competitive, which added engagement and ultimately enjoyment through achievement to spontaneous speech practices.

One could argue that enjoyment fuelled engagement, which again fired up under language learning. Meaningful and engaging activities increased motivation. A high level of engagement equalled a large amount of oral communication practice, which increased pupils' chances of reaching competence aims for oral communication. Their increased motivation seemed to increase peer pressure to speak more English. Reportedly competence aims were reached. This engagement was stimulated by the pupils' empowerment when they were choosing their own topic and language to express themselves. They created longer and more imaginative stories second time round. The unpredictable character of improvisation activities forced pupils to listen attentively, which is an essential skill for advancing scenes or stories (Johnstone, 1999) and for spontaneous conversations (Sawyer, 2001).

The facilitation of spontaneous speech practice took place through exerting an inclusive, playful pressure on pupils. This is an important finding because teachers may relent from expecting pupils to participate when they show initial hesitation. A teacher may be tempted to avoid confrontations and rather offer individual speech practice without exposing the pupil to pressure. According to the project findings, it seems important to invest in the practice of taking playful risks and motivate all pupils to participate in the main classroom. The second article showed a similar finding for reluctant speakers among student teachers. The lack of formal assessment and judgement in the playful improvisation approach seemed to relax reluctant speakers. Another central component for facilitation was enjoyment, which often occurred

together with engagement. Collective enjoyment engaged pupils to the degree where they forgot they spoke English; their commitment to, and enjoyment of, improvisation activities seemed to have immersed them in the spontaneous speech practice. The components for facilitation of spontaneous speech that were found in article 3 are illustrated in the model below:

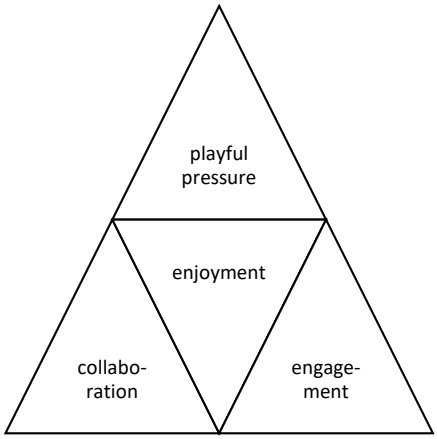

Figure 4 *Spontaneous Speech Facilitation Model*

The findings showed that enjoyment is the key factor in facilitating spontaneous speech practice. Playful pressure exerts gentle force from above, and engagement and collaboration complete the pyramid. Collaboration was realised through attentive listening (CIP4) and contributing to the narrative in the improvisation activities. To speak spontaneously with meaning, pupils had to listen carefully and accept earlier contributions (CIP1). For example, collaborative stories were elaborated through accepting offers and adding content, which increased language production. The pyramid is incomplete when any components are missing, which can render facilitation of spontaneous speech practice less successful. In that case, necessary circumstances for developing speaking confidence and communicative competence may not be present.

The open topic for storytelling and choice of characters in some improvisation activities provided pupils with a certain degree of autonomous spontaneous speech

practice in a learning environment that inspires individuality. The freedom to choose the exact language to use makes improvisation activities suitable for heterogeneous groups of learners, which are found in all EFL classrooms. This flexibility matches CLT's emphasis on learner-centredness (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Besides that, improvisation activities facilitated situational and authentic speech practice, providing learners with opportunities to practise language in diverse settings and diverse registers. Improvisation as a method for speech has proven to be an excellent didactic tool for pupils to improvise and practise phrases together in interactive, semi-natural situations. At first glance, storytelling may seem further removed from naturalistic, oral communication. However, it stimulates thinking and speaking on your feet, which is important to keep conversations going and prepares learners for the everyday English that they need in their future (Bygate, 2001). The inherent unpredictability of improvisation activities offered a close parallel to authentic FL use.

One must bear in mind that more advanced EFL learners have more freedom to express themselves in a variety of ways. Pupils with a smaller vocabulary may experience greater risk when improvising and thereby feel less enjoyment. These pupils may have experienced a large gap between their language capabilities and the language proficiency needed to master the communication needs for the improvisation activity. In such cases, scaffolding by an experienced teacher may support pupils' speech practice. Scaffolding efforts by mainly in-service student teachers may have been the safety net pupils needed to take language risks (CIP2) and become more confident. Less advanced pupils, whether in terms of age or ability, may need more and longer exposure to improvisation activities to increase their enjoyment of the playful approach and reach the "spontaneous speech mindset".

Besides student teachers' scaffolding, pupils seemed to have found the support needed in the collaborative character of improvisation activities to take greater language risks (CIP2) than they would have managed by themselves. Student teachers reported that pupils learned vocabulary from each other, which supports the notion

that improvisation activities support collaborative language learning. This finding concurs with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory (1986). Interactional learning enables learners to move beyond their perceived abilities (Lantolf, 2007; Vygotsky, 1986), resulting in pupils taking larger linguistic and creative risks when being playfully forced to go beyond their comfort zones together. Improvisation activities provided good conditions for spontaneous speech practice because pupils were positively engaged to contribute to collective stories or scenes. One could therefore state that pupils were empowered by improvisation activities to speak spontaneously beyond their perceived capacities. The dramatic tension may have been too high for the very reluctant speakers, whereas for most student teachers, dramatic tension engaged them in spontaneous speech. Enjoyment of a dramatic role may therefore depend on a certain degree of speaking confidence or oral proficiency. Ellis (2012) explains that learner participation in EFL classrooms and EFL proficiency may be regarded as correlational.

An important finding was that in-service student teachers provided more scaffolding than pre-service student teachers, even in the first trial. They predicted challenges in the instructions for the improvisation activities. In-service student teachers may have routinely focused on specific language learning outcomes rather than relenting to the less controllable language learning process of improvisation activities. One may wonder whether scaffolding may reduce the purpose of spontaneous speech practice. Although scaffolding with language prompts may have reduced language spontaneity slightly, it may also have increased some pupils' confidence. There is indeed a fine balance between scaffolding speech practice and controlling speech practice.

Lastly, only two student teachers selected an improvisation activity containing status for their classroom trial. This might be an indication that the theatrical concept of status needs more training than the improvisation sessions provided. It can be harder in status activities to separate the character from the self. Student teachers may

have felt insecure about the psychological ramifications of playing with status in a group culture with its own, already established status structure. This explanation is based on Johnstone's interview statement (Company, 2013) that teenagers work with status as their daily concern. Johnstone stated that one perhaps should not toggle too much with status unless we can guarantee a good structure around the improvisation situation. The findings in article 4 suggest that it may be harder to build that safe environment when using status improvisation and keep the action in the realm of characters, not the self. Otherwise, issues in classroom environments may be amplified through status activities. Therefore, status seems to be the least transferable content of improvisation sessions.

During the project, it became clear that written instructions for improvisation activities could have included written safety measures. These safety instructions were provided orally during improvisation sessions at the university, such as "anything you say is right", "no physical contact", "help each other out" and "make each other look good". My explanation for not including these messages in the written instructions is that they represent my practical knowledge as an improviser. Just as a teacher in the classroom creates a positive culture, improvisation instructors invest in the safety of improvisation. This safe learning environment needs to be in place before attending to the actual content of the course and enhancing trust through beginners' activities. The instruction "anything you say is right" provides an important safety for spontaneous speech practice because it allows risk taking without judgement. This phrase reappeared in trial logs, so student teachers have apparently picked up on it despite it not being included in the written instructions. Improvisation for beginners inherently includes safety-enhancing content. In the instructions of *One Word Story* acceptance of all ideas was specifically mentioned. In future instructions for improvisation activities, one could include safety instructions explicitly rather than trusting classrooms to already have safety measures for an inclusive learning environment and picking up oral instructions. Although trial log instructions asked about adaptations, mostly in-service student teachers adapted the improvisation activities to fit their

classroom. This may be caused by in-service student teachers having more knowledge of pupils' needs as well as an independent reflective skill set that they have developed through their teaching experience (11 years on average).

7.3 Rounding off the Discussion

This project aimed to explore the potential of improvisation, how improvisation activities can facilitate spontaneous English speech practice and the development of speaking confidence. It was a surprising discovery that improvisation activities were mostly successfully transferred from university to school settings. Safety and enjoyment seemed to go hand in hand. For pre-service student teachers, more reflections around didactic and organisational challenges may increase safety awareness and the quality of spontaneous speech practice. For in-service student teachers, who are experienced in classroom management and know their pupils well, some classroom challenges regarding improvisation may be addressed before transferring improvisation activities to EFL classrooms. The practical knowledge that creates the safety net in improvisation could be specified in improvisation instructions.

Among student teachers, very reluctant speakers could not relax into the "spontaneous speech mindset" because they did not enjoy themselves, which seems similar to some pupils' behaviour in some school practicums. According to student teachers, improvisation activities enabled the development of speaking confidence well. To create an inclusive, embodied spontaneous speech practice, improvisation activities must be structured yet flexible enough to provide EFL learners with demands just beyond their actual oral proficiency. With peer assistance and creative collaboration, EFL speakers may thus increase their language proficiency. Some key findings from the project are listed below:

- Collaboration creates a playful pressure to speak
- Safety is enhanced through non-judgement
- Improvisation can provide a contextual speech practice

- Enjoyment and engagement are created through embodiment
- A “spontaneous speech mindset” can lead to speaking confidence.

Based on the findings in the four articles, improvisation activities can be used as a method for developing speaking confidence in spontaneous English speech. The improvisation activities facilitated spontaneous speech practice well because they led to an increase in speaking confidence and a sense of mastery if student teachers achieved the “spontaneous speech mindset”. For the very reluctant speakers, however, this facilitation did not take place. The student teachers had mostly positive experiences with teaching improvisation activities in their practice. The overall impression can be illustrated by this quote from an in-service student teacher:

> Most young learners think learning is boring, especially if there’s a teacher involved, so therefore I like these exercises a lot. It gives the students a lot of freedom to explore and have fun whilst learning, and that is what I think is one of the most important things to have at least some part of in the classroom, fun. If the students are having fun, they will have a lot more motivation compared to if they were bored and stuck behind a desk all day. (P304)

In this quote several project findings are crystallised:

- The empowerment of learners through the freedom to explore and take risks.
- The motivational aspect of enjoyment.
- The importance of embodied language learning.

Language learners’ enjoyment, regardless of age, is motivational for FL teachers as well. In-service student teachers reported that they had lacked an approach to facilitate spontaneous speech. The overall conclusion is that improvisation is a good spontaneous speech facilitation method.

7.4 Contributions to the Field of English Didactics in Teacher Education

The main research question for the project was how improvisation activities can facilitate spontaneous English speech practice and the development of speaking confidence. The following section will clarify further how the project contributes to English didactics in teacher education.

Looking back at the pilot study, it contains elements that later articles touch upon as well. First, the discussion of situational or personality-based risk reluctance from the chapter could be seen as a foreshadowing of the victorious and vicious circle of the "spontaneous speech mindset" in the second article. Second, we emphasised the need for training of flexibility and adaptability, a competence that since then has appeared under the topic Life Skills in the Norwegian curriculum (*National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion*, 2020).

This flexibility may not only be regarded as a skill for future citizens but also for flexible and adaptable learners who are open to diverse methodologies. Since the interpretation of learning style facilitation has been reconsidered and found to be a rather limiting didactic approach (Fenner, 2020), EFL learners can be expected to expand their learning styles to include several, different approaches, including play for all ages. Play and instruction are seen as facilitators for development (Swain et al., 2011), a means by which conceptual abilities and the imagination of children are developed. Vygotsky (1979, p. 102) states that play creates a zone of proximal development for children, explaining that play helps children to play beyond their age, beyond their usual behaviour. Here I would like to remind the reader of Keith Johnstone's view that education has curbed play with its correct answer focus (see 2.2.2).

Sæbø (2016) studied the use of drama in Norwegian schools and found that pupils wanted a greater variation of didactic methods because variation is motivational and

can provide room for creativity. She found that there is a need for a didactic method that combines a bigger kinaesthetic register with cognitive and affective learning processes. In younger learners' classrooms, this is rarely debated; however, as learners move into higher grades, the potential of play-based learning needs to be continually recognised. Student teachers in the project stated literally that they are never too old to play, after having experienced the effect of enjoyment that play and risk taking had on their spontaneous language production. Play is universal and knows no age limit.

There is a long-standing tradition of using play in schools, especially for younger learners. Arguments can be the playful imagination from informal learning and the natural context for learning that play creates. This project emphasises that play as a natural approach to exploration and learning through play is relevant for older and advanced learners of English as well. Findings further confirm previous scholars' claims on the beneficial effect of drama-based methods for EFL learning:

> If drama can really enrich the language class in all these ways, why are so many teachers reluctant to use it? Many still think of drama as "theatricals", because this is their only experience of it. Often the fault lies not with the individual teacher, but with the training that he or she has received – a training that presents education as the one-way transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student, rather than the creation of a learning situation in which the student is also the teacher. (Wessels, 1987, p. 14)

Wessels (1987) points out that teacher education may need to take the responsibility for offering drama-based language learning. The findings in this project support previous scholars' claims on the beneficial effect of drama-based pedagogy for EFL learning. The trial of improvisation activities stimulated oral skills development through providing pupils with opportunities for situational, embodied language practice. The project emphasises the relevance of embodiment in language learning for all ages. Physical feelings cannot be separated from emotions as cognitive theorists suggest, placing feelings in the body and emotions in the mind (Benesch, 2017). Following Benesch's perspective, speaking reluctance is a physical and emotional issue.

It could benefit from being addressed in a kinaesthetic approach, such as through improvisation methods. Improvisation activities can be used to warm up learners to become comfortable speaking a foreign language, and to develop language through increased linguistic risk taking. Learners can practice emotional language (see section 2.2.3). The rules of an improvisation activity, just like an improvisation game, can remove the fear of failure. The project contributes to exploring the FLL potential of improvisation-based approaches, which turned out to be facilitated through playful pressure, enjoyment, engagement, and collaboration. Improvisation was a suitable approach for the development of communicative competence. Ideally, all learners would reach the "spontaneous speech mindset".

One could link the "spontaneous speech mindset" concept to Dweck's growth mindset (2008) in which learners' positive perceptions of their abilities are central to their success. The growth and fixed mindsets originate from educational psychology. Language learners with a fixed mindset may hinder their own learning because they want to avoid language risks and possible failure (Williams et al., 2015). An example of a growth mindset could be the learner belief that language learning is not an innate talent. This means that language learning abilities and language competence can be improved with effort, including failure, and that mistakes thus should be welcomed rather than avoided (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Williams et al., 2015). Another parallel to the "spontaneous speech mindset" could be the facilitative mindset, a sum of learner-internal factors for language learning (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020, p. 33). Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) explain that in order to engage, learners must regard the tasks as manageable, feel that they can affect their own learning and reach the objectives. They state that if learners experience a sense of enjoyment and feel energised while doing a task, they probably transfer this into a sense of efficacy. Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) point out that the facilitative state of mind concerns thoughts and feelings, thereby emphasising learners' emotional state as vital to their development which ties in with the findings in this project.

Following Schumann's view on feelings (2001), learners' perception of the present language learning situation will become a negative or positive image for the future. A positive experience with spontaneous speech practice can thus add positive images to learners' memory bank. The improvisation method may have a positive influence on learner belief (Young, 1991). In this project, the victorious circle of the "spontaneous speech mindset" could be regarded as providing support for the positive psychological effect of the improvisation method. Where the "spontaneous speech mindset" represents an inner process, the facilitative components contain both inner (enjoyment, engagement) and outer (playful pressure, collaboration) parts. EFL teachers have a role to play in encouraging growth mindsets, thereby encouraging learners to take language risks and to perceive mistakes as an essential part of language learning (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Williams et al., 2015). Johnstone shared this exchange with improvisers:

> (…) so I explain that real learning means 'getting it wrong'. This surprises them, so I explain further:' You could memorize the instructions for how to walk on stilts, but you'd still have to learn by falling off'. (Johnstone, 1999, p. 61)

The first step towards this playful attitude could be to explicitly discuss and train in spontaneous speech mindset with English language learners of all ages.

The findings highlight the value of student teachers' voices and learner autonomy in teacher education, allowing space for student teachers to form their own training under the guidance of teacher educators. The reflective writing has probably contributed to their own development as (prospective) teachers of English. Through writing often, they developed metacognitive views on their own learning. This view of student teachers as knowledge contributors and active learning facilitators may challenge administrative procedures in teacher education, where course plans and reading lists are planned in detail long before student teachers arrive at the beginning of the academic year. I would argue that learner-centred methodologies are as relevant in tertiary education as in other school systems. The ideal situation would be

to facilitate a dynamic course content that encourages more autonomy for student teachers.

7.5 Implications for Teacher Education

Teacher education must accept its responsibility to offer EFL student teachers theoretical and practical development through varied methods (*Lærerutdanning* 2025, 2017). Integrating playful activities through improvisation is an effective way of making language learning motivating and meaningful for learners (Cahnmann-Taylor & McGovern, 2021). The findings in my project support previous scholars' claims on the beneficial effect of drama-based pedagogy for EFL learning. Improvisation approaches specifically support play-based learning with unscripted, unpredictable language use. If learners in time can change the view of themselves from reluctant speakers to less reluctant speakers or spontaneous speakers, their communicative competence will probably increase as well. With this benefit in mind, providing improvisation approaches to a broader group of student teachers should be considered, possibly outside the realm of EFL. Scholars such as Stinson (2008) and Rossing and Hoffmann-Longtin (2016) have emphasised drama-based pedagogy in FLL as a vessel for deep learning that would support improvisation methodology as an interesting approach to deep learning in EFL classrooms. The findings in my project emphasise the value of embodied EFL speech practice which is quite a contradiction to online teaching that has become popular in recent times. One may wonder whether English teacher educators should argue for the importance of campus-based education rather than online teaching to facilitate embodied EFL practice through drama-based pedagogy.

Enjoyment is a key factor for creating a playful pressure to speak. There has not been much research into applying improvisation in EFL teacher education. The findings in my project support the improvisation approach as being relevant for student teachers and pupils. The project challenges EFL educators and teachers to regard improvisation activities as valuable spontaneous speech practice rather than filler games before learning English. The improvisation method has been shown to get

learners talking. Some scholars think that teachers who use their FL a lot in their classrooms can raise their pupils' levels of willingness to communicate (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018). Speaking EFL spontaneously, including language repairs, should therefore become second nature for student teachers.

Spontaneous speech practice needs to be addressed in teacher education because research has established that the skill of spontaneous speech may be challenging to develop for student teachers and pupils, especially teens and teenagers. The unpredictable language production in improvisation activities provides a close equivalent to authentic EFL use. Globally speaking it is acknowledged that reluctant speakers are a recurring challenge in the EFL classroom. Despite Norwegian learners being enveloped in English during their education and spare time (Dahl, 2015), reluctant speakers are a common phenomenon. It is therefore an important matter to convey to student teachers that creating an embodied, playful pressure to speak in the EFL classroom is an important condition for spontaneous speech facilitation. EFL student teachers should model a classroom speech practice of taking playful risks, with minimum scaffolding when needed. They should motivate all pupils to participate in the main classroom rather than allowing reluctant speakers to opt out. During their EFL education, EFL student teachers should develop an awareness of the balancing act between risk and comfort as well as learn some drama-based safety-enhancing activities in the EFL classroom. The findings in my project demonstrated that keeping a classroom safe needs to be practised, especially by pre-service student teachers. It would be vital to discuss the differences between process and performance focus in drama-based pedagogy.

When there is an established view that drama is an integral part of a communicative approach to FLL (Giebert, 2014), one may wonder why EFL teacher education does not include mandatory drama-based language learning approaches such as improvisation. Based on the findings in my project, improvisation activities can be recommended as an engaging method for spontaneous speech practice. Promoting

a sense of competence in language learners can be executed by non-judgemental, playful improvisation activities. English teacher education should therefore train student teachers in improvisation methods as an embodied approach to lower the affective filter (Krashen, 1981). The character of improvisation with its acceptance of all contributions forms a good foundation for reaching the 'spontaneous speech mindset' (Zondag, 2021) and ultimately developing speaking confidence (Zondag et al., 2020). The goal would be to train EFL student teachers in a flexible, collaborative method to help themselves and their future pupils develop speaking confidence. EFL student teachers should be made aware of the importance of drama-based pedagogy in general and improvisation in particular during teacher training. Drama-based pedagogy can be integrated into the competencies related to literacy and multimodality. Ultimately this means that English teacher education should acknowledge drama-based pedagogy and especially improvisation for its contributions to the EFL learning environment as shown in my project. Since improvisation competence may not be available within English teacher education, collaborations with colleagues in drama and theatre departments may provide solutions. The effect of incorporating improvisation in EFL teaching will potentially grow exponentially with every English student teacher spreading the playful spontaneous speech approach to their future classrooms.

7.6 Limitations of My Project

The design of my project demonstrates how practitioners can study their university classroom practice. The design and reality of my teaching practice have been made accessible for research, but they have not been created for research, thus the classrooms provided a naturalistic research environment. Teacher education was central in the research design, and in all decisions, student teachers' interests were prioritised over research concerns.

There will always be a degree of asymmetry in the professional power balance between teacher educator and student teacher, even when working with adults. The

teacher educator has the professional knowledge and defines the setting of the interaction. Student teachers' willingness to share their perspectives is illustrated by the large percentage of participating student teachers (87%) as well as their engagement in the ongoing research. Throughout the project, I have been aware that my background as an improviser may feed my view on the improvisation approach. I have tried to communicate information rather than enthusiasm. It is recommended, however, that teachers display an enthusiastic attitude to encourage enjoyment in their students (Benesch, 2017). Schumann (2001) reminds us that there are several other incentive stimuli for FL learners, such as the class, the language teaching method, the approach or technique, the text, particular explanations, fellow learners and the target language culture.

Nonetheless, research in a naturalistic setting has some challenges. The research process may have influenced student teachers, for example, when they were filmed in the studio or in the classroom. When investigating practice, there will be an element of influence from the research because the practitioner is the researcher on the inside. Researchers should avoid deceiving participants and the balance between necessary information and potential influence should be taken into consideration. The information asked for in the pre-questionnaire may have alerted student teachers that the research was focused on their speaking confidence. The description of the project was "possibilities with improvisation in the English classroom", so student teachers may have inferred that spontaneous speech was part of the research focus. Another slight influence was the creation of fixed instructions in structured sessions. Providing the same improvisation activities to various groups in the same manner was essential. The advantage of exact written instructions for each session was that it uncovered some of the practical knowledge that I apply in my teaching practice.

Furthermore, retrospective texts and trial logs were both a learning tool for the student teachers as the end product of a period of exploration and reflection, and the research data. This organisation provides scaffolding for the students in their

reflections. As for the research data, more open questions could have given more space to the students' thoughts and reflections without much direction. One could claim that more open reflection questions, e.g. "How have you experienced teaching improvisation?" could have been more learner-centred. The subjective views of participants is a major element in the constructivist paradigm and open questions facilitate contributions to knowledge construction in teacher education research.

The brevity of the data collection period could be regarded as a limitation but was intended to reduce the influence from other English classes on the findings. Nevertheless, one cannot completely exclude any possibility that confounding variables influenced student teacher experiences. Another possible limitation some may claim is that the data collection required self-reporting. This project is based on the premise that student teachers' reflections and interpretations are a valuable knowledge base for teacher education research. Qualitative analysis of the data investigated which themes were discussed by student teachers relating to their shared experience (Smith et al., 2009). A sensitivity to the subjective experience of student teachers was enabled by being both teacher and researcher. An external interviewer may have asked different questions and received different answers. The advantage of having established a professional relationship is the existence of trust between the two people in the room, which is important when discussing sensitive topics such as speaking reluctance.

The findings are representative of my practice as a teacher educator, yet generalisation is limited to similar practices. Ultimately, my project relied on a combination of professional knowledge as an improvisation instructor and an educator of EFL teachers. My position in the university classroom provided the research location and formed the research questions. At the end of my project, I conclude that my professional identity as an English teacher educator is stronger than my identity as an improviser. The improvisation method was thus an applied improvisation, not an art form or theatre performance, but a vehicle for spontaneous speech practice. Where

the improviser and performer has the art and its audience in mind, the teacher educator focuses on English didactics and language practice as was the research focus.

7.7 Opportunities for Further Research

My project focused on, and gathered data about, student teachers' experiences and perspectives. Some student teachers have taken the initiative to gather data to describe the learners' perspectives as well. Of course, this data collection takes different forms and can therefore only give an indication of how the learners experienced improvisation activities. Since then, two student teachers who participated in the project have collected structured data from learners who did improvisation in another practice period. Together with these student teachers, these data could be written into an article that continues the search for knowledge through the eyes of the learners.

It might be interesting to analyse student teachers' daily diaries and investigate which activities appealed most, and for what reason. From studying these immediate views, one could try to describe the essence of the most beneficial improvisation activities. Through describing in detail the way each activity works, one could further examine what the content and objective per session are and then compare these to the possible benefits for learners of English as reported by student teachers.

Another follow-up could be to design a longitudinal study in which one could interview the student teachers again after several years to examine what influence the improvisation sessions have had on their long-term views on facilitation of spontaneous speech in the English classroom. Many former student teachers have purchased *Rory's Story Cubes* and a study of the creative use of these tools could be interesting.

Lastly, further explorations into the applications of improvisation in the advanced English learners' classroom provide further insights into how improvisation can facilitate language practice. Future qualitative research could add depth and richness

to the findings in my project in which a small range of improvisation activities was applied in English teacher education. One can only speculate on the diversity of exploration in different contexts.

8 Conclusion

In this project, through the perspective of student teachers' experiences, new knowledge has been gained about the facilitation of spontaneous speech practice and the development of speaking confidence through improvisation activities. Throughout the project, there have been several types of data collection of an immediate and reflective character. The quantitative method enabled a quick overview over the larger group's experiences with the improvisation activities as an initial insight into improvisation activities' influence on student teachers' confidence when speaking spontaneous English. Student teachers reported a significant increase in speaking confidence. The quantitative data could not, however, explain why student teachers had answered the way they did, and it was therefore a measurement of a rather immediate character which showed that improvisation activities had indeed been a valuable method for increasing the speaking confidence of the EFL student teachers.

The retrospective texts had a reflective character because student teachers reread their learning diaries and produced a reflective text after the sessions had been concluded. It was found that enjoyment, collaboration and high degree of positive engagement had helped to increase student teachers' speaking confidence. Student teachers experienced improvisation activities as highly enjoyable, and beneficial for speaking confidence. The improvisation activities appeared to decrease the fear of making mistakes and to facilitate a varied spontaneous speech practice. Safety and trust were important conditions for reluctant speakers in situations when improvisation activities were experienced as stressful.

The trial logs required student teachers to reflect on the practicum experience when trying out improvisation activities in their school practicums. Student teachers experienced that the improvisation activities facilitated good spontaneous speaking practice among pupils. The threshold for speaking English spontaneously was lowered because the playful activities enticed pupils to contribute through a gentle force.

The project shows that reflective writing in several stages can provide access to student teachers' perspectives. As teachers, we use methods that we consider effective for the didactic purpose of a session. Although we may never completely understand student teachers' perspectives, IPA offered an approach to acknowledge student teachers' experiences as the knowledge base for this project. As a teacher educator, reading student teachers' words and gaining insights into their experiences has contributed to making my teaching more student-centred and hopefully better adjusted to students' needs. Throughout the research process, the phenomenological researcher must remain in a state of exploration and wonder, open to discovering the unexpected (Smith et al., 2009). This could be seen as a parallel to the playful, open state of the improviser, who must stay present and accept the fictional world as the truth in the moment of the scene or story.

The project contains an important message for teacher education, being that improvisation activities should not be overlooked in English teacher education for grades 5 to 10. The overall findings showed how improvisation activities provided safety through their playful and non-judgemental character and facilitated spontaneous speech practice for both pupils and student teachers. The articles contribute to more empirical research in the field of drama in EFL teacher education and offer insights regarding the implementation of improvisation in EFL classrooms. Student teachers gained insights into EFL methodology through an embodiment of spontaneous speech practice. Improvisation methodology can equip student teachers with valuable tools for FLL.

For my own practice as a teacher educator, the project provided me with insights into how student teachers experienced their spontaneous language proficiency, the improvisation approach, and how they viewed the connection between practice and theory. The project uncovered my practical knowledge of improvisation in the English classroom and deepened its scientific base, through developing my theoretical stance.

It has also reminded me of the limited knowledge one person has from the perspective of the teacher educator.

To round off the conclusion, I want to share a cultural term, *talanoa*, that I came across during my international stay in New Zealand. Vea (2015) explains that "talanoa" is a Pacific communication form that is different from a conversation because it is a full experience, face to face, complete with body language. Although this project has not used "talanoa" itself, it has put a spotlight on the importance of face-to-face, whole-bodied oral communication in the moment, there and then. During the interviews, I used my improvisation training actively to lower my status (Johnstone, 1999) and mirror the student teacher's body posture (Spolin, 1983). In these times of digital technology, I think it is vital to remind educators around the world that the oldest and most natural form of communication is the personal, whole-bodied encounter. Returning to the English didactics' context, it is precisely that meaningful embodied encounter that EFL learners of all ages practise during their education.

9 Appendices:

Appendix 1: NSD project 52502 original communication

Appendix 2: NSD project 52502 continuation

Appendix 3: NSD project 52502 informed consent form

Appendix 4: NSD project 52502 interview guide

Appendix 5: Pre-questionnaire

Appendix 6: Instructions for the retrospective text

Appendix 7: Instructions for the trial log

Appendix 1: NSD project 52502 original communication

Anke Zondag
Grunnskole Nord universitet

7600 LEVANGER

Vår dato: 17.03.2017 Vår Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 25.01.2017. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

52502	*The potential of improvisation as a didactic method for developing speaking confidence in English as a Foreign Language*
Behandlingsansvarlig	*Nord universitet, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Anke Zondag*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 28.02.2018, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Kjersti Haugstvedt

Anne-Mette Somby

Kontaktperson: Anne-Mette Somby tlf: 55 58 24 10
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Prosjektnr: 52502

Utvalget informeres skriftlig om prosjektet og samtykker til deltakelse. Informasjonsskrivet er godt utformet.

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at forsker følger Nord universitet sine rutiner for datasikkerhet.

Forventet prosjektslutt er 28.02.2018. Ifølge prosjektmeldingen skal innsamlede opplysninger da anonymiseres. Anonymisering innebærer å bearbeide datamaterialet slik at ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes. Det gjøres ved å:
- slette direkte personopplysninger (som navn/koblingsnøkkel
- slette/omskrive indirekte personopplysninger (identifiserende sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger so f.eks. bosted/arbeidssted, alder og kjønn)
- slette oppta

Appendix 2: NSD project 52502 continuation

Endringsskjema

for endringer i forsknings- og studentprosjekt som medfører meldeplikt eller konsesjonsplikt

(jf. personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter)

Endringsskjema sendes per e-post til: personvernombudet@nsd.no

1. PROSJEKT	
Navn på daglig ansvarlig: Anke Zondag	Prosjektnummer: 52502
Evt. navn på student:	

2. BESKRIV ENDRING(ENE)	
Endring av daglig ansvarlig/veileder:	*Ved bytte av daglig ansvarlig må bekreftelse fra tidligere og ny daglig ansvarlig vedlegges. Dersom vedkommende har sluttet ved institusjonen, må bekreftelse fra representant på minimum instituttnivå vedlegges.*
Endring av dato for anonymisering av datamaterialet: 31. mai 2020	*Ved forlengelse på mer enn ett år utover det deltakerne er informert om, skal det fortrinnsvis gis ny informasjon til deltakerne.*
Gis det ny informasjon til utvalget? Ja: ____ Nei: __X__ Hvis nei, begrunn: informantene ble skriftlig informert at datainnsamlingen inngikk i et større prosjekt med sluttdato 2020.	
Endring av metode(r): Det vurderes bruk av semi-strukturert intervju (audio opptak) i tillegg til eksisterende metoder.	*Angi hvilke nye metoder som skal benyttes, f.eks. intervju, spørreskjema, observasjon, registerdata, osv.*
Endring av utvalg: Ny runde med samme type utvalg, men nye studenter	*Dersom det er snakk om små endringer i antall deltakere er endringsmelding som regel ikke nødvendig. Ta kontakt på telefon før du sender inn skjema dersom du er i tvil.*
Annet:	

3. TILLEGGSOPPLYSNINGER

4. ANTALL VEDLEGG	
	Legg ved eventuelle nye vedlegg (informasjonsskriv, intervjuguide, spørreskjema, tillatelser, og liknende.)

Har du spørsmål i forbindelse med utfylling av skjemaet, ta gjerne kontakt med Personvernombudet hos NSD, telefon 55 58 81 80

Appendix 3: NSD project 52502 informed consent form

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet «Improvisasjon i engelsk undervisning ved Nord universitet» 2018

Bakgrunn og hensikt
Dette er et spørsmål til deg som student om å delta i en forskning studium for å skaffe innsikt i mulighetene med improvisasjon i engelsk undervisning ved Nord Universitetet. Studiet inngår i et større doktorgradsprosjekt.

Hva innebærer studiet?
Jeg forsker på improvisasjonsbaserte undervisningsmetoder i klasserommet. Mesteparten av studiet vil foregå i ordinær undervisning over noen dager høsten 2018. Datainnsamlingen skjer gjennom en spørreundersøkelse før og etter undervisningsprosjektet, en læringsdagbok, filmopptak av improvisasjonsaktiviteter, intervju, og utprøving av aktivitetene. Filmopptaket brukes for å se improvisasjonsaktivitetene utenfra. Forskeren vil kunne bruke filmopptakene for å observere og studere aktivitetene.

Mulige fordeler og ulemper
Informasjonen som registreres om deg skal kun brukes slik som beskrevet i hensikten med studien. Alle personopplysningene vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. En kode knytter deg til dine opplysninger gjennom en navneliste. Det er kun forskeren som har adgang til navnelisten og som kan finne tilbake til deg. Det vil ikke være mulig å identifisere deg i resultatene av studien når disse publiseres. Doktorgradsprosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes i 2020. Studien er registrert hos Personvernombudet for forskning, NSD - Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS.

Frivillig deltakelse
Det er frivillig å delta i studien og deltakelse har ingen påvirkning på karakteren din. Du kan når som helst og uten å oppgi noen grunn trekke ditt samtykke til å delta i studien. Dette vil ikke få konsekvenser for din videre opplæring. Dersom du ønsker å delta, undertegner du samtykkeerklæringen på neste side. Om du nå samtykker til å delta, kan du senere trekke tilbake ditt samtykke uten det vil få konsekvenser for dine videre opplæring.

Samtykkeerklæring følger på neste side. Et signert eksemplar returneres dersom du ønsker å delta. Det andre eksemplaret er til deg.

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien «Improvisasjon i engelsk undervisning ved Nord Universitet»

Prosjektleder: Anke Zondag

Deltakernavn i store bokstaver:

Jeg har lest og forstått informasjonen om studiet på side 1 og er villig til å delta i studien.

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker)

(Sted, dato)

Har du spørsmål til studien, kan du kontakte prosjektlederen
Anke Zondag 74 02 26 45 eller anke.zondag@nord.no.

Tusen takk for din deltakelse!

Appendix 4: NSD project 52502 interview guide

Interview guide semi-strukturt interview prosjekt nr. 52502

The dialogues will take place in their mother tongue Norwegian, to both lower the position of the non-native teacher and interviewer, as well as provide a space for more extensive and precise expressions than in the English diary texts that the participants wrote previously. The interviewer has lived in Norway for over twenty years and is highly fluent in Norwegian, enabling her to follow up answers given in the interviews. She will transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews herself.

Round 1: open questions and video-stimulated recall reflections

Round 1 (English version)

1. Introduction: welcome and information about recording etc.
2. Main question: What was it like for you to do these improvisation activities?
3. Please describe in your own words how you felt about speaking spontaneously during the activities.
4. Please describe in your own words how you felt about speaking spontaneously in the weeks after the activities.
5. We are going to watch a small excerpt from the improvisation activities. Please comment on the video footage whenever you feel like commenting it.

The interviewer can also stop the video and ask for comments upon selected places.

6. Anything else you want to share?
7. How has the interview been for you?

Runde 1 (norsk versjon)

1. I troduksjon: Velkommen og informasjon om opptak og prosedyren for intervjuet.

2. Hovedspørsmål: Hvordan var det for deg å gjøre disse improvisasjonsaktivitetene?

3. eskriv med dine egne ord hvordan det føltes for deg å snakke spontant engelsk under aktivitetene.

4. eskriv med dine egne ord hvordan det føltes for deg om å snakke spontant engelsk etter aktivitetene.

5. Vi skal se et lite utdrag fra improvisasjonsaktivitetene. Bare kommenter når du har lyst underveis. Intervjueren kan også stoppe videoen og be om kommentarer på utvalgte steder.

6. Noe annet du vil dele?

7. Hvordan har intervjuet vært for deg?

Appendix 5: Pre-questionnaire

Name: Age: ___ Gender: Female/Male

Questionnaire 1

Please answer the following questions. I am interested in your personal opinion so there are no wrong answers. Please answer by putting only one X for each question in the table:

EXAMPLE	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Partly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I like chocolate.				X		

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Partly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. My level of English (in general) is high.						
2. My listening skills in English are good.						
3. My speaking skills in English are good.						
4. My motivation for learning English is strong.						
5. I like learning together with other people.						
6. I can express myself fluently in English.						
7. I generally feel relaxed when speaking English.						
8. I prefer to have preparation time before speaking English.						
9. I feel confident when speaking English with a few people (e.g. group work).						
10. I feel safe when speaking Norwegian in front a group.						
11. I generally feel that other people around me speak English better than I do.						
12. I feel confident when an English teacher suddenly asks me a question.						

Name: Age: ___ Gender: Female/Male

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Partly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
13. I feel afraid that other people may laugh at me when I speak English.						
14. I feel safe when speaking English in front of a group.						
15. I am good at starting a conversation in English about familiar topics.						
16. I feel confident when volunteering to speak in the English classroom.						
17. I am afraid my English teacher may correct every mistake when I speak.						
18. I feel confident when speaking English spontaneously.						
19. I am good at keeping conversations in English going.						
20. I can express and justify my own opinions in English.						

Please answer the next questions in your own words:

1. Do you have any experience with doing drama or improvisation activities at all?
   YES / NO
   If yes, please describe what you have done, how many years of experience etc.:

2. Describe your personality in a few words (e.g. adventurous, shy, outgoing, insecure, curious, friendly, anxious):

3. What physical reactions do you have when you are giving a prepared presentation in English?

Thank you for your help!

Appendix 6: Instructions for the retrospective text

Instructions for the retrospective text.

Write a diary text (minimum 1,000 words) in which you reflect on how you have experienced doing improvisation activities in the English classroom. In your opinion, have the improvisation activities improved your competence as a speaker and a student teacher of English?

Special focus points
You have participated in improvisation sessions. Here is a list to help you remember what we have done in the TEFL classroom:

- Session 1 Storytelling: *Zip, Zap, Zop – One Word Story – Three/four sentence story – Dice Based Story*
- Session 2 Conversations: *Man on the Street – Customer service – Noah's Ark*
- Session 3 Status: *Warm up walk – Downtown Abbey – Meeting –Park Bench*

Please read your own learning diary texts again, look back and reflect on the improvisation sessions you have attended.

Do you have favourite activities? Please explain why you liked those activities so much. Have the improvisation activities influenced your fluency and/or self-confidence in spontaneous speech? If so, please be specific how and why. If not, please explain why. Have you developed any skills other than speech?

Some of the activities were filmed. How did you feel about being filmed?
Finally: Add any comments about the use of improvisation in the English classroom.

Thank you for allowing me to learn from you!

Appendix 7: Instructions for the trial log

Instructions for the trial log 2018

You have received almost three hours of instruction in improvisation activities. It would be very interesting to know what happens when you now use these exact activities in an English classroom. Your assignment is to try out two improvisation activities with the same class twice. It is well-known that pupils must get used to new activities so you must do each activity twice, but on different days. Please take field notes while and after you are teaching, on anything you can think of. Detailed instructions for the improvisation activities are uploaded under basic information.

Your assignment is to write a reflective log with the following content:

Pre-trial

- Please describe the group (e.g. 5th grade, number of pupils etc.)
- Mention which of the improvisation activities you have chosen and your reasoning behind your choice
- What were your specific aims (e.g. competence aims or learning objectives) for using these activities in your class? What did you hope to accomplish?
- What was it particularly about the improvisation activities that enables meeting these aims, please be specific?
- Any need for adaptation of the instructions? Please explain.

Reflections after the first trial

- Describe time and day (e.g. Wednesday 1pm).
- Describe what happened during each activity, evaluate and reflect about the improvisation activities you have tried out in the classroom. What would you do differently next time?
- How actively involved were you in the activities? Was it enough to read out the instructions? Did you have to explain further? How would you describe your role?
- Which, if any, of the aims were achieved? How do you know this?
- Please comment on why you think these aims were successful, what specifically is it about the activity that allows for the success.

Reflections after the second trial

- Describe time and day.
- Describe what happened during each activity this time, evaluate and reflect about the improvisation activity you have tried out again.
- In what way was the second time different?
- Which, if any, of the aims were achieved? Please comment on why you think these aims were successful, what exactly is it about the activity that allows for the success.
- To what degree do you think this activity gave the pupils a chance to practice spontaneous speech?

Post-trial

- Please reflect: How did you experience teaching improvisation? What have you learned from the trial? Any surprises?

Thank you for allowing me to learn from you!

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PART 2 Articles I to IV

Article I:

The Influence of Improvisation Activities on Speaking Confidence of EFL Student Teachers.

Authors: Anke Zondag, Annelise Brox Larsen, Tale Margrethe Guldal, Roland van den Tillaar

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The influence of improvisation activities on speaking confidence of EFL student teachers

Anke Zondag, Annelise Brox Larsen, Tale Margrethe Guldal and Roland van den Tillaar

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to explore the application of improvisation activities in English teacher education, specifically to investigate their influence on the student teachers' confidence when speaking English spontaneously. The improvisation activities consisted of storytelling, conversations and status expressions. Data were drawn from both pre- and post-questionnaires and retrospective texts. The statistical findings showed significant improvements in the student teachers' level of speaking confidence and degree of relaxation while speaking English. The findings of the qualitative analysis confirmed this, and participants stated that the fun, collaboration and high degree of engagement had helped to increase their speaking confidence. The combination of the findings indicated that the improvisation activities had been a valuable method for increasing the speaking confidence of the EFL student teachers. The pedagogical implication is that teacher educators should consider including improvisation activities in their EFL courses.

Keywords: *teacher education, EFL/ELT, reluctant speaker, speaking confidence, improvisation activities, oral communication*

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SAMMENDRAG

Virkningen av improvisasjonsaktiviteter på lærerstudentenes selvtillit ved spontan engelsk tale

Målet med denne studien var å undersøke bruken av improvisasjonsaktiviteter i engelskfaget i lærerutdanningen. Dette ble gjort gjennom å undersøke virkningen aktivitetene hadde på lærerstudentenes selvtillit ved spontan engelsk tale. Improvisasjonsaktivitetene besto av historiefortelling, samtaler og status. Data ble hentet fra både pre- og post-spørreskjemaer og retrospektive tekster. De statistiske funnene viste signifikante forbedringer i studentenes nivå av selvtillit og grad av avslapning mens de snakket engelsk. Funnene i den kvalitative

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analysen bekreftet de kvantitative resultatene, og deltakerne uttalte også at den høye graden av engasjement, fokus på moro og generell aksept for å gjøre feil bidro til å øke deres selvtillit ved spontan engelsk tale. Funnene indikerer at improvisasjonsaktivitetene var en verdifull metode for å øke lærerstudentenes selvtillit. Den pedagogiske implikasjonen er at lærerutdannere bør vurdere å inkludere improvisasjonsaktiviteter for å gi lærerstudentene øvelse i spontan engelsk tale.

Nøkkelord: *lærerutdanning, reluctant speaker, improvisasjonsaktiviteter, spontan engelsk tale*

1 Introduction

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the influence of improvisation activities on the speaking confidence of English as a Foreign Language (EFL)[1] student teachers. Traditionally, improvisation activities have been part of a drama curriculum in drama rooms (McKnight & Scruggs, 2008). During the present study, however, the improvisation activities took place with student teachers of English in university classrooms. Despite the fact that drama, with its focus on textual interpretation and performance, is well established as a beneficial method to learn foreign languages (Kao & O'Neill, 1998; Maley, Ur, & Duff, 2005; Manuel, 2008; Stinson, 2008; Winston & Stinson, 2014), few studies have researched the potential of improvisation activities within foreign language learning (FLL) (Kurtz, 2011). To our knowledge, none of these studies have examined the influence of improvisation activities on speaking confidence within EFL teacher education.

Our article reports on the findings after a short series of improvisation activities was implemented during English didactics courses. The present study adheres to Stinson's definition of improvisation (2008), which states that players (here: student teachers) do not use a script nor a predetermined scenario but make up words and/or actions. Spontaneous speech was defined as unplanned, immediate oral communication. The following research questions were investigated:

> Do improvisation activities influence student teachers' confidence when speaking spontaneous English? If so, what could explain this influence?

2 Relevant research

Attitude and motivation, language anxiety and self-confidence are among the affective factors in FLL (MacIntyre, 2002). Since the 1970s, research on affect in FLL

1 Even though English is taught from the age of six, Norwegian children do not learn English as a second language in an English-speaking country as immigrant children would (Tomlinson, 2005). To distinguish the participants of the present study from learners in second language contexts, we use the term English as a foreign language (EFL).

has mainly focused on foreign language anxiety (FLA) (Dewaele, Witney, Saito, & Dewaele, 2017). Extensive research has established that learners may display high Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). FLCA was originally defined as 'a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process' (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 128). FLCA is situation specific to the foreign language classroom and often related to assessment or judgement; particularly oral classroom activities are likely to cause anxiety (Young, 1990). Another model to explain variables regarding FLL is Willingness to Communicate (WTC), a manifestation of a readiness to engage in FL discourse pointing out that despite good communicative competence spontaneous use of the FL is not guaranteed (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998). Clément, Baker and MacIntyre (2003) define self-confidence in FLL as a lack of anxiety combined with a perceived communication competence, a definition that informed the present study. Due to their central position in the FLL field, questions related to FLCA and WTC have inspired the questionnaires in the present study.

Despite ample research into FL anxiety, few studies propose methods to help learners deal with it. Krashen (1987) argued that lowering the affective filter by creating a relaxing atmosphere may have a positive influence on language learning due to factors such as self-confidence and anxiety which are derived from FLL beliefs (Young, 1991). The general conclusion is that confident foreign language learners feel low anxiety (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). In their own study, Matsuda and Gobel found self-confidence to be a strong predictor of success in FLL, leading them to advocate a sense of achievement as the major objective for FLL. Dewaele et al. (2017) investigated FLCA and Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) among high school students and concluded that teachers should not be too concerned about FLCA, but that general FL proficiency and attitude towards FL was the origin of FLCA among the learners. Consequently, Dewaele et al. (2017) recommended teachers to concentrate on learners' enthusiasm and enjoyment in a low-anxiety learning environment.

Group work seems to be an important factor in lowering anxiety levels in FLL. In a survey of over 200 university and high school students, Young (1990) found that they generally preferred small group oral activities. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) found that smaller groups resulted in a better atmosphere, more individual use of the foreign language and closer social connections. In a study with 12 freshman students, spontaneous speaking activities such as games and role plays were found to decrease the students' language anxiety levels, due to the sense of being unprepared and the collaborative group work (Yalçın & İnceçay, 2014). The importance of small group work has also been emphasised by Matsuda and Gobel (2004) who pointed out that, apart from increased comfort, the group work setting increased peer interaction in the target language.

Speaking reluctance is one of the greatest challenges widely confronted in EFL settings (Savaşçı, 2014). For the purposes of the present study, the *reluctant speaker*

will be defined as an EFL learner who regularly and consciously avoids speaking English spontaneously despite advanced language competence. This reluctance does not only affect the speaker's own language learning but may affect the overall learning environment. Speech reluctance may be interpreted as a lack of vocabulary. Ultimately, reduced oral participation impedes the development of conversational skills (Sawyer, 2001). Adolescents are found to be especially susceptible to social anxiety (Felsman, Seifert, & Himle, 2018). They may become particularly conscious of their own mistakes and experience the FL classroom as a high-anxiety learning environment. Even young adult learners, such as student teachers, can display such reluctance. In an action research study (Savaşçı, 2014), EFL teacher students gave *fear of mistakes*, *lack of confidence* and *cultural influences* as reasons for their speaking reluctance. Because speaking reluctance regularly occurs it should be considered a critical matter within modern EFL methodology, such as modern communicative language teaching (CLT) which emphasises linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competency. Although the challenge with reluctant speakers has instigated the present study, the purpose of this article is not specifically to explore the complex psychological issues related to EFL. According to MacIntyre (2007), an advanced learner who is reluctant to communicate might have high anxiety about communicating yet a high motivation for learning. The EFL learner must be given the option to practise spontaneous speech using real-time, more unpredictable interaction that reflects genuine communication (Byram & Méndez García, 2009; Christie, 2016).

Improvisational theatre is used worldwide as a tool for writing new material, a method for training actors and a type of performance (Napier, 2004). The major improvisation theorists Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone have each separately shaped contemporary improvisational theatre (Holdhus et al., 2016). The Spolin methodology (1983) focuses on spontaneity and intuition and was originally developed to promote social interaction among peers (McKnight & Scruggs, 2008) whereas Johnstone (1999) initially devised improvisation games and exercises to facilitate the creation of narrative material for the theatre. Theory and practice from improvisational theatre have inspired other areas, particularly education and organisational theory (Holdhus et al., 2016). Improvisation activities may provide opportunities for both creativity and unpredictability because the essence of improvisational theatre is to interact with others in a collective creative process (Holdhus et al., 2016). They may offer a similar experience to an authentic foreign language dialogue through the immediacy of improvisation and its requirement of spontaneous responses (Sawyer, 2003; Waterman, 2015; Winston & Stinson, 2014).

In recent years, approaches based on improvisational theatre have demonstrated beneficial effects within the field of mental health. According to Phillips Sheesley, Pfeffer, and Barish (2016), comedic improv therapy may provide a corrective emotional experience for those suffering from a social anxiety disorder. They identified group cohesiveness, play, exposure and humour as the helpful elements of the improv therapy. Krueger, Murphy, and Bink (2017) found that improvisational

theatre intervention reduced symptoms of anxiety and improved self-esteem. Similar results were reported in a large study of adolescents (Felsman et al., 2018). Finally, an intervention study found that taking a theatre improvisation course increased the interpersonal confidence of less confident student teachers (Seppänen, Tiippana, Jääskeläinen, Saari, & Toivanen, 2019). Collectively, these findings support the idea that improvisation activities can be a method for increasing speaking confidence.

Despite a lack of universal agreement on the rules of improvisational theatre, some concepts are widely acknowledged. In their article about using improvisation in university, Berk and Trieber (2009) present seven improvisation principles. *Trust* (1) is an essential condition for creating a safe space in which risk-taking and creativity can evolve. Berk and Trieber use *acceptance* (2) to denote the central 'Yes, and' improvisation concept (Johnstone, 2007; Spolin, 1983). This concept means agreement on offers (Yes) and expansion on the story (and). Through *attentive listening* (3), a joint story is developed through the negotiation of meaning. *Spontaneity* (4) means immediate contributions without any critical (self) judgement. Through improvisation, learners apply verbal and *non-verbal language* (6) to create a *collaborative narrative* (5). Our improvisation activities scored on most of the principles:

Table 1: Overview of the improvisation activities scored according to Berk and Trieber's improvisation principles.

	Trust	Acceptance	Attentive listening	Spontaneity	Storytelling	Nonverbal comm.
Zip, zap, zop	x		x			x
One word story	x	x	x	x	x	
Three sentence story	x	x	x	x	x	
Dice based story	x	x	x	x	x	
Man-on-the-street	x	x	x	x	x	x
Customer service	x	x	x	x	x	x
Noah's ark			x	x	x	x

	Trust	Acceptance	Attentive listening	Spontaneity	Storytelling	Nonverbal comm.
Status walk						x
Downton Abbey	x	x	x	x	x	x
Meeting	x	x	x	x	x	x
Park bench	x	x	x	x	x	x

Their seventh principle was *warming ups* (7), i.e. activities that transition the learners into an improvisational mode (Berk & Trieber, 2009). The table does not include that principle because it deals more with form than content and it relates to only two improvisation activities in the present study, e.g. *Zip, Zap, Zop* which is a warm-up activity that increases the listening focus of the players (McKnight & Scruggs, 2008). The other warm-up activity was *Status Walk* which is an embodiment of status to understand the theatrical concept of status expression which is defined as the conscious manipulation of our level of dominance in improvised situations (Johnstone, 1999).

Many of the improvisation principles have a clear connection to communicative language teaching (CLT). Savignon defines the essence of CLT to be 'the engagement of learners in communication in order to allow them to develop their communicative competence' (Savignon, 2007, p. 209). The ultimate goal of CLT is to speak accurately and fluently, but the learning process provides a safe risk-taking haven as during improvisation. Spontaneity enables players to initiate words and actions quickly, based on trusting and accepting the other players' suggestions (Berk & Trieber, 2009). This ability to create in the moment clearly relates to the trial and error assumption of modern CLT. Negotiation of meaning is central in attentive listening as well as in spontaneous speech (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Christie, 2016). This principle strongly corresponds to the core values of CLT, i.e. collaboration through an engagement in interaction and meaningful communication (Richards, 2006).

Speakers of a foreign language must practice the immediate communication skill consciously (Bygate, 2001). EFL learners meet many communicative obstacles because their cognitive skills are much further developed than their English language competence. Stern's research (1980) assumed that drama activities in the EFL classroom had helped university students improve oral communication skills. A study by Galante and Thomson (2017) confirmed that the use of drama-based techniques

can have a positive effect on oral fluency among L2 speakers, showing a significant impact relative to other communicative language practices. Due to the element of unpredictability and its unscripted format (Sawyer, 2003), improvisation activities can offer a close parallel to authentic foreign language dialogue and a playful approach to develop speaking confidence.

3 Method

3.1 Approach

Throughout the present study, quantitative and qualitative methods were applied. Data were gathered through a pre- and post-questionnaire using a Likert scale (ordinal data) before and after the full series of improvisation activities. After the three sessions were completed, participants in some of the courses wrote a retrospective text (textual data). The data sets were analysed separately by two different researchers. By gathering closed and open-ended data, this approach provided the opportunity to combine findings and draw conclusions based on the combined strengths of both data sets (Creswell, 2014), though it is not a full mixed-method study.

3.2 Participants

Participants (N = 57) were recruited from the student teachers of a Norwegian university. The participants were informed of the research project. Consent was obtained and the project was carried out according to the ethical guidelines of the Norwegian Data Protection Services (NSD).

The participants were 44 pre-service and 13 in-service student teachers completing a Teaching English course for grades 5–10 (10–15 years of age). The pre-service groups (mean age 22 years old) consisted of primary education student teachers. The in-service participants were experienced primary education teachers (mean age of 38 years). The qualitative analysis was performed for a sample, see section 3.4. Students were expected to have adequate English language proficiency to enrol in the course. Following Clément, Baker and MacIntyre's definition of self-confidence in FLL (2003), participants assessed their perceived English language proficiency in the questionnaires.

3.3 Procedures

The improvisation activities were adapted for the EFL classroom from improvisational theatre techniques. The main author had acquired these techniques during several years of improvisational theatre courses, seminars and reading, mainly on improvisation methods created by Johnstone (1999, 2007) and Spolin (1983, 1986). The main author taught the activities at the start of the courses and the sessions consisted of *storytelling*, *conversations* and *status expressions*. She provided participants

with a total of three hours of improvisation over the course of three days. Sessions began with the overall reassurance that 'anything said during improvisation was right'. This positively-phrased instruction frames a non-judgemental environment because people commonly remember the last word best. Before improvising in small groups, participants received oral instructions for each activity. Because the presence of an audience, even of peers, could increase participant anxiety, it was important for all participants to be active simultaneously.

Even though nearly every improvisation activity can be said to teach listening and speaking (McKnight & Scruggs, 2008), the following improvisation activities were selected:

1. Storytelling: *Zip, Zap Zop, One Word Story, Three Sentence Story, Dice Based Stories*
2. Conversations: *Man-on-the-Street, Customer Service, Noah's Ark*
3. Status expressions: *Status Walk, Downton Abbey, Meeting, Park Bench*

This selection was based on several considerations. First, the activities needed to encourage spontaneous oral communication. This included an element of interactivity where both listening and speaking skills were required to complete the task. Second, the activities had to be suitable for regular classrooms containing many tables and chairs as opposed to a spacious drama room. Each session focused on a different theme: storytelling, polite conversation or status expression. In the activity *One Word Story*, for example, the student teachers collectively told a fairy tale by each adding one word at a time. This activity encouraged participants to accept any suggestion from the other participants and to trust each other to tell the story together through attentive listening and building on earlier elements (Yes, and).

Moreover, the sessions contained unscripted activities with partially-defined or undefined characters. For example, in *Man-on-the-Street*, the participant herself chose her character. In the next round, the reporter defined the stranger in their greeting, e.g. "Hello, old man …" or "Good afternoon, Mr. President". The participant would then react in character. During this activity, participants were able to practice not being in control (Crossan, 1998) as well as having to adjust their language to the characters and the context.

3.4 Data Collection

The data was gathered at different intervals and contained participants' perspectives only. The 57 participants filled out a pre- and post-questionnaire that used a six-point Likert scale. The answers, which denoted the subject's level of agreement, were scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The items covered, for example, the participant's perceived anxiety and self-confidence, and self-assessment of language proficiency before the first and after the last improvisation session. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items, all closed questions. Due to the lack of a valid scale for speaking

confidence, the items were inspired by the items from the FLCA Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) and Cao and Philp's participant interview questions examining WTC (Cao & Philp, 2006; MacIntyre et al., 1998). To increase the sensitivity of the scale, the middle values in our study were *slightly disagree* and *partly agree*.

Immediately after each improvisation session, participants wrote a learning diary in English. One week after the final session, participants wrote a retrospective text based on these diaries under semi-structured guidance (see App. A). The initial two groups of participants were filmed improvising in an on-campus studio after the final session. Participants' feedback was negative due to the added challenge of being filmed in an unfamiliar setting. Some reported that this experience may have reduced their self-confidence during the filming. In addition, some participants had technical challenges when accessing the recordings because of security measures. This method of filming was discontinued. Consequently, the retrospective texts from the initial 23 participants were selected as the sample for the qualitative analysis.

3.5 Analysis

Since the answers in the questionnaire were given on an ordinal scale and the Shapiro-Wilk test did not show a normal distribution of the answers, a non-parametric test, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks, was used to assess the differences between the pre- and post-questionnaires. Statistical significance was accepted at a value of $p<0.05$. The pre-and post-questionnaires were analysed in SPSS version 25.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Reliability was tested with Cronbach's Alpha on each item in the pre- and post-test, which were all between 0.751–0.893. These findings can be classified as highly reliable (Hopkins, Marshall, Batterham, & Hanin, 2009).

The retrospective texts were analysed using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). The main author read the retrospective texts holistically and manually annotated meaningful statements about the improvisation experience in NVivo. She then condensed these statements into descriptive meaning units, e.g. 'increase in speaking confidence' and 'more comfortable talking'. Finally, these meaning units were categorised under the theme *speaking confidence.* A write-up of the theme was made based on applying a phenomenological perspective on the empirical data taken from the sample (Smith et al., 2009). The main author compiled a file containing all meaning units concerning the theme *speaking confidence*. She read and reread this file before writing a summary from memory. Afterwards, she returned to the file to supply the summary with details and add citations from participants' statements to illustrate the findings.

3.6 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The main author's position as a teacher educator is one of the premises of this practitioner research. Being practitioner research, our study may contribute to the

understanding of teacher educators' practice (Ellis, 2012). In this section, we will address some ethical considerations regarding the dual roles of the researcher as well as some methodological limitations.

The study took place within the main author's university classrooms. This insider position is regarded as an advantage for deep insights into practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The study relied on the main author's practical knowledge as an improvisation instructor, as well as her expertise as an educator of English teachers. This premise guaranteed near identical classroom instructions with limited side coaching and a similar yet dynamic classroom organisation, e.g. absent participants and adjustments for group size. The brevity of the project aimed to limit other didactic influences, e.g. pedagogical and linguistic sessions, on the findings. Yet, there may still have been confounding variables influencing the student teachers' answers in the questionnaires.

Ample care has been taken considering the ethical ramifications of the study. The consent form emphasised that participation was voluntary and would not influence the student teachers' grades. The participants were informed that their views and reflections generated the knowledge base for the study. Moreover, all student teachers returned the blank or signed consent form so the teacher would not know who among the student teachers were participants during the improvisation sessions. All data were anonymised, and the analysis took place *after* the semester and examinations had been rounded off.

The quantitative analysis was performed by a co-author. The findings are representative, yet generalisation is limited to similar practices. The study took place with small student groups based on voluntary participation, an important ethical consideration in any study and particularly in practitioner studies. This resulted in relatively small numbers of participants.

The qualitative analysis of the texts aimed to investigate what participants communicate as themes for the shared experience (Smith et al., 2009). The phenomenological approach (IPA) enabled a sensitivity to the experience of participants who have undergone improvisation activities in EFL. The truth claims of an IPA approach are tentative (Smith et al., 2009). The teacher and researcher are still one and the same person, and the practitioner must therefore be conscious of her own beliefs and values during the analysis. We hold with Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) in our position of regarding the insider as a knowledge facilitator.

4 Findings

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative findings separately before they are discussed together in the next section. The retrospective texts provided explanations for the reported increase in speaking confidence that was found in the quantitative and qualitative methods.

4.1 Statistical Findings

The pre- and post-questionnaires from the 57 participants were analysed and a significant effect was found in the pre- to post-tests for items 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 14, 16 and 20 (see Table 2). No significant increase was found for the evident item about speaking confidence (18), yet the ratings directly relating to speaking confidence in the English classroom (9 and 16) showed a significant increase. The ratings concerning safety and relaxation (7 and 14) also showed a significant increase from pre- to post-test.

Table 2: Mean score ± standard deviation of answers on questionnaires during the pre- and post-tests.

Items	Pre-test	Post-test	*p*-value
1. My level of English (in general) is high.	4.25 ± 0.83	4.28 ± 0.82	0.897
2. My listening skills in English are good.	4.78 ± 0.73	4.93 ± 0.72	0.076
3. My speaking skills in English are good.	4.25 ± 0.89	4.44 ± 0.85*	**0.032**
4. My motivation for learning English is strong.	5.37 ± 0.67	5.34 ± 0.67	0.642
5. I like learning together with other people.	4.55 ± 0.92	4.89 ± 0.79*	**0.002**
6. I can express myself fluently in English.	4.13 ± 0.98	4.32 ± 0.96	0.063
7. I generally feel relaxed when speaking English.	3.96 ± 1.15	4.46 ± 0.95*	**0.000**
8. I prefer to have preparation time before speaking English.	3.50 ± 1.42	3.95 ± 1.29*	**0.003**
9. I feel confident when speaking English with a few people (e.g. group work).	4.26 ± 1.20	4.68 ± 0.89*	**0.002**
10. I feel safe when speaking Norwegian in front a group.	4.75 ± 1.32	4.75 ± 1.20	0.985
11. I generally feel that other people around me speak English better than I do.	3.82 ± 1.35	3.63 ± 1.35	0.112
12. I feel confident when an English teacher suddenly asks me a question.	3.59 ± 1.21	3.75 ± 1.22	0.140
13. I feel afraid that other people may laugh at me when I speak English.	2.66 ± 1.29	2.64 ± 1.26	0.962
14. I feel safe when speaking English in front of a group.	3.80 ± 1.24	4.11 ± 1.13*	**0.019**
15. I am good at starting a conversation in English about familiar topics.	4.38 ± 1.01	4.33 ± 0.87	0.698
16. I feel confident when volunteering to speak in the English classroom.	3.92 ± 1.14	4.11 ± 1.03*	**0.049**
17. I am afraid my English teacher may correct every mistake when I speak.	2.39 ± 1.24	2.43 ± 1.09	0.717
18. I feel confident when speaking English spontaneously.	4.03 ± 1.12	4.12 ± 0.92	0.521
19. I am good at keeping conversations in English going.	4.06 ± 0.98	4.07 ± 0.92	0.894
20. I can express and justify my own opinions in English.	4.40 ± 0.99	4.63 ± 0.77*	**0.049**

* indicates a **significant** difference from pre- to post-test on a $p < 0.05$ level.

Table 3: Categorised findings.

Category	Items without significant change	Items with significant change
General English language proficiency	1, 6	20
Oral communication skills	2, 15, 19	3, 8
Fear and anxiety in FL	13, 17	
Confidence and safety in FL	12, 18	7, 9, 14, 16

Looking at the findings per category, we observe that the participants' self-assessed English language proficiency has remained mostly unchanged. Items 1 and 6 showed no significant change and item 20 only just showed significant difference (0.049). Concerning oral communication, participants' self-assessed speaking skills showed a significant increase (3), but their listening, expression and conversational skills (2, 6, 15 and 19) remained stable. Furthermore, participants reported more enjoyment while learning collaboratively (5). Finally, participants preferred more preparation time than they did previously (8). No significant results were found for the other statements. Pre- and post-test ratings for item 1 (general English level), 4 (motivation) and 10 (safety in Norwegian) showed no significant change. These findings could be regarded as strengthening the reliability of the questionnaire findings because these items concern quite static features, especially within the short time span. The general level of English language proficiency is the sum of many language skills of which only the oral skill was practised. Broadly speaking, learners' motivation can be regarded as being quite stable because it is connected to their personal values. The sessions took place in English so these experiences would, in general, not be expected to affect a native-language-related issue.

4.2 Textual Findings

To investigate the influence of improvisation activities on speaking confidence further, an inductive analysis was performed on the 23 retrospective texts. A finding that clearly emerged was an increase in speaking confidence, which is consistent with the statistical analysis. Most participants (16 out of 23) reported a positive influence on their speaking confidence, described as an increase or boost in self-confidence during speech. The instructions requested participants to write about their confidence in spontaneous speech, so the theme *speaking confidence* may be considered an expected rather than emergent theme. However, an interesting finding was that most participants reported an increase and explained the increase:

> I am not a person who raises my hand to answer, not even in classes where we talk Norwegian. But I feel more confident to talk English now, but not more competent, I think. But again, I think by doing all these activities, you learn to use the language to make stories, doing interview etc. and you get to practice your language. (Student 102)

> The didactic method by improvisation has absolutely improved my confidence in speaking English. Especially spontaneously. The activities we did are perfect for both learning English and to be more confident in class. I would say that all the activities are perfect for improving confidence in speaking English spontaneously. It was a little scary at first, but when you got a little in to it, it became fun! (Student 106)

> In the last session, I found the exercises to be a lot of fun. I even think I got better at speaking spontaneous English; at least more confident. (Student 206)

> I was more and more relaxed after each exercise. My confidence and competence as a speaker of English got better already after the first session. Yes, my English knowledge has not increased much, but I could speak spontaneously with or without mistakes. (Student 211)

The main explanations for the increased *speaking confidence* were the high degree of engagement, having fun and collaboration. Other participants mentioned that the practice had made them more competent which then made them more confident:

> I have learned so many new words, so I feel my vocabulary have expanded, and that makes it easier to talk English. I also feel some of my pronunciation has developed, and these things make me more confident when I speak English. (Student 107)

The improvisation sessions lasted a total of only three hours; nevertheless, participants were constantly engaged as either a speaker or an active listener within their small groups:

> One-word fairy tale was absolutely my favourite. We made a story together! It was fun and there were a lot of laughter. Stories that we made were lots of fun and sometimes didn't make any sense. These activities and a lot more have made me more confident in speaking English spontaneously. I feel more confident and surer about myself and my English skills. (Student 115)

Many participants had been quite nervous and anxious about speaking English. Two reasons were mentioned several times: it had been years since they had spoken a lot of English and they felt their English was not good enough. Many in-service participants described that improvising these everyday situations made them more confident as EFL speakers:

> Since this is some years ago, I felt unsecure and nervous starting the English course. And top of all, we were thrown into spontaneous activities every day!

> After three days with a lot of different pair/group work, I can say that I know myself a bit better when it comes to speaking, so my self-confidence has grown – I did all these scary activities (they were at first) and I am still alive! (Student 201)

> To sum up, I believe I am more confident on using English spontaneously after the gathering. The variety of games and activities has helped me to think of spontaneous speech as not so frightening. (student 213)

Some participants mentioned that they were taught in an age where correct grammar and correct pronunciation were the focal areas of English classes:

> When I learnt English at school, grammar was very important. You had to read, write and talk grammatical correct. It was also nothing, or a very small part we had to put away the book and talk spontaneous. I think it is from that time I am very afraid of saying something wrong and I have to think for a long time how to say it in the right way. To be a little bit shy is either not an advantage to do spontaneous speech in the class. Throughout this exercises I have learnt that it isn't dangerous to do mistakes. (student 208)

The collaborative nature of the improvisation activities also seems to have had a positive influence:

> By dividing us into small groups and giving us different things to do, we needed to talk to everyone, but not in front of the whole class. We also got to know each other better and I feel much more confident by talking English in the class. (student 102)

5 Discussion

The present study investigated whether the improvisation activities influenced the student teachers' speaking confidence. The quantitative findings were that participants reported positive effects when asked indirectly about improvements in confidence and about the degree of safety during spontaneous speech production (items 7, 9, 14, 16). These effects were validated by the findings of the qualitative analysis which revealed that most participants in the sample (16 out of 23) reported a positive influence on their speaking confidence. Triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that the improvisation activities had a positive influence on the student teachers' speaking confidence.

These findings could indicate that participants have slightly changed their attitudes through a decrease of self-judgement and a sense of achievement. Their speaking confidence may have increased due to the mastery of the improvisation activities, e.g. solving the guessing games, which demanded circumlocution and clarifying

questions. Following the premise that self-confidence is a predictor of FLL success (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004), the findings related to speaking confidence are quite promising. A significant increase was reported in the ability to speak English which could be explained as a logical consequence of the spontaneous speech practice. The significant increase in their already strong ability to express and justify their own opinions could have been caused by the improvisation activities in which participants practised expressing opinions. There was a large increase in the category of feeling generally relaxed while speaking English and feeling more confident while speaking English in small groups. In their texts, participants explained that they had fun, which created a relaxed learning environment and a safe space for making mistakes (Felsman et al., 2018). These explanations confirm the significant findings of items 14 and 16, indicating that these improvisation activities provided a low-anxiety learning environment with high degrees of enjoyment (Dewaele et al., 2017).

However, no significant effect was found when participants were asked directly about an increase in their speaking confidence (item 18). This could be regarded as a contradictory finding. Interestingly, the majority of participants reported an increase in their speaking confidence in their retrospective texts. This contradiction shows similarities with another study (Savaşçı, 2014) which found no speaking reluctance among participants in the questionnaire analysis but reported reluctance in the individual interviews. This leads us to wonder whether interviews provide a different platform for reporting speaking confidence and/or speaking reluctance. Considering Clément, Baker and MacIntyre's (2003) definition of self-confidence in FLL, we observe that anxiety-related scores remained low. This may indicate that participants felt safe, trusting both the teacher and fellow students. This finding resembles an earlier study that established that more experienced FL learners report less FLCA (Dewaele et al., 2017). The consistently low score concerning the fear of being laughed at could provide an explanation. We can only speculate that our participants experienced less FLCA as a consequence of their adequate English language proficiency, and that they did not identify with the explicit item about speaking confidence as relevant for their situation.

No significant change was found regarding listening skills nor conversation skills, which both began with a high score (see Table 2). Though participants practised conversations in the improvisation activities, they did not feel more capable of starting or keeping conversations going. They reported a higher preference for wanting preparation time before speaking (see Table 2). This finding may seem contradictory, but it provides insight into some of the difficulties participants experienced when forced to fully improvise. The act of seeking a manner to express themselves in character or in an unusual situation may have shown participants certain gaps in their language competency (Swain, 2000), as some participants described in their texts.

Both statistical and qualitative analysis uncovered a rise in appreciation for collaborative learning. The retrospective texts confirmed that when the activity allows

for a great deal of freedom, e.g. in the storytelling activities, participants must collaboratively improvise the direction of their communication (Sawyer, 2001). This finding could also be explained as a social development, as some students expressed in their retrospective texts; they wrote that the learning environment became safer after a while because the inhibition characteristic of being strangers decreased. This familiarisation may have been enabled by the improvisation activities, because the group of participants that had previously met also reported an increase in safety. Lastly, participants may have become more aware of the shared pleasure of mastering a collaborative narrative. This interpretation is supported by Johnstone's characterisation of improvisation practicing interpersonal skills (Johnstone, 1999). Some participants reported that they realised their English was not as poor as they previously believed and wrote that they were going to be more lenient towards themselves. This might explain the small, not significant decrease in item 11.

The retrospective texts provided some explanations for the reported increase in speaking confidence. They referred to an enjoyment of collaborative learning, a high degree of enjoyment and an intense engagement to the point where some participants forgot they were speaking English. As Crossan (1998) observed, the spontaneous nature of improvisation requires learners to devote their full attention to that moment rather than be distracted by what has occurred before or may occur after. This state of presence in play may form a counterweight to FLA. To a large extent, the findings of the present study resonate well with earlier identification of *group cohesiveness, play, exposure* and *humour* as the beneficial elements of comedic improv therapy (Phillips Sheesley et al., 2016). Play and humour created a relaxed environment for the practice of spontaneous speech in small, supportive groups. The exposure to the collaborative narrative (Yes, and) appears to have increased participants' speaking confidence.

There are certain limitations to the present study (see also 3.5). The dual role of teacher and researcher demands an awareness of the participants and the analysis; however, this unique position also facilitates insider insights. Though nearly every improvisation activity can be said to teach listening and speaking (McKnight & Scruggs, 2008), the practitioner's knowledge of both improvisational techniques and teaching EFL was central to the present study. We consider that the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provides a degree of triangulation to support the findings; nevertheless, we acknowledge the limited generalisation of the findings as they are closely connected to their context.

6 Pedagogical Implications

In line with Dewaele et al.'s (2017) vision of focusing on learners' enthusiasm and enjoyment, we recommend concentrating on speaking confidence in EFL university courses. Savignon (2018) underlines the need for learners to participate in the expression and negotiation of meaning, a description that resembles Sawyer's views (2001)

on the essence of improvisation. Many improvisation activities contain a search for information and a fictive simulation of real life, making them suitable for modern foreign language methodology (Veine, 2006; Winston & Stinson, 2014). The present study found that improvisation activities may increase student teachers' speaking confidence. Consequently, we invite EFL teacher educators to include improvisation activities in their courses.

7 Conclusion

In the present study, we investigated the influence of improvisation activities on the speaking confidence of EFL student teachers. Our findings indicate that EFL student teachers could benefit from doing improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice. The questionnaires revealed positive effects on participants' level of speaking confidence and degree of relaxation while speaking English. The qualitative analysis of a selection of participants' texts not only confirmed these findings, but indicated that levels of speaking confidence increased due to a high degree of engagement, a focus on fun and an enjoyment of collaboration. The qualitative findings validated and explained the quantitative findings. We find it plausible that these improvisation activities provided these student teachers with suitable circumstances for practising oral communicative competence and developing EFL speaking confidence. The findings are representative, yet generalisation is limited to similar practices.

The present study has contributed to our understanding of the potential of improvisation activities in EFL teacher education. As teacher educators, we are aware of the common occurrence of speaking reluctancy and regularly meet reluctant speakers in our university classrooms. In the past, researchers have mostly targeted a reduction of negative outcomes of FLA. The current trend is that of positive psychology relying on one's strengths in dealing with FLA (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Through the application of these improvisation activities in the university classroom we have gained an insight into a playful method for increasing speaking confidence. Based on these findings we consider improvisation activities to be a valuable method within EFL teacher education.

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Appendix A

Instructions for the retrospective text

Write a diary text (minimum 500 words) in which you reflect on whether and how the didactic method *Improvisation in the English classroom* has developed your confidence and competence as a speaker of English as a foreign language, especially spontaneous speech. Secondly, describe the effect of the improvisation activities on your competence as a teacher of English.

Special focus points

In the TEFL classroom, you have participated in improvisation sessions. Please read your own learning diary texts again and look back on the improvisation sessions you have attended. Do you have a favourite activity? Please explain why you liked that activity so much. Have the improvisation activities influenced your fluency and/or self-confidence in spontaneous speech? If so, please be specific how and why. If not, please explain why. Have you developed any other skills than speech?

Article II:

Student teachers' experience with improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice in English.

Author: Anke Zondag

Article

LANGUAGE
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Abstract

Because most real-life foreign language speech is naturally unpredictable, spontaneous speech should be practiced in the foreign language classroom. Student teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) may benefit from practising methodology for spontaneous speech practice. This article reports the findings for a study into EFL student teachers' experiences with using improvisation activities, exploring the relevance of improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice. The data include semi-guided texts and reluctant speakers' interviews. The findings showed that improvisation activities facilitated spontaneous speech practice and strengthened speaking confidence through enjoyment. The 'spontaneous speech mindset' enabled participants to explore linguistic and creative boundaries. The study showed that application of improvisation activities is an excellent method for spontaneous speech practice in EFL teacher education.

Keywords

drama, EFL, English as a foreign language, English language teaching, improvisation, oral language pedagogy, reluctant speaker, speaking confidence, spontaneous speech mindset, spontaneous speech practice, teacher education

I Introduction

Drama as an overarching discipline has been established as beneficial for foreign language learning (FLL). Within education, improvisational practices have been mainly applied and studied in drama lessons (Holdhus et al., 2016); more empirical research into how drama and theatre techniques may stimulate the development of oral communication is necessary (Galante & Thomson, 2017). Although FLL textbooks describe drama-based activities like (semi-)scripted role play and simulations as popular communicative

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activities, not many textbooks have integrated activities for non-scripted drama activities yet (Becker & Roos, 2016).

This discrepancy can be addressed in foreign language (FL) teacher education (TEd) by integrating improvisation methodology in spontaneous speech practice which may benefit student teachers and their future learners. In the present study spontaneous speech is defined as unplanned, immediate oral communication; improvisation activities refer to drama-based approaches where participants do not follow scripts or predetermined scenarios, but experiment with language by making up words and/or actions (Galante & Thomson, 2017; Stinson, 2008).

This article shares findings for a study into spontaneous speech practice in English as a foreign language (EFL)[1] TEd. Student teachers' experiences with doing improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice in English were examined, with special regard for reluctant speakers. Through analysing retrospective texts ($n = 41$) and interviews ($n = 6$) new insights were gained and concepts such as 'spontaneous speech mindset', 'vicious circle of stress' and 'victorious circle of enjoyment' were coined. It is argued that the application of improvisation activities is a relevant method for spontaneous speech practice in EFL Ted.

II Conceptual framework

I Theatre improvisation

Since the 1950s, theatre improvisation has grown extensively as a training and performance method, whereby improvisers collaborate to create most of the dialogue, story, and characters during performances (Holdhus et al., 2016; Sawyer, 2015). The present study focused on improvisation methodology by Spolin and Johnstone, who independently developed improvisation theories and remain central in theatre improvisation (Seppänen et al., 2019). Spolin developed improvisation games for children based on problem solving, whereas Johnstone focused on storytelling and relationships (Johnstone, 1981, 1999; Spolin, 1983, 1986). Although these approaches vary, they contain similar concepts for facilitation of improvisation training and performance. The central improvisation principles (CIPs) formulated for the present study are:

1. Acceptance and elaboration ('Yes, and' rule): accepting whatever happens, including mistakes. Verbal and non-verbal cues are called offers (Johnstone, 1981). Offers must be accepted without judgment and elaborated upon to establish communicative interaction and move stories forward (Johnstone, 1981; Spolin, 1983). This principle is central to storytelling aspects of improvisation.
2. Risk-taking and spontaneity: reacting to any situation without planning or censoring one's ideas to allow spontaneity to arise (Johnstone, 1981). Spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom when improvisers are faced with a fictional reality, explore it and react without self-judgment (Spolin, 1983). This principle is central to dramatic aspects of improvisation.
3. Relations and status: verbal and non-verbal communication expressing the relation or social position of an improviser towards other improvisers in scenes

(Johnstone, 1981). All sounds and movements (such as posture) signal the type of relationship to others. This principle is central to collaborative aspects of improvisation.

4. Attentive listening: listening actively by being present in scenes, supporting other improvisers and attending to everything in the moment (Johnstone, 1981; Spolin, 1983; Vera & Crossan, 2005). This mode is a separate CIP and supports other CIPs.

2 Application of improvisation in educational contexts

a The role of drama and improvisation in FL education. Since the prevalence of communicative language teaching (CLT), drama-based methodology has been an inherent part of FL teaching (Giebert, 2014). Savignon (2018) emphasizes learners' needs to experience communication through participation in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning. Role-play provides such a context for FL practice, for taking risks with new vocabulary and constructions in an enjoyable and non-threatening situation (Clipson-Boyles, 2012). Nevertheless, some caution that scripted role- play should be applied sparingly because its controlled language practice can reduce linguistic creativity and actual interaction (Heathfield, 2007). A comparative study of adolescent EFL learners (Galante & Thomson, 2017) indicated that techniques adapted from drama and theatre can result in significantly greater improvements in English oral fluency compared to more traditional communicative teaching.

The benefits of applying drama in language teaching have been studied thoroughly (Lee et al., 2015). An overview of such benefits is, for instance, given by Boudreault (2010) who presents drama as a powerful teaching tool for developing self-awareness and an improved sense of confidence in students' FLL abilities. Whereas controlled language exercises may dominate classrooms, Almond (2004) emphasizes that drama gives learners a genuine need for communication as well as the intricacy of unpredictable language. Modern FL teachers agree that 'drama fosters engagement, and engagement fosters language acquisition' (Koushki, 2019). In summary, drama supports the focus of modern FL methodology on meaning.

b The role of drama and improvisation in tertiary education. Several empirical studies have demonstrated positive effects of drama-based FL pedagogy in tertiary education (cf. for example Abenoja & DeCoursey, 2019; Celik, 2019; Miccoli, 2003; Piazzoli, 2011; Stern, 1980). Stern hypothesized that drama positively influences FLL because it stimulates the use of certain psychological factors that facilitate oral communication: 'heightened self-esteem, motivation, and spontaneity; increased capacity for empathy; and lowered sensitivity to rejection' (1980, p. 95). Drama activities helped participants to gain self-confidence in speaking English and develop their spontaneity (Stern, 1980). Role-playing encourages participants to become more flexible by developing a sense of mastery in various language situations (Stern, 1980). Piazzoli (2011) applied process drama pedagogy in second language (L2) university classrooms and found that participants developed a degree of trust which replaced an earlier judgmental group dynamic. A more collaborative, supportive learning environment arose, where participants took

risks and discarded earlier self-conscious attitudes towards the FL. In turn, this development enabled some highly anxious participants to reduce their language anxiety and gain more self-confidence which increased their spontaneous FL communication. The improvisational character of drama was limited because language structures and idioms were introduced and revised.

In a recent study (Baykal et al., 2019), ELT pre-service teachers felt enjoyed (highest occurrence), confident, motivated, creative and interested during drama activities. The participants were, however, taking an elective course for Drama in ELT, which weakens the findings. Interestingly, these participants expressed some concern for classroom management and suitability for all types of learners. The authors conclude that the drama course should be offered to all student teachers of English.

Evidently, unpredictability and creativity are important features of authentic FL dialogue (Sawyer, 2003; Winston & Stinson, 2011) as well as improvisation with its evanescent nature (Davies, 1990; Winston & Stinson, 2011). According to Bygate (2001), speaking FLs spontaneously requires the development of a specific type of communication skill, which must be practised using suitable methods. The ephemeral nature of improvisation simulates real-life events (Winston & Stinson, 2011) and challenges the basic skills of listening and communication (Crossan, 1998). Improvisation involves spontaneous interactions in semi-authentic learning environments. This creates windows of opportunity for flexible and creative learner-centred EFL practice (Kurtz, 2015). Piccoli (2018) discusses improvisational theatrical techniques as creative, flexible teaching resources which can be applied to expand students' language competencies, particularly oral proficiency skills.

In a general tertiary context, Berk and Trieber (2009) state that improvisation can be a powerful teaching method in university, and support their view with four main didactic arguments (DAs):

1. Improvisation corresponds to modern students' expectations towards active, collaborative, social, and learner-centred classroom experiences.
2. Improvisation uses students' multiple and emotional intelligences for problem-solving and active discovery, especially verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, bodily/kinaesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.
3. Improvisation encourages collaborative learning by helping to build trust, respect, listening, verbal and nonverbal communication, role-playing, and risk-taking through spontaneous storytelling.
4. Improvisation stimulates deep learning through student active engagement, as learner activity and interaction are inherent to improvisation activities.

These DAs can be related to other studies. Gallagher (2010) emphasizes that in learning contexts, improvisation returns the body to its rightful state (body and mind) through its holistic approach (DAs 2 and 4). Crossan (1998) discusses psychological risks (DA3) caused by the nature of improvisation containing spontaneity and dependence on others. Crossan explains that the spontaneous nature of improvisation relies on fundamental communication skills, thereby expecting students to dedicate their complete attention to the moment (DA4). Collaborative language production (DA3) is considered a central

characteristic of spontaneous speech (Christie, 2016). With its focus on collaborative learning, the present study could be placed within sociocultural theory, given its central idea that people are essentially communicatively-formed beings (Lantolf, 2007). Canale and Swain (1980) also regard communication as grounded in sociocultural interpersonal interaction involving creativity and unpredictability.

c Anxiety and speaking reluctance in FLL TEd: the role of improvisation. Anxiety has been widely studied in FLL research because of its debilitating effect on FLL performance (Dewaele, 2013; Horwitz, 2001, 2010). Such communicative anxiety refers to FLL students who 'freeze and block when having to start a conversation, are very sensitive to error correction, avoid participating and generally adopt passive language learning attitudes' (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017, p. 207). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) state that foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) is a situation-specific anxiety, whereas Dewaele (2013) found a significant link between anxiety as a personality trait and FLCA. Horwitz et al. (1986) suggest teachers can either help anxious students to cope with stressful situations or make learning contexts less stressful, while Dewaele and his colleagues (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Dewaele et al., 2017) advocate teachers to focus on FLL enjoyment. When inhibited students do not engage actively in EFL speaking activities, their speaking reluctance becomes self-enforcing because they should be more orally productive to develop their speaking skills (Savaşçı, 2014). Matsuda and Gobel (2004) emphasize the importance of furthering students' self-confidence in EFL classrooms. They conclude self-confidence could be developed by encouraging student involvement in classroom activities, and by creating a comfortable atmosphere through games and role-plays (for example). Research on affective variables has been preoccupied with FL learners' negative emotions excessively long (Dewaele et al., 2017).

In an intervention study, Seppänen et al. (2019) found that improvisation methods increased interpersonal confidence of initially inhibited student teachers. Including improvisation methodology in TEd curricula can improve student teachers' social interaction abilities and their teaching responses (Seppänen et al., 2019). Comedy improvisation has been successfully applied by mental health professionals to treat psychological conditions such as social anxiety disorder (Phillips Sheesley et al., 2016). Participants in an improvisational theatre intervention demonstrated positive outcomes in terms of verbal productive creativity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Schwenke et al., 2020). According to these studies, improvisation activities may help reluctant speakers (defined as learners who regularly and consciously avoid speaking English spontaneously) practise spontaneous speech. To experience language learning progress and to become really communicatively competent, learners must manage using FL spontaneously and creatively (Becker & Roos, 2016). Nevertheless, there has been little academic research into improvisation as a didactic approach for EFL student teachers. Therefore, the present study addresses the following research questions:

1. How have student teachers experienced participating in improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice in English?
2. How have reluctant speakers experienced participating in these improvisation activities?

III Methods and data

1 Methodology

The research site was a TEd faculty at a Norwegian university and the study was conducted during regular teaching EFL (TEFL) courses. Through writing retrospective texts, participants reflected on their experience with the spontaneous speech practice as a whole. This process highlights the value of accessing and developing professional and practical knowledge through reflection. The discussion draws on findings from retrospective texts from a larger group ($n = 41$) and interviews with (very) reluctant speakers ($n = 6$). The qualitative study applies Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the central perspective for examining the data (Smith et al., 2009) which facilitated a sensitivity to student teachers' experiences.

The study satisfies most of the characteristics Creswell (2013) identifies for qualitative research: it takes place in a natural setting (i.e. classroom in a regular course), the researcher is the key instrument gathering data using multiple methods, focusing on participants' meanings through an emergent design. The last element refers to the implementation of interviews after analysis of retrospective texts.

2 Participants

Over two years, 41 student teachers of English for grades 5–10 participated in the research. Of these, 28 were pre-service primary education student teachers and 13 were primary and lower secondary education teachers with an average of 11 years' teaching experience. The participants were anonymized and are all referred to as student teachers. Each course was randomly given a number (e.g. 100, 500) and the participants were randomly assigned a number within that course (e.g. P101, P513). These participant numbers have been included when referring to participants' reflections. Because female students represent the majority in TEFL courses, participants are referred to by female pronouns (she/her) as the unbiased pronoun. In the second year, six participants were interviewed.

3 Teaching procedures

The teacher educator adapted and taught improvisation activities in TEFL courses. The hour-long sessions contained increasingly more challenging activities in language and creativity. Although nearly every improvisation activity can teach listening and speaking (McKnight & Scruggs, 2008), the following activities were selected:

a Session 1: Storytelling (CIP1, CIP2, CIP4). During the warming up *Zip, Zap, Zop*, participants stood in a circle and physically sent a pulse clockwise or anti-clockwise saying zip-zap-zop. In this activity, they made mistakes when they lost focus, a practice for accepting failure. Subsequently, participants performed collaborative storytelling activities of *One Word Story* and *Three Sentence Story*. Finally, a collaborative story (*Dice Based Story*) was told using Rory's story cubes.

b Session 2: Conversations (CIP1, CIP2, CIP3, CIP4). The activities challenged participants to play roles, and status was implicitly practised through characters' relations. In *Man on the Street*, participants initially shaped 'reporter' and 'stranger' roles themselves. Afterwards, reporters defined strangers through a greeting such as 'Hello, little girl . . .' or 'Good afternoon, Prime Minister'. Strangers accepted reporters' offers and reacted in character. Other activities included *Customer Service* (with a mystery object) and *Noah's Ark* (formal speech).

c Session 3: Status expressions (CIP1, CIP2, CIP3, CIP4). To create an understanding of the physical concept of status, participants warmed up with a *Status Walk*, in which they embodied imaginary high and low statuses. Here, social relations and characters' status were used as an accessible introduction to the theatrical concept of status. The first activity was *Downton Abbey*, inspired by Johnstone's master–servant game (Johnstone, 1981) and the television series for setting. In *Meeting*, participants were given a secret social order, then performed a planning meeting with subtle hints about their status. The final activity (*Park Bench*) was a meeting between strangers.

4 Data collection

Immediately after each improvisation session, participants wrote a learning diary in English. One week after the final session, participants wrote a retrospective text based on these diaries under semi-structured guidance (see Appendix 1). Texts were collected through learning management systems (LMS).

Some relevant perspectives from reluctant speakers did not meet the 33% threshold for recurrent themes. To gain a deeper understanding of reluctant speakers' experiences, interviews were added in the second year of the study. Participants were also provided with tablets to film improvisation activities in university classrooms. Retrospective texts were then examined closely regarding reluctant speakers. Two participants emerged as very reluctant speakers and four as reluctant speakers. Semi-structured individual interviews (length 44-59 minutes) encouraged participants to share experiences in more detail in an interactive, dialogic reflection (see Appendix 2). To prompt their memory, footage of their improvisation activities was shown during interviews. Participants initiated comments and the interviewer stopped the footage at natural intervals, e.g. when an activity was finished. This approach is based on stimulated recall, an effective tool to create an understanding for students' cognitive and affective processes (Piazzoli, 2011). Each interview was audio-taped and written down in a verbal protocol.

5 Analysis of retrospective texts

The 41 retrospective texts were analysed manually using NVivo by creating nodes. A thematic IPA analysis of participants' experiences was conducted (Smith et al., 2009). To enhance validity and compensate for possible instruction influence on the texts, the recurrence threshold for theme recurrence was reduced from Smith et al.'s recommendation of 50% to 33%, i.e. a theme recurring in 14 of 41 texts.

6 Analysis of interviews

Each interview was analysed holistically. Following an iterative inductive cycle, notes were developed into descriptive comments, then into interpretative notes and emergent themes (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, individual themes were compared, and super-ordinate themes were established.

7 Ethical considerations and limitations

The study aims to contribute to the understanding of this teacher educator's practice (Ellis, 2012). The study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines from Norwegian Data Protection Services (NSD). The teacher educator had not met participants before. They were informed about the purpose of the study and provided their written consent which was registered after improvisation sessions ended to minimize influencing the teacher educator's practice.

The brevity of the study could be regarded as a limitation but was intended to reduce other influences on findings. Nevertheless, one cannot completely exclude any possibility that confounding variables influenced participant experiences. Another possible limitation is that the data collection requires self-reporting. This study is based on the premise that participant reflections are a valuable knowledge base for TEd research.

Qualitative analysis investigated which themes were discussed by participants relating to their shared experience (Smith et al., 2009). This study holds with Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) who regard practitioners as knowledge facilitators for deeper insights into practice. A sensitivity to subjective experiences of participants was enabled by being both teacher educator and researcher. Reluctant speakers were interviewed in Norwegian, thus lowering the teacher educator's authority because she was the FL speaker during interviews. The findings are representative of this teacher educator's practice, yet generalization is limited to similar practices.

IV Findings

1 Participant perspectives in retrospective texts

Findings for experiences for all participants ($n = 41$) are presented through the most recurrent themes per number of retrospective texts, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Most recurrent themes in retrospective texts.

Theme	Number of texts ($n = 41$)
Good spontaneous speech practice	36
Increase in speaking confidence	32
Enjoyment	29
Safety	27
Creativity	25
Initial discomfort	21
Vocabulary	17

a Good spontaneous speech practice. Overall (in 88% of the texts) participants agreed that improvisation activities facilitate spontaneous speech practice. In most texts (61%), this approach was described as good to very good spontaneous speech practice for the following reasons:

- The activities had easy rules with varied degrees of direction.
- The activities had a good listening and speaking ratio.
- We talked about many different things in different situations.
- We increased efforts to vary words and sentences.
- The activities encouraged us to talk.
- The activities enabled everybody to participate, regardless of proficiency.

b Increase in speaking confidence. Most participants (78%) reported their speaking confidence clearly increased due to improvisation activities, for example, because 'it's been a long time since I spoke that much English, so to have these informal games boost my self-confidence and my fluency as well' (P202). Participants described essential factors as enjoyment, familiarization with each other in various situations, and production of extensive spontaneous speech. They emphasized how increased speaking confidence produced a positive effect on their fluency:

> The activities have made me less afraid of making mistakes when I speak English, because most the activities have been very casual and funny, which has made me relaxed, and I have therefore gradually gained more confidence in speaking English. (P101)

> I would absolutely say that these activities have influenced both my fluency and self-confidence in spontaneous speech in a good way. I felt much more confident during the last activity compared to the first activity. (P310)

> I also think that you can forget a bit that you are in class, and just be focused on that you are doing a game or a fun activity with your friends. And by this you may feel freer to talk, you relax more and also I think you will become a better speaker in general by this. (P411)

Particularly in-service student teachers felt increasingly relaxed throughout sessions:

> When I learnt English at school, grammar was very important. You had to read, write and talk grammatical correct. It was also nothing, or a very small part we had to put away the book and talk spontaneous. I think it is from that time I am very afraid of saying something wrong and I have to think for a long time how to say it in the right way. To be a little bit shy is either not an advantage to do spontaneous speech in the class. Throughout this exercises I have learnt that it isn't dangerous to do mistakes. Everybody does mistakes sometimes, and in oral communication you can find some other words to use or you can use the body language together with the words to be understood. (P208)

Although some participants stated they did not become more competent in oral proficiency, most participants reported that improvisation activities encouraged them to engage in talking.

c *Enjoyment.* Enjoyment was a common theme (71%) and the word *fun* was used 94 times. Some mention they were initially quite uncomfortable but became more confident because they enjoyed themselves. Misunderstandings caused participants to laugh collectively, making them more relaxed again. Another finding was the joy experienced through playful engagement of making stories together and playing a character, with enjoyment as reward:

> Usually I can get nervous if I am to speak on behalf of myself about something about myself, but when we were forced to 'play' characters we were both forced to speak about another topic, and once the laughter were out, we pretty much just wanted to keep talking because we wanted to have another laugh, and it didn't feel uncomfortable or scary at all once we had started talking and once we had started to have fun with the activity. (P401)

d *Safety.* Two-thirds of participants reported safety as an important element of their positive experience. This atmosphere of safety was due to several features, such as working in small groups. Participant 415 explained that her favourite exercise was Dice Based Story because 'we were in smaller groups which made me more comfortable to talk in front of students.'

Another benefit of this form of collaborative EFL learning was that all participants were engaged simultaneously either as speakers or listeners. Hence, when participants made a mistake, it is 'only your partner that hears the mistake, not the whole class' (P208). The teacher educator's dual competence played a major role in creating the safe learning environment.

> All these improvisations games worked fantastic for me. I felt that I became better in English after each gathering. Yes, all these exercises was useful for me, but attitude of my teacher was crucial. She made me feel safe and comfortable. These improvisations games will be not so effective if we not manage to make our pupils relaxed and feel comfortable. (P211)

A large proportion of the texts (41%) also mentioned mutual language support as a benefit of collaborative activities because they could give or receive help with FLL. Lastly, participants described they had reduced their fear of making mistakes, for example, P116 expressing 'I do not feel like the other students are laughing at me when I'm talking, and I actually feel a bit mastery in that I participated'.

e *Creativity.* Participants mentioned creativity in connection with collaborative storytelling and dramatic creativity. They described how being creative makes room for imagination and fantasy. Participant 310 felt that she had increased her imagination to come up with a story. Creativity can lead to (re)discovering vocabulary:

> I feel like the exercises helped to develop my creative skills as well as my speaking skills. I had to come up with sentences that would contribute in the context to help the story and/or the game to move forwards. (P206)

Besides narrative creativity, many participants (37%) experienced taking on roles as both enjoyable and interesting. Embodying a higher or lower status enabled them to realize how feelings influenced characters' language:

> I like this game (meeting) allot because I could talk freely about the subject that was chosen, but had a determent role. This game help me use my imagination to be someone else, that didn't really talk about thing I usually do. This made it so that I use or say different things that had to do with the subject, but that the character says rather than me. It challenged my vocabulary allot, and made me be more comfortable talking about other things that I usually talk about. (P114)

Being in character engaged them and facilitated conversations:

> The Park bench was quite interesting because we got completely lost in character. I figured out his interest at once, but we kept talking in character. The conversation continued, and we sat there talking about his suspicion that his wife was cheating on him and so on. It was a natural flow to the conversation and we talked easily. It was an interesting turn and when we ended the conversation, we both sat there not completely understanding what happened. (P310)

Playing characters positively influenced their spontaneous speech, as mentioned regularly:

> Improvising and 'playing characters' makes speaking a little less dangerous, because all of the students has to do it, and all of the students has to participate in an unfamiliar role. This could for some people sound even scarier, but it seemed to be working well for making the environment in the classroom less 'dangerous'. (P401)

f Initial discomfort. Despite overall enjoyable experiences, many participants (51%) began with some discomfort with in-service participants being overrepresented. Participants reported various explanations for the discomfort, from excitement of starting a new course to feeling uncomfortable about improvisation activities:

> I can admit to myself that when the class got informed of the things we were going to go through in TEFL, that I got a little scared. There was allot of talking about improvisation exercises, and acting. Something that quickly could be childish and become boring. Beside from that to also know that all these people in the classroom were strangers did not help that much either. So, before the day came I already didn't like the idea of these improvisation exercises. (P114)

Most participants reported that initial nervousness disappeared once activities started, and improvisation activities helped them feel more relaxed as the same participant reports:

> It didn't turn out to be that scary after all and it became fun to participate in these exercises. And because it felt like a safe place to practice, I started to try using different words and different ways of expressing myself. (P114)

Participants also emphasized that the timing (start of the semester) was beneficial to their speech practice:

> That week I was a little nervous, but at the same time it was very funny and I learned that I don't have to be afraid to make a fool of myself. I eventually loosened up and I enjoyed myself. We had around an hour of the day with the activities and it made quite a difference for me. I feel safer in the classroom, I do not feel like the other students are laughing at me when I'm talking, and I actually feel a bit mastery in that I participated. I know this sounds a bit odd, but I have never liked unpredictable activities, as I have previously needed predictability in the classroom. (P116)

Although participants mostly described the sessions as good experiences, they felt they had been challenged. Challenges ranged from social issues (self-consciousness) to the challenges of unpredictability and risk-taking. Around 25% of participants expressed the challenge of spontaneous speech being to respond immediately after listening attentively:

> What I enjoyed most about it was the fact that I was able to do everything that the games asked for. I didn't skip anything or not do anything. I'm actually quite surprised by myself at this point, because I did not fail. I was expecting to fail these exercises. Therefore, I'm quite happy with myself, and I have learned that I can do things like improvisation like I didn't think I could do. (P312)

> So we had to respond to things as we were going. This made it impossible to plan ahead what we were going to say, because we always needed to think of a response as we were talking with the customer serviceman. (P401)

> Participants described how improvisation activities encouraged them to think and react quickly. Participants mentioned that activities prepare them for speaking in the real world because 'in everyday life you have to listen and formulate a response on the spot'. (P113).

g Vocabulary. Improvisation activities challenged participants to apply a large range of vocabulary. For example, *Customer Service* extensively challenged participant vocabulary by having to describe the mystery object or problem:

> You had to talk around the item, describe it in a maybe unusual way and not even the easiest one either. I feel that my group was relaxed at this activity; we managed to use words we had not used before, and to come up with (as a service man/woman) good enough questions to guess in the end and help the poor customer. (P411)

> When we did the 'man on the street' and 'customer service' activities I felt like I got to explore and even expand a little on my vocabulary since we were put in scenarios and discussions where we usually wouldn't find ourselves in on a regular day. So, we had to pick from a different vocabulary and use some rarely used words. (P412)

The need for a wide scope could present challenges, because participants had little time to find words in some activities, such as *One Word Story*, where they were forced 'to come up with a reasonable response with very little time to prepare' (P305).

2 Reluctant speakers' views on improvisation activities

Some student teacher perspectives did not meet the 33% threshold for the recurrent themes despite their experiences as reluctant speakers being relevant for spontaneous speech practice and speaking confidence. This led to adding a research question and interviewing some participants during the second year of the study to explore reluctant speakers' perspectives. The interview findings are presented per perceived degree of speaking reluctance, starting with very reluctant speakers:

a Very reluctant speakers. Two participants (P406 and P413) reacted very negatively to initial information about upcoming improvisation activities. They had been highly anxious about public speaking from an early age. Both participants feared being judged because of previously experiencing heavy criticism for making (foreign) language mistakes. Participant 406 visualizes conversations in advance, so she knows exactly what to say in daily life. Participant 413 described her speaking anxiety as a severe mental block, which becomes a physical manifestation such as brain freeze and stomach knots. This occurred when she was informed about improvisation:

> And that I have been, every time, like we talked about here too, criticized negatively, that there is no constructive criticism, just pure disapproval, almost bordering on bullying [yes] um, . . . in such activities in which you are roasted because you say something wrong – do something wrong; regardless whether the purpose of the activity is to make a fool of yourself or make mistakes or whether it is an activity in which you have a roleplay with dialogue [yes] so . . . my first thought was NO (laughs and breathes out heavily), simply NO! (calls out and laughs again) (P413)

Participant 413 used a first-person narrative when describing the current learning environment but regularly switched to the second person pronoun to describe past experiences.

Participants expressed that improvisation activities provided a complex, negative experience. Whilst improvisation activities provided both enjoyable and awkward experiences, they did not suit these very reluctant speakers. They completed some activities as quickly as possible to end their discomfort or volunteered to film instead of playing, described as a coping mechanism. Participant 413 expressed that *Downton Abbey* was extremely uncomfortable because she played a character who only received negative reactions. This triggered bad memories that made her feel so uncomfortable she could not think. Interestingly, playing the authoritative lady herself was also a bad experience which she could not remember until shown footage. Even though she knew all student teachers concentrated on their own activities, P413 believed everybody was only watching her. Sensations of scrutiny are a regular form of discomfort for both participants and align with the description of social anxiety disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2008).

The improvisation activities caused some mental and physical stress for these very reluctant speakers. Participant 406 explained that her nervous laughter in the footage originated from being unable to express herself spontaneously, resulting in silly awkwardness. The laughter worsened the experience through a spiral of noticing discomfort,

overthinking, and physically sensing discomfort, which again reinforced mental stress. In *Customer Service*, overthinking hindered P406 from expressing her interpretation through not trusting her own judgment. Having not experienced any mastery or enjoyment when the mystery was finally solved, P406 rather wanted to move on quickly to relieve stress symptoms. She acknowledged projecting failure and being laughed at. She realized these expectations are based on earlier experiences and not valid for the present context.

Both participants expressed a need for control. The dice pictures in *Dice Based Story* facilitated acceptance and elaboration:

> I: You said it became a bit easier, but then I wonder why?
>
> P406: For example, when I saw a picture of a bee I would think of a bee, then think of what the last person said and then I can kind of combine it. And while the others were talking, I would sit and look at the pictures to see which I can take when it is my turn [yes] which can fit into what has already been said.

This strategy of planning ahead proved challenging when other group members took the dice she had selected. When unable to continue the story well enough because of sudden changes (self-judgment), P406 lowered her voice because of dissatisfaction with her elaboration. She regularly experienced great discomfort, increased by observing her physical stress reactions. Similarly, P413 experienced great discomfort during *Dice Based Story* and *One Word Story* because the immediacy of storytelling increased their tension. When turn-taking altered from fixed order to random, P413 picked up two die consecutively and added two story elements to continue the storyline she imagined. Both participants preferred random storytelling turns which may be related to control issues.

Improvisation activities helped these very reluctant speakers feel more socially included, for example by being more daring within their small groups. While P406 stated that improvisation activities helped her social interactions, similar activities in a new group would negate these improvements due to a lack of established social safety. She strives to be liked and approved by others. Consequently, she fears saying something that may cause people to dislike her; hence, keeping silent is her defence mechanism. She had never conducted a conversation in English because of a lack of oral practice in and out of school. Although improvisation activities created some challenges, she concluded they provided good spontaneous speech practice. In her opinion, the social aspect was a core condition, because the group safety enabled her to engage in spontaneous speech. Her passive vocabulary was activated, and she improved her pronunciation skills through self-correction. Despite wishing to improve her public speaking, she cannot imagine enjoying spontaneous speech practice because the discomfort of the experience still outweighs its learning potential.

Participant 413 found it easier to talk to the other participants because the experience made her feel accepted. Her rumination was reduced which made it easier to speak. She believed that improvisation activities helped her because the playful approach enabled her to laugh at herself when making a mistake, and she then continued conversations without negative tension. She explained that speaking was still very uncomfortable

because it entailed showing her vulnerability. However, she concluded that participation had been 'alright'.

b Reluctant speakers. Four participants (301, 302, 312, and 415) described themselves as inhibited and shy. They had initial negative reactions because they felt improvisation was beyond their comfort zones. Two of them were also excited because of the teacher educator's enthusiasm during the TEFL course introduction. During the first session, these participants experienced a sense of mastery in an initially uncomfortable situation. They explained that it was liberating to manage improvisation activities despite tensions, and mastery encouraged them to continue. Participants ultimately realized there was nothing to fear. For example, they experienced mastery in *Man on the Street* (session 2) because it forced them to speak with everybody in the classroom, a task they had believed impossible. Their need for preparation gradually decreased as they became increasingly comfortable with speaking spontaneously.

Overall experiences were described as intense, engaging, playful speech practice that changed their initial reluctance to speak spontaneously. Improvisation activities pushed them beyond their comfort zones. Participant P302 abandoned the previous need for pre-planned sentences before speaking, while P312 described the change as stretching a language muscle. Others mentioned taking more risks in language production, while P312 felt that repeated exposure to improvisation was essential for speaking more freely after sessions as well. This newfound freedom of speaking spontaneously provided more speaking confidence. In the last session, she experienced a desire to improvise without any worry, because she was committed to completing the improvisation activities. She considered this change an adaptation of self-perception, having assumed herself unable to improvise. However, when encouraged in a safe setting, she managed the activity and experienced mastery. Another participant described how she felt more able to open up:

> Well, I see a little bit of impro, activities like these, with a different perspective. It is like you almost become a totally different person. [yes] or you become somewhat like another person, trying to be a little funny, a bit, yeah, you play different roles. So I feel like um . . . how can I say this . . . you show your funny side, or I don't know what to say, if you . . . [yes, I understand] yeah, that they see you as, not being serious all the time, that you are a nice person and you open a bit up, manage to open yourself up a bit. (P415)

Participants were so intensely engaged and immersed in the fictional world of the activities they forgot they had practised EFL. The reluctant speakers described the activities as very enjoyable and emphasized that humour was an important part of their positive experience.

Furthermore, safety and trust were important premises for these collaborative improvisation activities. Taking part in improvisation activities simultaneously in small groups reduced prior negative associations with spontaneous speech practice. Small groups enabled risk-taking and facilitated joint storytelling because the reluctant speakers felt less observed and trusted their group members. One group supported each other by choosing a mystery object with which P301 was familiar, another by passing on their turn to participants who had ideas for the ending of the story (P312).

These reluctant speakers experienced a sense of flow or being 'in synch' (P301) in the storytelling session. The flow was described as almost telepathic by P312, who illustrated how she developed attentive listening skills by projecting the story, acknowledging the actual offer (acceptance), and then contributing along the same storyline (elaboration):

> Well, when you listen to what she has to say, you understand like, oh okay, so thát is where you want to go. Then you must facilitate or adapt accordingly . . . maybe play the ball over to them as well. Then they get what they ask for and then you must say that in a way, enabling . . . that you have something to say that is related to what they just said. (P312)

When P312 was caught by a surprise contribution, she managed to continue the collaborative story, which again strengthened her speaking confidence. Together with other participants, she took responsibility for the content. The reluctant speakers experienced that an important element of improvisation activities was being forced to speak spontaneously without waiting or preparation time:

> It is like when there is no space for being shy, because there is none in such activities where you just have to speak, you have to speak to keep the activity going, and for me that helped me realize that it perhaps is not so dangerous to talk. (P301)

The time pressure of improvisation activities decreased their speaking reluctance.

Improvisation activities were excellent spontaneous speech practice for diverse everyday situations. Their speaking skills improved because they tried to search for the right words and language register when in character, for example in *Man on the Street* and *Downton Abbey*. P312 became more secure in speaking English, daring to speak without rehearsing, and has become more active in both English and Norwegian unprepared speech. In her opinion, regular oral speech practice would not have provided the challenges or resulted in the changed mindset that she experienced. She concluded the approach was more essential than the content, and the improvisation methodology should be part of the TEd courses:

> And I think improvisation should be -maybe not last year- because it would not fit in with tree diagrams and such, but it should be included in this education (. . .). Because it may happen that everybody sees the light like I did. And that is a possibility we cannot miss, I think. So it was very useful for me. And I don't know if others are of the same opinion but it helped me very much and it is very good if it can help people to become more confident. (P312)

The overall findings support the concept that in this article is coined as the spontaneous speech mindset. Although participants were unsure of the long-term effect of the changes they have experienced, some plan to initiate more spontaneous speech themselves.

V Discussion

First, the findings are discussed in light of Berk and Trieber's (2009) didactic arguments before discussing the concept of spontaneous speech mindset and its emergence in the reluctant speakers' experiences.

1 Didactic arguments revisited

The improvisation activities were relatively learner-centred because participants were responsible for completing the actual content together. Such an approach suits modern language teaching methodology with its focus on empowerment of the learner and communicative competences. For example, *Customer Service* and *Park Bench* contained an information gap so participants had to paraphrase to close the gap, thereby practising attentive listening (CIP4) and negotiating meaning (Savignon, 2018) which is important in communicative competence (Richards, 2006).

The findings confirm improvisation activities are attuned with several intelligences and related to Gallagher's point of embodiment (2010). Any interpersonal communication displays relations and status (CIP3) (Coppens, 2002), which is partly expressed through paralinguistic cues. Practising FL speaking includes the use of paralinguistic cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and other forms of nonverbal communication (Stinson, 2008). In addition, participants were stimulated to apply a variety of language registers naturally through embodiment of the role, such as polite language required from servants. Participants described how playing characters provided space for practising diverse spontaneous speech through creativity (Sawyer, 2003; Winston & Stinson, 2011).

Finally, the findings support the notion of collaborative learning as supported by acceptance and elaboration (CIP1). One common explanation for decreasing the fear of making mistakes was enjoyment. Enjoyment appears to reduce psychological risk and support spontaneity (CIP2). Participants described enjoyment, improved interpersonal relationships, and copious spontaneous speech as essential factors in improvisation sessions, which contributed to increased speaking confidence.

2 Spontaneous speech mindset

In essence, the overall findings could be described as an enjoyable spontaneous speech experience that enabled an increase in EFL speaking confidence. The findings confirmed Stern's hypothesis (1980) that certain psychological factors were triggered, rendering participants more flexible and empowered. Improvisation activities created safe environments for spontaneous speech practice, which has been described as a positive atmosphere of openness and trust encouraged by mutual support (Schwenke et al., 2020). Improvisation activities challenged participants' oral proficiency in diverse situations. This resulted in exploration of their linguistic and creative boundaries, hereby coined a 'spontaneous speech mindset', as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Participant experiences can be interpreted as a continuous circular process, with enjoyment as the main facilitating component for reaching the spontaneous speech mindset. When their language contributions were accepted without judgment (CIP1), participants relaxed in the safety of the spontaneous speech practice (CIP2). As they became more comfortable, their speaking confidence could develop. This led to more risk-taking (CIP2) in speech, an expression of empowerment. Consequently, their speech became more fluent and varied. They experienced mastery, increasing their enjoyment of improvisation activities. If participants failed to communicate spontaneously, most still enjoyed themselves because improvisation activities were non-judgmental and playful with room for failure. The circle

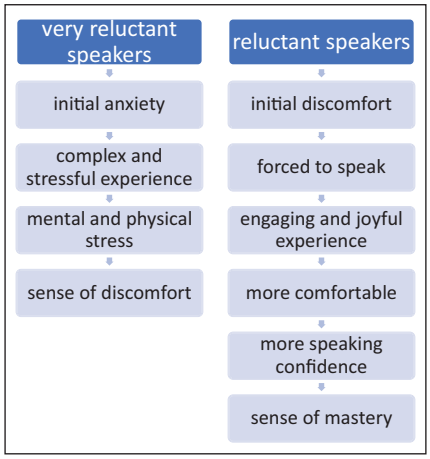

Figure 1. Interview findings.

would be repeated and every time a speaker experienced enjoyment, their spontaneous speech mindset could increase, creating a window of opportunity (Kurtz, 2015). The narrative creativity of improvisation activities (CIP1) stimulated participant imagination. This challenged their language beyond everyday speech and inspired the rediscovery of imaginative response (Johnstone, 1981). Participants explored their creativity (CIP3) when in character, surprising themselves by applying different language styles in their adapted roles. They were absorbed by making meaning in collaborative stories (CIP4), with some reaching a level of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008), enhancing their unselfconsciousness. Improvisation activities supported and contextualized their spontaneous speech, as participants were expected to attempt new behaviour and stretch their competency base (Crossan, 1998). Participants accessed their different sides, coped with unpredictable situations, and (re)discovered more words and phrases by accessing their playful imagination.

3 Reluctant speaker experiences

Reluctant speaker experiences varied and laughter turned out to express both stress and enjoyment (Figure 1). Very reluctant speakers experienced a rather vicious circle of stress due to the unpredictability of improvisation activities. The immediacy of spontaneous storytelling and its inherent lack of control was experienced as a threat that hindered acceptance and elaboration (CIP1). Consequently, very reluctant speakers preferred random turn-taking in storytelling which provided more creative freedom to contribute immediately when an idea arose and re-established some control of the storyline. Discomfort was also expressed by switching pronouns during the interview, possibly indicating a need to distance herself from emotions. Despite factual knowledge about the present situation being safe, their anxious thoughts from earlier experiences overpowered them.

Undeniably, the improvisation experiences were influenced by projections of former judgment. This sense of discomfort may have prevented the enjoyment required for

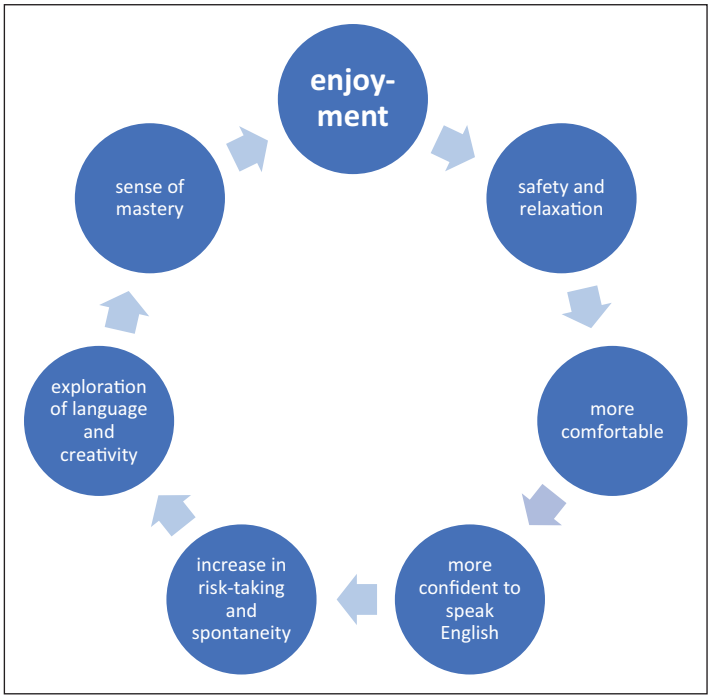

Figure 2. Spontaneous speech mindset.

relaxing into a spontaneous speech mindset. The short time frame of the sessions may have been a limitation for very reluctant speakers. They might benefit from improvisation exposure over a longer time (Seppänen et al., 2019) or when provided as part of professional group therapy (Phillips Sheesley et al., 2016).

Conversely, other reluctant speakers experienced a victorious circle of enjoyment because they reached the spontaneous speech mindset (Figure 2). Repeated exposure to the enjoyment of improvisation activities decreased their need for preparation and increased their spontaneous speech mindset. Being forced to speak unprepared overruled their discomfort because they wanted to contribute to the content of the improvisation activities. The increasing difficulty of sessions was beneficial for developing their speaking confidence. Reluctant speakers realized they had mastered something beyond their learner belief, which strengthened their speaking confidence. They redefined spontaneous speech tension as excitement which enabled them to reappraise assumed negative expectations and reduce their stress response, leading to reduced speaking anxiety (Piazzoli, 2011; Seppänen et al., 2019).

4 Pedagogical reflections

Creating an atmosphere of safety is vital for improvisation and FLL methodology. Participants pointed at safety and trust as essential conditions for their positive experience. Sessions were deliberately held at the beginning of courses, ensuring participants

could benefit most from the improvisation activities. Naturally, many participants were insecure, especially in-service student teachers whose transition from teacher to student may have created additional insecurity. As in any method, one cannot assume improvisation activities are enjoyable for all EFL learners. Seppänen et al. (2019) point out that incorporating improvisation methodology in TEd curricula could enhance student teachers' social interaction skills. One may wonder whether the level of speaking anxiety from very reluctant speakers may be so debilitative that it is beyond EFL teachers' professional competence and responsibility to manage in a natural classroom setting. The reluctant speakers indicated, however, that inclusion in playful collaborative activities is more beneficial than exclusion from social contexts through individual tasks. The reluctant speakers emphasized the importance of regularly leaving their comfort zones in EFL.

Improvisation activities facilitated excellent spontaneous speech practice in EFL TEd, enabled by the unpredictable characteristics of authentic speech. Attentive listening attuned participants to collaborative storylines and enjoyment supported taking risks in small groups. The improvisation activities attended to the process (spontaneous speech practice) rather than the end product (linguistic gain). This spontaneous speech mindset could be regarded as a facilitative mindset for speaking spontaneously (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). TEd should provide student teachers with methodological approaches for supporting EFL speakers in an inclusive spontaneous speech practice.

Due to the teacher educator's dual competence as improviser and teacher, improvisation activities contributed to creating a safe learning environment, facilitating spontaneous speech practice. The playful atmosphere enabled participants to further explore their oral proficiency. Ultimately, the study relied on a combination of professional knowledge as an improvisation instructor and an EFL teacher educator.

VI Conclusions

In this study, application of improvisation activities in TEd was investigated and found to provide excellent practice for EFL spontaneous speech. Enjoyment through improvisation activities facilitated non-judgmental spontaneous speech, enabling participants to explore linguistic and creative boundaries, contributing to their speaking confidence. While FLL research has mainly focused on negative emotions (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), FL speech practice has both shadow (speaking anxiety or reluctance) and light (speaking confidence) sides. The spontaneous speech mindset can be regarded as a manifestation of the light side and enables learners to further develop their spontaneous speech proficiency. Spontaneity liberates people (Spolin, 1983).

While the study cannot predict how long the effects will last, an interesting finding was that some reluctant speakers indicated changes in learner belief. They enjoyed improvisation activities which decreased their need for preparation and increased their spontaneous speech mindset. The greater the enjoyment, the greater the engagement, and the easier it was to speak English. They reappraised their sense of discomfort as excitement and achieved mastery. Through improvisation, learners experiment with language rather than reproduce scripted speech (Galante & Thomson, 2017), which suits FLL risk-taking encouraged by Dörnyei (1995). Improvisation activities based on central

improvisation principles (CIPs) are highly recommended as a suitable method for spontaneous speech practice in EFL TEd, provided teacher educators have adequate improvisation competence to create a safe practice.

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Note

1. Even though English is taught from the age of six, Norwegian learners do not learn English in an English-speaking country. To distinguish the participants of the present study from ESL learners and emphasize the foreignness which may influence their speaking confidence, this study uses the term English as a foreign language (EFL).

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Appendix 1

Instructions for the retrospective text.

Write a diary text (minimum 1,000 words) in which you reflect on how you have experienced doing improvisation activities in the English classroom. In your opinion, have the improvisation activities improved your competence as a speaker and a student teacher of English?

Special focus points

You have participated in improvisation sessions. Here is a list to help you remember what we have done in the TEFL classroom:

- Session 1 Storytelling: *Zip, Zap, Zop – One Word Story – Three/four sentence story – Dice Based Story*
- Session 2 Conversations: *Man on the Street – Customer service – Noah's Ark*
- Session 3 Status: *Warm up walk – Downtown Abbey – Meeting –Park Bench*

Please read your own learning diary texts again, look back and reflect on the improvisation sessions you have attended. Do you have favourite activities? Please explain why you liked those activities so much. Have the improvisation activities influenced your fluency and/or self-confidence in spontaneous speech? If so, please be specific how and why. If not, please explain why. Have you developed any skills other than speech?

Some of the activities were filmed. How did you feel about being filmed?

Finally: Add any comments about the use of improvisation in the English classroom.

Thank you for allowing me to learn from you!

Appendix 2

Guide for the interviews.

1. Introduction: welcome and information about recording etc.
2. Main question: What was it like for you to do these improvisation activities?
3. Please describe in your own words how you felt about speaking spontaneously during the activities.
4. Please describe in your own words how you felt about speaking spontaneously in the weeks after the activities.
5. We are going to watch a small excerpt from the improvisation activities. Please comment on the video footage whenever you feel like commenting it.
   The interviewer will also stop the video and ask for comments upon selected places.
6. Anything else you want to share?
7. How has the interview been for you?

Because most real-life foreign language speech is unpredictable, spontaneous speech must be practised in the English language classroom. Reluctant speakers are, however, a common challenge. This project explored how improvisation activities facilitated spontaneous English speech practice and stimulated the development of speaking confidence. The research focused on English teacher education and ensuing school practicums. The empirical material includes pre- and post-questionnaires, retrospective texts, interviews and trial logs.

The overall findings showed that improvisation activities provided safety through their enjoyable, collaborative and playful character. High levels of positive engagement among learners were found. Facilitation of spontaneous speech practice took place through embodiment, immediacy, engagement and enjoyment. The enjoyment of collaborative improvisation created a playful pressure to speak. A variety of language registers was practised through role embodiment. Student teachers who experienced high degrees of enjoyment and intense engagement, reached a "spontaneous speech mindset" and increased their speaking confidence.

The improvisation activities offered a contextual speech practice that facilitated taking language risks in the safety of a playful, engaging learning environment. Enjoyment is the key factor in facilitating spontaneous speech practice at university and in school. Based on the findings in this project, it is sensible that English teacher education were to provide student teachers with training in improvisation for spontaneous speech practice because improvisation can encourage the development of a "spontaneous speech mindset".

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