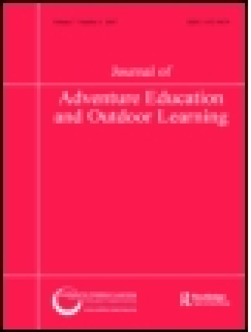

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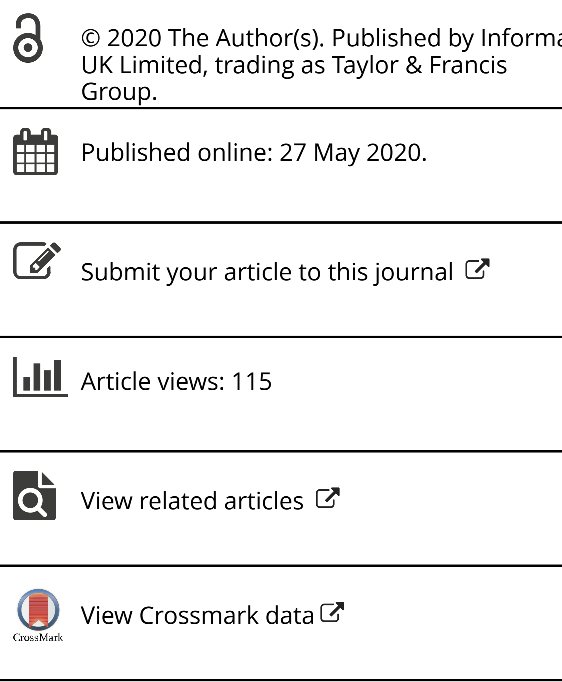

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# Norwegian teenagers' experiences of developing second language fluency in an outdoor context

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**ABSTRACT**
This article explores how Norwegian teenagers experienced the development of spoken fluency of English as a second language (L2) through varied and sensuous learning in an outdoor environment. The article is based on six semi-structured group interviews with 23 year-8 students (13–14 years old) in a lower secondary school in Norway. The interviews were analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis, and the results indicate that the students found their English fluency to be improved and that the outdoors environment increased their confidence and intrinsic motivation for developing their spoken English skills. The results are interpreted as a consequence of new and varied affordances in an outdoor environment. Students reported increased willingness to communicate in the target language due to increased confidence, real-life language use, and interesting ways of learning.

**KEYWORDS**
Second language learning; fluency; foreign or second language anxiety; outdoor education; intrinsic motivation; affordances

## Introduction

In Norway English is one of three core subjects which students start learning in year 1 (age 6). By year 8, students will have an average of two 45 minute sessions of English per week.

The overall purpose of second language (L2) instruction is that learners should be able to communicate (in speech and writing) in the target language, i.e. they should develop communicative competence (Derwing, 2017). Communicative competence refers to a learner's ability to communicate effectively with different people in different contexts (Hymes, 1972; Littlewood, 2014). Fluency is a part of communicative competence, and fluency together with complexity (elaborate and varied performance) and accuracy (correct language use) make up the three principal language proficiency dimensions (Housen & Kuiken, 2009). Communicative competence was first introduced by Hymes (1972) as a reaction to Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence, and it was further developed by Canale and Swain (1980) and Savignon (e.g. 1983, 2002). The approach used for acquiring communicative competence is communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasises authentic language use for communicating meaning (e.g. Ellis, 2008; Richards, 2006). One of the goals of CLT is fluency in the L2.

To become a fluent speaker is an important aim of L2 learning. By speaking fluently, one will communicate well with others and avoid misunderstandings as well as frustration on behalf of the part of the interlocutor. Dysfluent speech may also be associated with lower intelligence and result in native speakers not wanting to communicate with L2 learners (Derwing, 2017). To become fluent in an L2, it is necessary for learners to be involved in activities that promote spoken fluency, for

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example, activities that demand extensive language use (Derwing, 2017). However, L2 research indicates that classroom teaching does not focus much on fluency-oriented activities (Derwing, 2017; Tavakoli & Hunter, 2017) and that teaching of fluency in the classroom has its limitations (Derwing, 2017). Therefore, it would be useful to consider if non-classroom contexts, for instance, outdoor environments, might be more effective in promoting spoken L2 fluency.

L2 learners must be able to use the language in spontaneous as well as planned communication, and the two types of oral production demand different strategies. Because spontaneous speech is immediate and direct, the learner will not have time to plan and prepare what to say. Therefore, developing spontaneous fluent production is demanding and requires practice. However, L2 research indicates that there is little focus on spontaneous language and activities that develop fluency in classrooms (Tavakoli & Hunter, 2017; Wood, 2010). Also, language learning situations promoting spontaneous speech should be as real as possible, but real-life communication situations can be challenging to create in a classroom setting (e.g. Richards, 2015).

Anxiety during the learning of a foreign or second language, referred to as foreign language anxiety (FLA), is one of the major obstacles for achieving L2 proficiency (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) because it influences foreign language learning and communication negatively (e.g. Dewaele, 2002; Gregersen, 2003). FLA is particularly associated with speaking practices and leads to less confidence and self-esteem, and as a consequence students are less willing to communicate in the L2 (MacIntyre, 2007). To reduce FLA, research suggests that L2 learning should take place in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere (e.g. Gregersen, 2003; Steinberg & Horwitz, 1986). An outdoor environment might offer this because it represents a less formal learning arena where learners might feel less observed and assessed (Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2015), which might indicate that there are other and more opportunities for learning than in a classroom setting. Learning outside the classroom is commonly labelled outdoor education. According to Jordet (1998), outdoor education is a teaching method in which parts of the school day are spent in the local environment or on the school grounds.

The aim of this article was to explore how Norwegian teenagers experience the development of English L2 fluency through varied and sensuous learning in an outdoor context. Different fields such as psychology, psycholinguistics, phonetics, and applied linguists have approached oral L2 fluency from different perspectives, but very few studies have investigated instructed spoken L2 fluency (Derwing, 2017). Moreover, to our knowledge no studies have investigated L2 fluency in a school-based outdoor setting. There are also few studies focusing on outdoor education at the secondary school level. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in our knowledge of L2 education in an outdoor context. Because acquisition of L2 fluency demands that learners actively engage in language speaking activities, and because research indicates that such opportunities are limited in a classroom setting (Derwing, 2017), this article asks the following research question: How do Norwegian secondary school students experience the development of English fluency in an outdoor context?

## Literature review

### *L2 spoken fluency*

Within the fields of psychology and psycholinguistics, research has been concerned with how fluency is affected by cognitive processes. In the field of phonetics, the interest has been in the learners' physical outputs, whereas applied linguists have investigated how fluency can be developed through classroom tasks and activities, the effects of L2 immersion, etc. (Derwing, 2017). There are three types of fluency: cognitive fluency, utterance fluency and perceived fluency (Segalowitz, 2010). Cognitive fluency refers to the mental processes required, utterance fluency refers to speaking without many hesitations and pauses and perceived fluency focuses on how a listener would rate a speaker's fluent speech production. Clearly, these are all linked (Derwing, 2017).

Even though fluent speech production is an important element in L2 performance and for effective communication, fluency has proven difficult to define (it is often defined vaguely) and linguists have used the term in different ways (DeKeyser, 2012; Derwing, 2017; Ellis, 2008; Richards, 2006; Wood, 2010). Derwing (2017, p. 246) defines it as 'the degree to which speech flows, and to what extent that flow is interrupted by pauses, hesitations, false starts, and so on'.

Over the past decades research on fluency has mainly focused on temporal variables of speech (Derwing, 2017), meaning that researchers have been occupied with 'speech rate, amount and frequency of hesitation, location of pauses, and length of runs of fluent speech between pauses' (Wood, 2010, p. 1). Findings show that utterance fluency increases when learners have many opportunities to use the language, both in classrooms and in target language contexts (e.g. Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004; Tavakoli, 2011; Tavakoli & Hunter, 2017). In addition, learning of formulaic sequences (i.e. fixed combinations of words) is important because they can make pauses shorter and less frequent and runs of speech longer (e.g. Derwing, 2017; Wood, 2006). Focus on listening tasks is also important for fluency development (Derwing, 2017).

Wood (2010) claims that L2 learners suffer from inadequate fluency for a long time after their basic L2 studies and that L2 teachers often focus on language accuracy and the hope that input and practice will help learners to speak more fluently.

### *Language anxiety*

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language learning threatens learners' self-concept and is therefore associated with anxiety. FLA is important in the development of fluency because it inhibits fluency, and it has been described by Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 125) as 'the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system . . . limited to the language learning situation'. They claim that many learners find foreign language learning in classroom situations particularly stressful and that speaking is the modality that provokes the most anxiety. In this article, we will use FLA as Horwitz et al. (1986) do, namely as anxiety unique to the L2 learning situation.

Research on FLA dates back to the 1970s, and most studies have been concerned with FLA in a classroom context. Studies of FLA in non-classroom contexts have mainly focused on using the language in target language contexts (e.g. Allen & Herron, 2003). Allen and Herron (2003) much cited study found that FLA levels decreased during the 6 week summer programme the L2 learners of French spent in France. However, compared to our study, the students were older and had studied French as an L2 for a maximum of four years.

According to Horwitz (2010), various aspects of FLA have been studied, and the first studies were concerned with the nature and effects of FLA (e.g. Horwitz et al., 1986; Kleinmann, 1977; Long & Porter, 1985). Later studies focused on the sources of FLA (e.g. Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz, 1996), how FLA influenced learning in general (e.g. Gregersen, 2003; Young, 1990) and specific types of learning such as speaking and listening (e.g. Elkhafaifi, 2008; Oxford, 1999). The latest research has focused on teaching strategies that can lower FLA (e.g. MacIntyre, 2007). Also, to measure FLA levels, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) and the Willingness to Communicate model (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clement, & Noels, 1998) were introduced. Willingness to communicate refers to a learner's readiness to speak whenever the opportunity arises. The model has gained considerable interest because it has been found that learners' willingness to communicate levels are connected to how much they communicate in the L2 (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Donovan, 2003).

To lower the threshold for L2 speaking, the literature has focused on teaching strategies that stress the importance of creating a supportive, friendly, and relaxed learning environment (e.g. Gregersen, 2003; Young, 1999). This includes less focus on error correction (e.g. Gregersen, 2003; Young, 1990), speaking in small groups (e.g. Long & Porter, 1985; Young, 1990), and speaking about topics of interest (Gregersen, 2003). The negative effects of classroom FLA in terms of confidence,

self-esteem, and participation (willingness to communicate) (MacIntyre, 2007) make it important to explore pedagogical approaches that might help reduce FLA and build confidence so that L2 learners can be more active participants in using the target language.

### *Outdoor education*

Outdoor education usually takes place in schools' nearby environments so that learners can interact with the local environment and can learn from their experiences (e.g. Beames & Ross, 2010). For outdoor activities to develop spoken L2 fluency, outdoor education needs to be addressed in a less traditional way. Activities must be fluency-oriented so that the students can actively engage in the target language, and they must involve meaningful interaction with peers. However, the main reason for developing fluency outdoors is that an outdoor environment represents a change of setting and might therefore increase learning.

Research has found outdoor education to have many positive effects on learning, including increased academic achievement (e.g. Dismore & Bailey, 2005; Fägerstam & Blom, 2013; Fägerstam & Samuelsson, 2014), intrinsic motivation (e.g. Bølling, Otte, Elsborg, Nielsen, & Bentsen, 2018; Dettweiler, Unlu, Lauterbach, Becker, & Gschrey, 2015; Fägerstam & Samuelsson, 2014; Fiskum, 2014; Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2012b, 2015), and engagement (Beames & Ross, 2010) as well as improved social relations (Hartmeyer & Mygind, 2016). In addition, outdoor education has been found to reduce students' stress levels (Dettweiler, Becker, Auestad, Simon, & Kirsch, 2017), which might be important to reducing FLA. Research has also found that a change of environment may change the students' attitudes towards learning (e.g. Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2015; Skaugen & Fiskum, 2015). Fiskum and Jacobsen's (2015) study looked at children with reading disabilities, but still the findings might have relevance for young teenagers and their development of L2 fluency. Several studies have also found that communication between learners is different in an outdoor environment than in a classroom setting (Fägerstam & Blom, 2013; Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2012a, 2012b; Mygind, 2014). For example, Mygind (2014) found that a higher degree of dialogue takes place between the students in an outdoor environment.

The positive findings of outdoor education might be explained by the change of learning environment because an outdoor setting offers other opportunities for learning than an indoor classroom. Moreover, these findings suggest that a naturalistic setting might increase learning outcomes also in terms of L2 fluency.

### *How can outdoor education contribute to the development of L2 fluency?*

An affordance is the intuitive, visual perception of our surroundings, e.g. a tree might invite a child to climb it (Gibson, 1986). The theory of affordances first appeared in animal biology, but Gibson (1986) found the theory to also relate to human beings. The affordance theory was later developed by Heft (1988) and Kyttä (2002, 2004)) who both applied a functional approach, i.e. looking at an environment's functions rather than its form in order to develop a framework for studying children's outdoor environments.

A classroom is a formal learning arena having certain expectations, such as the teacher being in control of what is being done and said, students being quiet when the teacher speaks, students sitting quietly at their desks and raising their hand when they have something to say, only one student speaks at a time, textbooks are often used, etc. Moreover, what one does as a student is observed and assessed by the teacher and other students. An outdoor environment, on the other hand, represents a different learning arena because it is an informal, open space where students are freed from the norms of the classroom (Harris, 2017). Consequently, it also represents different affordances.

Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory of human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985) aims to explain the various choices people make without being influenced by other factors. According to

Deci and Ryan, intrinsic motivation is important for cognitive and social development, and they argue that learners need to experience competence, autonomy, and relatedness in order to be motivated to learn. Because outdoor education offers a variety of affordances, it might open for more choices of activities or ways to handle tasks, which might lead to a greater feeling of autonomy as well as more possibilities for mastering tasks (Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2015).

## Methodology

### *Design*

We contacted one secondary class and offered three days of outdoor activities (one double session per day). Afterwards we interviewed the students in groups.

### *Ontological and epistemological stances*

The ontological position of learning in outdoor contexts can be found in deep ecology, which views humanity as located within nature rather than being dominant over nature (Nicol, 2002). Outdoor education builds on a constructionist epistemology, which emphasises that knowledge is constructed, not discovered. Constructionism thus rejects the objectivist and subjectivist view of human knowledge (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism holds that knowledge develops in the interaction between culture (all the knowledge we draw on in order to understand) and object (the physical world around us) (Crotty, 1998). Because constructionism focuses on acquiring knowledge through social interchange, it supports methods used in outdoor education and language learning. According to functional and sociocultural language models emphasising communicative competence, such as CLT, the students are expected to be active participants in interaction with others in order to construct meaning.

### *Trustworthiness*

Despite the first author's lack of in-depth knowledge about the effects of outdoor education, the increasing interest in the topic over the last couple of years and the belief that this method of teaching is positive and beneficial for students might have influenced the results. According to hermeneutics (Crotty, 1998), interpretation of all texts is based a person's previous knowledge with a specific phenomenon. As a researcher studying a particular topic, it is therefore important to be conscious of one's preconceptions and how these might influence one's research and results.

The students knew prior to the interviews that this was a research project for which the first author was responsible and that she was their instructor. This might have influenced their positive attitude to the language activities they were engaged in as well as the answers given during the interviews. On the other hand, because she was not their regular English teacher and the students were informed that their responses would not be revealed to their teachers, it might have contributed to more honest answers since their answers would not have any negative consequences for them.

In terms of reliability, the methods and the data analysis have been made as clear as possible. This should enable evaluation of the research and the identification of other contexts where these findings might prove useful. Such clarity of methods and research process is of vital importance (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Regarding validity, the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and not in English. If the interviews had been in English, the students might not have given their true opinion on outdoor education because their answers would be dependent on their English language proficiency. Also, some of the questions in the interview guide were quite leading, and therefore these could have

been interpreted differently by the students than the first author had expected or they might have given an answer they thought the interviewer would be pleased with.

### *Activities*

A total of five different English activities were conducted during three sessions taking place on three different days. Each session lasted approximately 80 minutes. All instructions about how to implement the activities were given by the first author of this study (hereafter 'I'). Activities were chosen so that the participants would be encouraged to use English in meaningful and genuine communication situations (Ellis, 2008; Willis, 1996) and for the students to speak as much English as possible because extensive language use (Derwing, 2017) was the overall aim. Another important reason was to plan activities that would reduce FLA and lower the threshold for speaking English (Gregersen, 2003). It was therefore important that activities encouraged simultaneous speech to avoid any negative emotions related to observation and assessment (Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2015) of their language proficiency. The activities *Talk about a Topic, Describe Your Room, What do You See?, Pick and Tell*, and *Walk and Talk* were conducted in the following way. On day one, two activities were carried out on the school's football pitch because the activities demanded some space and the pitch was in easy reach from the students' classroom (and thus saved us some time). Once at the pitch and ready for the first activity, *Talk about a Topic*, the students were asked to form two circles, one inner circle facing outwards and an outer circle facing inwards, so that each student would be facing a partner. Next, I gave instructions about how to implement the activity. I told them that they would be given several everyday topics to talk about with their partner, but the time would be limited to three minutes, and that I would tell them when to start and stop talking. When I said 'stop', the students in the outer circle moved to the right while the students in the inner circle did not. Once everyone had a new partner, a new topic would be given. Some discussion topics were 'Tell about what you plan to do this summer', 'Tell about the best film you have ever seen', and 'Tell about what you would do if you became a billionaire' Altogether 5–7 topics were discussed. The second activity on day one, *Describe Your Room*, was performed in pairs. The students were asked to find a partner then to stand back to back, facing away from one another. Before leaving the classroom the students had been told to bring something to write on and write with. The instructions for the activity were for the students to describe their bedroom to their partner and for their partner to draw the room based on this information. When finished they would look at the drawing and discuss the result. The roles would then be swapped.

The activities of the second day were *What do You See?* And *Pick and Tell*, and they took place at the school's second football pitch because one activity demanded a description of nearby physical objects. In addition, changing the learning arena added variation to the activities, which might be inspiring in itself. *What do You See?* Was an activity where the students were in small groups of two or three. Careful instructions were given prior to the activity to make sure the participants knew what to do. Students were to take turns describing an object they could see not too far from the pitch without saying what the object was. When the other students thought they knew the answer, they were to run/walk quickly to the object and touch it. When back to the group, they would learn if the answer was correct, and if not they had to listen more carefully to the instructions and try once more. The second activity of the day was *Pick and Tell*, which was organised as a relay with several students making up each group. The first student in each group would run/walk quickly to the other end of the pitch to pick a note from a box, hurry back to the group, and describe the noun on the note as best as he/she could. When one of the members of the group gave the correct answer, the next student in line took their turn.

Day three involved only the *Walk and Talk* activity because this demanded more time than the previous ones. The activity did not take place on the school grounds, but in the nearby surroundings. The reason for this was that I expected the activity to be more inspiring if the students could walk around the neighbourhood starting and ending the walk at the school, instead of just walking on the

school premises. For this activity, careful instructions were given in the classroom. Students were asked to be in small groups, preferably in pairs, and they were given several laminated sheets with different topics. They were allowed time prior to the walk to sit in their groups and decide which topics they wanted to discuss on their walk because I expected that some preparation would make the discussion flow more easily. They were allowed to bring the sheets with them when walking.

The class's form teacher, their English teacher, and an assistant were present during all three outdoor sessions, but they kept themselves in the background, mostly offering assistance to some of the students in explaining how they should engage in the activities.

### Interviews

Semi-structured group interviews were held with the students, and semi-structured interviews with open questions were chosen to allow the students to say more than they probably would have if the interview guide had been very rigid and structured. It also allowed the interviewer (the first author) to ask follow-up questions. The groups of students faced the interviewer sitting on opposite sides of a desk. An audio recorder was placed on the desk, and the students were informed that the conversation would be recorded.

The interviews took place in May 2018. They were conducted in Norwegian to avoid any FLA because the main aim was to get the students to speak, not to observe their English speech fluency. The interviews were conducted in groups of three or four and took place on three different days. To ensure confidence among the students, the students' teacher was asked to put them in six different groups because she knew the students well and would know who would feel comfortable together and would be likely to speak.

Altogether six interviews were conducted. Two interviews were conducted each day immediately after the outdoor activities of that day. They were conducted right after the activities due to practicalities. The students were asked specifically about their opinion of that day's activities, but on days two and three they could also comment on the activities of the previous days. The interviews lasted approximately 7–26 minutes depending on how talkative the students were.

The semi-structured interview guide included 28 questions in total. The first 13 questions were connected to the outdoor activities they had taken part in (e.g. what was positive/less positive and if they were able to speak much English during the activities). Questions also regarded FLA such as if they were afraid of making errors when speaking (Gregersen, 2003; Young, 1990), and intrinsic motivation (questions on competence, autonomy and relatedness) (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

### Participants

All 23 year-8 students (13–14 years old) in the class participated in this study. The participants were recruited through an email (consent form attached) sent to the form teacher, which was then forwarded to the parents. Because all of the students were very eager to participate in the interviews, we ended up including the whole class. Not surprisingly, some of the participants were very talkative, whereas others were quite shy and did not contribute much during the interview process.

The class had no prior experience with English language learning in an outdoor context, but more or less all had had English instruction in an indoor classroom a few hours per week since the age of six.

### Ethics

The study was carried out in accordance with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data's guidelines and met the research ethics guidelines set by the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (2014). The students' parents signed a consent form and were informed that the study was anonymous and that their teenagers could withdraw at any time by telling their form teacher. All

students in the class were permitted to take part in the study. The students gave informed consent by showing willingness to participate in the interviews.

Procedures that helped balance the power between the interviewer and the interview participants were that the students were informed about the study's intent, how the interview material would be used and stored and that no names would be used so their identity would be protected. This information was given to the students in class prior to the interviews. During the interviews the interviewer was an active listener asking follow-up questions whenever necessary. In addition, to make the participants more comfortable the interviews took place at the students' school, in a small room next to the their classroom.

### *Data generation and analysis*

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to investigate the students' experiences of learning English fluency in an outdoor context and to understand how meanings were created. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis 'is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (p. 79). This method of analysis was chosen due to its flexibility because it does not need to be used within any particular theoretical framework and because the method allows for rich and complex descriptions of the students' experiences. Because thematic analysis is a flexible method that contributes to detailed and complex descriptions by searching for patterned themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), it provided a thorough analysis of these students' experiences of language learning in an outdoor context.

When conducting thematic analysis, there are several decisions that need to be made before and during the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). One of these is what should be regarded as a theme and whether the number of instances is important or if it is enough for a theme to 'capture something important' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). The researcher needs to take an active part during the research process because themes must be identified; they do not just emerge from the data. To classify as a theme, information in the data must reflect an important element relevant to the research question. Thus, the prevalence of the themes was not crucial in this study. The chosen approach required paying close attention to the students' experiences as a whole (Wertz, 2011) and aimed to give a rich account of the identified themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Other decisions to be made are whether the analysis should be driven by an inductive or theoretical approach, whether themes should be identified at the semantic (explicit) or latent (implicit) level, and whether the researcher wants to carry out the research within a realist or constructionist epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the approach would best be described as inductive, with themes identified at the semantic level and the research carried out within a constructionist paradigm.

Brown and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006) suggest a six-step process that enables the researcher to identify themes or patterns in the data. The process is not linear, but is recursive where the researcher moves back and forth between the initial codes and themes when searching for overall themes and sub-themes. Briefly, the six steps can be explained as follows: 1) become familiar with the data, 2) generate initial codes, 3) search for themes, 4) review the themes, 5) define and name the themes, and 6) write the text. To make the research process of the study transparent, what follows is how these six steps guided the work with the interview material.

The analytic process started during the interviews and continued through the transcription work (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015), which made the author familiar with the data at an early stage (step 1). When all of the audio files were transcribed, the transcriptions were copied into a table with a column to the right that allowed for writing brief comments, interesting ideas, or initial codes/themes. When systematically reading through the data interview by interview, all interesting data extracts were highlighted and ideas, codes, and themes were manually typed next to the corresponding data extract (step 2). These initial codes captured the essence of what the students were talking about. At this stage, it was considered important that the codes were 'close to' the empirical

**Table 1.** Initial themes identified in the six interviews.

| Initial themes | Interviews where the theme is discussed |
|---|---|
| Fluency | 1, 2, 3, 5 |
| Inactivity | 1, 2, 4, 6 |
| Book-based learning | 1, 5, 6 |
| Relevance | 1, 3, 5 |
| Physical activity | 1, 3, 5, 6 |
| Social relations | 1, 2, 5, 6 |
| Accuracy | 1, 4, 5, 6 |
| Motivation | 1, 4, 5, 6 |
| Observation | 1, 2, 3, 5 |
| Spontaneity | 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 |
| Confidence | 1, 2, 3, 5, |
| Language anxiety | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 |
| Willingness to speak | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 |
| Autonomy | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 |

data, and therefore they reflected, sometimes even verbatim, the participants' statements. Next, these initial codes were looked at in more detail to generate potential themes (step 3), keeping in mind that some of the codes might become subthemes or overall themes by the end of the analytic process. A thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the codes was created manually to get an idea of how the themes could be linked. The potential themes were reviewed (step 4) before the themes were given more appropriate and final names that would capture the essence of the students' experiences (step 5). Based on these themes, a new thematic map was made, and the number of themes was reduced from 14 to 4. When writing the text (step 6), students' statements as well as a table were included to make the content of the analysis visible to the reader. The students' statements were included to strengthen the study's arguments and to make the analysis more transparent. The table was also used as a means of transparency because it makes the potential and final themes visual to the readers (Table 1).

## Results and discussion

Overall, the analysis of the interviews indicated that the outdoor environment was seen as a different learning arena from the indoor classroom and that the teenagers created meaning from the varied and different ways of learning in this environment. The students reported feeling more confident speaking English in the outdoor environment, that they found the activities to encourage real-world language use, and that the activities involved interesting ways of developing fluency. *Willingness to communicate* in an outdoor environment was identified as the overall theoretical theme, and *feeling confident, real life language use*, and *interesting ways of learning* were identified as theoretical subthemes.

### *Willingness to communicate*

Willingness to communicate is essential in developing fluency (Horwitz et al., 1986), and this was identified as an essential theme across the empirical material and as a theme in all of the interviews. This might not be a surprising outcome because the objective of this study was to encourage the students to engage in fluency-oriented activities. Nevertheless, the study clearly indicates that the teenagers found it easier to speak the target language, i.e. they experienced less FLA, in the outdoor environment than in a classroom setting. This seems to be due to several reasons. In the outdoor environment they reported feeling less observed by both the teacher and their peers (Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2015), making them feel more confident and less anxious when it came to using the target language. Also, the focus being on fluent speech production, and not on using the correct vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation (accuracy) (Gregersen, 2003; Young, 1990), and the fact that it did

not matter if they made any language mistakes, made them feel more relaxed and confident during the outdoor learning. Clearly, these experiences differed greatly from the reported experiences of classroom learning. In addition, the results indicate that the students found the outdoor activities interesting and motivating, which also made them willing to interact in the target language. Overall, the outdoor environment had a positive effect on student learning because it lowered performance as well as FLA levels and supported willingness to speak and communicate in the target language, which clearly is a very important aim of language learning.

According to Deci and Ryan (1985) self-determination theory of human motivation, people experience intrinsic motivation if they feel that they can master the task that is given (i.e. competence), that they can have an impact on the task or find the task meaningful or relevant (i.e. autonomy), and that they feel they are part of a social group (i.e. relatedness). The students reported that they mastered the tasks assigned to them, and that they found practicing fluency outdoors to be relevant for their future language use and closer to the spoken English they would use outside of school. Also, they found the activities to strengthen social relations. According to the theory of achievement-goal (Nicholls, 1984, 1989) our findings show that these teenagers considered learning in a classroom setting to be performance-oriented. In the outdoor environment, on the other hand, where the focus was on producing spontaneous and everyday language, the learning was considered to have a more practical focus and was more mastery-oriented. These findings are also in accordance with Fiskum and Jacobsen (2015), who found that students felt more anonymous and confident (i.e. less measured) in an outdoor setting as opposed to in the classroom. In addition, because learning outdoors did not focus on correct use of the target language (Gregersen, 2003), failure did not matter and thus students felt more competent, accepted, and included. This can be interpreted in the light of studies of affordances (Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2012b, 2015; Kyttä, 2002, 2004) because an outdoor environment represents new and different affordances (Gibson, 1986) from the classroom.

Another factor that influenced the participants' willingness to communicate was that the activities involved some physical activity, i.e. they were not sitting at their desks as they reported to do in the classroom, which in turn helped them learn more easily. One teenager expressed that it was 'okay to be physically active while learning … much easier to learn … ' (Int. 1). Another one said: 'I think the activities were fun because there was more physical activity … we were running back and forth also' (Int. 5). And a third said: 'You do not learn as much in the classroom. I feel I learn more when I am outdoors engaging in activities and such' (Int. 4). Students also appreciated being out in the fresh air and that they could more easily socialise with other students: 'We normally sit at our desks all day, so it feels good to be outdoors' (Int. 6), and 'It is nicer to be outdoors … it feels more social outdoors than sitting at individual desks in the classroom' (Int. 1).

### *Feeling confident*

The analysis of the interview material indicates that the students felt more confident practicing speech fluency in an outdoor context than they did in a classroom setting. The reasons for this seem to be linked to the students feeling less observed or measured in the outdoor environment compared to in the classroom (Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2015) and that the outdoor activities encouraged the students to focus on fluency and not on avoiding making language mistakes (Gregersen, 2003). The fact that language errors did not matter seemed to have a positive impact on how comfortable and confident they felt when interacting in the target language. In interview 2, a student explained: 'It was a bit better because not everyone listened to exactly what you said … only the one you were talking to'. Another student remarked: 'Nobody really paid attention, and then it became easier to speak English. We weren't so afraid to say something the wrong way'.

The interview material indicated that a classroom seems to have certain expectations in terms of norms or rules. For example, that the students speak one at the time while the teacher and the other students are listening, which makes them feel that they need to perform well in front of their

audience. As one teenager said: 'It is worse in the classroom when you are the only one talking … everyone will sit there and listen to you' (Int. 2). Additionally, the classroom is an arena in which the students are used to being assessed based on their performances. The interviews show that this also applies to spoken English and hence many experience FLA when having to speak out loud in the L2 classroom. 'If you talk in front of the whole class, you are a bit more afraid of making mistakes' (Int. 1), one student reported, and another said, 'Because often during the English sessions I do not dare to say much because I don't know which words to use' (Int. 2). Further statements in this regard included 'I feel we have a good classroom environment, but it is always a bit scary in case you make mistakes' (Int. 3) and 'I am just afraid of making mistakes and then I become more stressed and make more mistakes' (Int. 4). This is in accordance with Gregersen (2003) who found that anxious learners made more errors than non-anxious learners. Moreover, the anxious learners did not seem to recognise the importance of making mistakes as a natural part of the learning process, and they seemed to lack 'error tolerance' (p. 26). FLA thus becomes a vicious circle: students making errors become more anxious and then they make more errors.

The teenagers clearly felt more confident speaking English outdoors because the focus was on fluent speech production and not on correctness: 'If we are outdoors mistakes are not that noticeable, and maybe we are in groups and then there are not so many people listening to you' (Int. 5). Other participants also reported different experiences outdoors from those of the classroom: 'When we stood in the circle everybody talked … and then we did not listen to the others' (Int. 2), "Less focus on mistakes … " (Int. 2), 'In addition it wasn't as scary to make mistakes' (Int. 2), 'You do not feel that they are listening to you when you are standing in the circle because they are talking too' (Int. 2), and 'We did not think about speaking correctly outdoors' (Int. 1). New affordances also include different ways of thinking for the students, so while in a classroom setting they might easily compare themselves with others, their focus in the outdoor environment was on mastering the tasks that were given (Nicholls, 1984, 1989). In the classroom, they reported a theoretical focus with emphasis on accuracy, which in turn resulted in FLA.

Students reported that they appreciated practicing English speech fluency in smaller groups because this meant that they were less observed by other classmates and thus they felt more comfortable and confident: 'It is easier to speak two and two' and 'When you are in groups of two it is maybe that you dare to speak a bit more freely' (Int. 1). Long and Porter (1985) showed that L2 learning in small groups in an informal setting led to increased student motivation and less FLA.

Increased confidence was also identified due to strengthened social relations: 'You may feel more confident together with others that you don't know that well …, get to talk more with them … ' (Int. 1). This was also expressed by another student: 'We got to speak a little with everybody when we were standing in that circle, and we got to listen to the others too, it is not like everybody is sitting listening to you,' and 'It is important that it is a group where you know the others well' (Int. 5).

### *Real-life language use*

The second subtheme identified was real-life language use. In the interview material, a focus on fluent speech production was seen as very positive, and the students reported that they enjoyed the focus on spontaneous speech outdoors. A reason for this was that practicing English fluency was identified as being relevant for the participants in terms of future language use:

> When we are talking outdoors I feel it is more the kind of language we use every day kind of … if you are in the classroom you feel you have to say something that is in the book or something like that … if you are outdoors you can choose to speak a bit more freely (Int. 5).

Other students gave the following statements: 'Learning outdoors wasn't as artificial in a way' (Int. 2) and 'When we are speaking outdoors, it is more natural English. When we are indoors it is more reading from the book' (Int. 6). By using the words 'every day', 'not artificial', and 'natural', the teenagers indicated that the use of language outdoors was closer to the spoken English they see

themselves using outside of school, in real life, when they go on holiday abroad, play online games, etc. This was also expressed more explicitly by some students: 'I feel I learn more English if we work on everyday topics, what we are going to do such as spare time activities' (Int. 1) and 'I use English when I am playing online where I might meet someone from another country' (Int. 5). This is also supported by other comments such as: 'When we say something during the sessions it is more answering questions and the like, now it was more everyday language … which we can use in everyday life'.

Classroom learning was reported to be very textbook-based and to focus mostly on accuracy and reading and writing. The time spent on practicing spoken English was reported to be very limited, often just answering the teacher's questions: 'When we are sitting in the classroom there is a lot about vocabulary and grammar and stuff so there is not much time to practice speaking English, but we get that with these activities' (Int. 1), and 'Outdoors I used some Norwegian words if I did not remember the correct English word. … instead of just sitting in a classroom looking in the book' (Int. 1). Another student explained:

> And when we sit and write and things like that during English sessions we do not get to speak much English except for when the teachers speak to us when we put up our hand, and then we get to … yes., we get to use more English words and expressions when we talk with one another about things we are going to do and have done, so it is useful to use English more. (Int. 1)

Moreover, it was found to be positive that they could use spontaneous speech: 'When we say something, you do not read from the book, you do not know what to say, you just say it in a way' (Int. 1) and " … could use our own words … you could speak as you liked (Int. 6).

Real-life language use was reported to strengthen the feeling of meaningfulness for the students, which in turn was important for feelings of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Developing English fluency in an outdoor context was experienced by many students as supporting their intrinsic motivation because the language activities stressed both competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Overall, the students claimed that they had mastered the tasks assigned to them, that they experienced that they had a certain influence on how the activities were carried out and found the activities meaningful, and that learning in an outdoor environment had a positive effect on social relations with other students (Hartmeyer & Mygind, 2016). The latter was because they could more easily interact with the others outdoors than in the classroom where social interaction was said to be more limited. Hence, learning spoken fluency in an outdoor context can be said to increase students' intrinsic motivation, which might also be an effect of the mastery-oriented focus they experienced in the outdoor environment. This is in accordance with achievement-goal theory (Nicholls, 1984, 1989) and studies that have found outdoor education to be more stimulating and motivating than classroom learning (e.g. Fägerstam, 2014; Fägerstam & Grothérus, 2018; Nundy, 2001; Rickinson et al., 2004).

### *Interesting ways of learning*

Interesting ways of learning was identified as the third subtheme across the empirical material. In terms of competence, it was reported that the students found it easier to speak English outdoors, e.g. int. 1, 2, 3, and 5. Furthermore, the students reported that the outdoor language activities were experienced as joyful and interesting: 'When you feel it is enjoyable and interesting then you are more motivated to say something' (Int. 1). Another student felt that speaking was both more joyful and beneficial than writing: 'It is a bit more fun to speak really than just write and stuff … you learn more' (Int. 1). Yet another commented: 'It is more fun to be outdoors because in a classroom you just look at the teacher and want the session to end as soon as possible really' (Int. 4). The teenagers also experienced autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985) due to the language activities being quite open. The activities were only described by the instructor, or the students were only informed about the topic, not how to speak about it. One student reported: 'I think it was okay that we could choose ourselves,

so we did not speak about the same things' (Int. 3). Others said: "I think it was good that we were able to speak a bit freely (Int. 5) and 'We got to decide for ourselves what to say' (Int. 1) and 'We only got the topic, and we were not told how to speak about it' (Int. 1). Another participant said: 'I think it is better when the task is more open because then there is no key, but our own opinions . . . ' (Int. 2). The teenagers experienced relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as they reported having interacted more with their fellow students than they usually do in a classroom setting where they mostly sit next to the same person:

> I feel that everybody becomes more . . . what should I say . . . that everybody speaks a bit more together . . . so that you don't just sit next to one person . . . so that the whole class can speak together (Int. 5).

This was appreciated by many students as they reported: 'When we were standing in the circle we could be together with peers that we usually don't talk to' (Int. 2), ' . . . get to know the others in the class, indoors we sit together with the same person', and ' . . . here you get to be with more people . . . ' (Int. 6). Enjoyment was also expressed in statements like: 'I think it was more enjoyable' (Int. 6) and 'It is much better being outdoors because then it is more fun what we are doing . . . it is different . . . not the same as sitting in the classroom all the time' (Int. 4).

Overall, ways of learning were reported to be different outdoors compared to in the classroom. The outdoor language activities were found to be joyful and kinaesthetic and encouraged the teenagers to use their creativity and their senses. This might be due to increased intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Our findings are also supported by other studies of learning in outdoor environments, e.g. Harris (2017), who investigated practitioners' reflections on the use of forest schools. In contrast, learning in the classroom was reported by the students to be more monotonous, book-based, and static.

## Methodological reflections

One strength of this study is that many students were interviewed. However, they all belonged to one class at the same school (i.e. one school culture), which is a weakness because students at other schools might have had different experiences. Even though they were asked only one specific question about FLA, many students brought this up as a discussion topic in the interviews. This indicated that many had previous experience with anxiety in the L2 learning process. In addition, the students were not asked about how they experienced being physically active during some of the activities, but this was brought up by several as being positive for their learning.

Further studies should include more participants as well as an outdoor intervention to measure the effects of outdoor education in terms of language activity and willingness to communicate. Individual recordings of L2 speech (pre and post) should be carried out in addition to observations and recordings of language activity during the intervention period.

## Conclusion and pedagogical implications

The interview material showed that students experienced developing English fluency in an outdoor context as positive in several respects. Overall, the students reported increased willingness to communicate due to increased confidence, real-life language use and interesting ways of learning. Because willingness to communicate is important for the development of fluency, these are interesting findings and suggest that an outdoor environment supports the development of fluent spoken L2 production.

The outdoor environment offers different ways of learning compared to the indoor classroom. An outdoor setting opens for autonomy, and the participants can make their own choices to a greater extent, which in turn contributes to a feeling of mastery. Because of this, the students experienced intrinsic motivation when engaging in the outdoor language activities. Overall, the results of this study indicate that developing L2 fluency in an outdoor context is seen as an asset because it offers

different and varied affordances compared to spoken language learning in an indoor classroom, and therefore the students showed less FLA and greater willingness to communicate in the target language. Both are important factors in the development of L2 fluency.

This study indicates that teachers should aim to link their classroom practices on fluency to teaching outdoors and should consider an outdoor context as a complement to the indoor classroom.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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