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**DEVELOPING STUDENTS' SPEAKING
SKILLS IN ONLINE EFL CLASSES:
A Study of Estonian Secondary School Teachers'
Views**

MA thesis

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Abstract

Teaching speaking skills has been an essential part of foreign language education. However, the Covid 19 pandemic forced teachers to replace classroom teaching with online teaching. Thus, this thesis explores how four Estonian secondary school teachers coped with the new situation: how they taught speaking skills online, what tools they used, and their views and experiences.

This thesis consists of an introduction, chapter 1, chapter 2 and conclusion. The introduction provides the background to the study by focusing on speaking skills according to Common European Framework of Reference, teaching speaking skills in general and gives an overview of teaching with ICT or online in Estonia. Chapter 1 is a literature review on teaching speaking skills in general and how to do it online, with which platforms and other online resources. Chapter 2 focuses on the purpose of the study, its methodology, the four teachers' views and analysis. The summary of the findings can be found in the conclusion.

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Introduction

Speaking has traditionally been one of the four skills (together with listening, reading and writing) the development of which has been considered one of the aims of second or foreign language education. Indeed, the Estonian National Curricula for Basic Schools (hereafter NCBS) and Upper Secondary Schools (hereafter NCUSS) regard the development of students' communicative competence as the main aim of foreign language teaching and formulate the learning outcomes according to the "the four constituent skills of language proficiency – listening, reading, speaking and writing" (Ministry of Education and Research 2014a: 2).

Speaking as a language skill can be defined in different ways. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001, hereafter CEFR) differentiates between spoken production and spoken interaction. Spoken production involves productive activities such as giving presentations or giving a speech. Therefore, spoken production is a sustained monologue, whether to describe an experience, put a case in a debate, or give information. Spoken interaction, on the other hand, involves at least two people engaging in an oral communication exchange. Spoken interaction involves understanding the interlocutor in a conversation, informal or formal discussion, information exchange, interviewing or being interviewed, or using telecommunications, and responding appropriately. The CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020, hereafter CV), however, replaces the terms 'spoken production' and 'spoken interaction' with the terms 'oral production' and 'oral interaction' in order to make the descriptors 'modality inclusive' (Council of Europe 2020: 22), that is, to make

them applicable to sign language as well. Therefore, in the present thesis, the terms speaking skills and oral skills are used interchangeably.

Teaching speaking skills might be the most challenging area to teach. A study by Chen (2011) carried out among 331 English as a foreign language (hereafter EFL) teachers in 44 universities in China established several difficulties in teaching oral skills. The teacher-based difficulties include developing students' motivation, low self-efficacy, planning and implementing oral activities, and balancing students' needs. The student-based difficulties include inactive participation and low English proficiency. The general difficulties include a lack of conducive environments, limited teaching resources, having to teach large classes, and insufficient teaching time. Brown (as cited in Álvarez, 2020) agrees with these conclusions and adds some more difficulties: as students may not be exposed to reduced forms that are part of a fluent speech, slang, and idioms, their speaking might be very formal-sounding in every situation, and "bookish". In addition, stress, rhythm, and intonation are all difficult concepts for many English learners to grasp. Spoken interaction takes place with at least one other speaker resulting in a number of concurrent demands: monitoring and understanding conversational partner(s), their own contribution, producing the answer, monitoring its effect, and so on. Because they are not used to spontaneous communication, English learners might become frightened or frustrated while utilizing their second or foreign language in genuine conversational circumstances.

One method to improve or bring more variety into teaching in a physical classroom is to use information and communications technology (hereafter ICT). It could include online textbooks, videos, educational programs, and an online learning

environment. Teachers who find their teaching more efficient are more likely to have their students use ICT frequently for learning activities and are confident in their ability to support learning with new technologies. In addition, according to Cook (2001), the greater the degree of collaboration between teachers and other teachers, the more likely it is that teachers will allow students to use ICT.

According to a study conducted by Timmi (2017), English teachers in secondary schools in Estonia were more motivated, proactive, and supportive when they used ICT, while implementing ICT had little impact on learning outcomes. The teachers pointed out that there may be more push toward using them because it is "new and interesting". However, they agreed that implementing ICT would be "time-consuming". The study was carried out when teachers could choose to use (or not to use) ICT in class, but the situation changed when the COVID-19 pandemic started in March 2020.

According to the data covered by the OECD survey (2020a) on the general preparedness to switch over to remote learning due to the pandemic, over 50 percent of Estonian lower-secondary teachers said they are pretty confident in guiding their students through the process of learning to use digital tools. Over 80 percent were sure that their colleagues were open to the change and needed innovation brought about by the pandemic. However, fewer than 20 percent confirmed participating in monthly collaborative professional learning. Teachers also reported spending a little more than an hour on communication and cooperation with parents and guardians of their students. Another OECD survey (2020b) that focused on making the most of technology for learning and training found that among 16–65-year-old Estonians, 9 per cent lack basic computer skills and 27 per cent have a well-rounded skill set. Among 15-year-old students, access and use of computers available in schools are over 90 per cent due to

the widespread access to the internet. Over 80 per cent of socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged students have access to the Internet and electronic devices only at school. Around 90 per cent are in the rural areas, and 80 per cent are in the cities.

The current thesis attempts to gain some insights into how the mandatory online teaching instituted in March 2020 affected EFL teachers' work in Estonia, particularly the way they teach speaking skills. Before, teachers chose to implement ICT into their teaching methods for teaching speaking skills, but in March of 2020 moving their teaching online was necessary rather than a choice. Lockdown was used in many countries worldwide, including Estonia, to contain the spread of COVID-19. Teachers and students, now prohibited from meeting face-to-face in the classroom, had to adapt quickly, which meant turning to and experimenting with different online resources. While online teaching is not new in teaching foreign languages, it and the extensive use of ICT were rare in Estonian secondary schools before the pandemic (Timmi, 2017).

This research paper explores the methodology, online resources (platforms like Zoom) and tools (like videos) used for improving students' English speaking skills and attitudes towards them by the English teachers during the rushed online teaching situation. It focuses on the experience and reflection of four Estonian secondary school EFL teachers in Tallinn and Harjumaa during the mandatory online teaching period, from March 2020 until the end of the school year in June 2020. For this, a structured interview was conducted with the teachers.

The thesis consists of four parts: introduction, chapter 1, chapter 2, and conclusion. Chapter 1 focuses on the theoretical framework of teaching speaking skills

in both offline and online classrooms, different aspects of teaching speaking skills, different activities, online platforms, digital tools, and problems that might arise. Chapter 2 focuses on the research. First, it gives the purpose of the study, then the methods and overview of the participants, then the results of the interview that was conducted with the four Estonian secondary school EFL teachers, and the discussion of the findings. The final part of the thesis is a conclusion. After that, there is the list of references and Appendix 1 with the interview questions in English, and Appendix 2 with the interview questions in Estonian.

Chapter 1: Teaching Speaking Skills in physical and online classrooms

This chapter focuses on what previous research has revealed about teaching speaking skills in physical and online classrooms and what teaching handbooks recommend in the above situations. Section 1.1 deals with the aspects typically focused on when teaching speaking skills: communication, interaction, fluency, input, spoken grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. In addition to those, it also discusses general speaking activities that focus on more than one aspect. Section 1.2 discusses teaching speaking skills in the online classroom and the virtual resources that make it possible.

1.1 Aspects typically Focused on when Teaching Speaking Skills

This section focuses on the aspects of teaching speaking skills (primarily in offline classrooms) discussed in the handbooks on teaching foreign languages by such authors as Ur (1996), Harmer (1998), Hedge (2000), Hughes (2002), Cook (2001) and Celce-Murcia (2014).

Eight aspects are discussed: interaction, fluency, input, spoken grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, activities that use global language, and correcting. The last topic is correcting students' mistakes, perhaps the most controversial aspect.

Interaction

Another aspect of speaking skills is interacting. Cook (2001:155-160) and Celce-Murcia (2014:106) focus extensively on its technicality. Ur (1996:129) also categorises it into different subunits.

An essential aspect of naturally occurring spontaneous speech is that the interlocutors focus on the ideas/emotions/information being conveyed rather than the mechanism of their interaction. Therefore, according to Cook (2001), speaking is not essentially driven by language but rather by the parties involved. Natural speech includes different characteristics, such as hesitation and pauses, stress, rhythm, colloquial language, intonation, slang, and idioms. Spontaneous, interactive speech is prone to hesitation, false initiation, grammatical inaccuracies, vocabulary restrictions, repetition, and revolves around short units of thought or quasi-sentences based on breathing and restrictions while processing spoken language. Celce-Murcia (2014) adds that the interaction involves monitoring and understanding the opposite side, minding themselves, producing their contribution seeing its effect on the opposite side. The exchange goes both ways.

There are three different ways in which interaction takes place in the classroom according to Ur (1996): interactional talk, taking long turns, and varied situations, feelings and relationships. She describes interactional talk as a way of “learning conventional formulae of courtesy” (Ur 1996:129) - students learn to interact with others, greet, converse, apologise, and thank someone. Taking long turns involves a monologue, and is mainly used by adults or academic students, therefore might not be that important

for other classes. Some tasks that apply it are telling stories, and jokes, describing a person or a photo in detail, recounting the plot of a film or a book, and giving a short talk. Varied situations, feelings, and relationships can be practised while doing a role-play, as students get the feel of being in a real-life situation where they might find themselves later in life.

Fluency

One other aspect of speaking is oral fluency. Byrne (1986, as cited in Hughes, 2002) says that to communicate with verbal fluency means expressing oneself intelligibly and not hesitating too long so that the listener gets impatient or loses interest, and the conversation dies down. Edge and Carton (2009, as cited in Celce-Murcia, 2014:107) define fluency as “operating the (language) system quickly”. It is discussed by Hedge (2000:54), Ur (1996:120-122), Hughes (2002:78) and Celce-Murcia (2014:107, 121-135).

Florez (1999, as cited in Hughes, 2002:78) states that, to be a good speaker, one should be able to anticipate and then produce the expected patterns in the specific discourse situation. One should also manage turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback, redirecting when necessary, creating the sounds, stress patterns and intonations, rhythmic structures, selecting appropriate vocabulary, using body language, and paying attention to the conversation's success. To practise it all, Ur (1996) suggests using group work and debate.

Input

One of the first aspects discussed concerning teaching speaking skills is the input the students receive. Cook (2001) defines input as an essential component for learning a foreign language. It comes down to how exact the language students hear is and the working environment they and their teacher have created for their language learning. It is discussed by Cook (2001:161-164), Celce-Murcia (2014: 108-110), Harmer (1998:52-55) and Hedge (2000:10, 54). While Cook (2001) and Celce-Murcia (2014) focus more on the authenticity of the input, Harmer (1998), in general, discusses the exposure to the foreign language students should receive, which others also touch upon. Hedge (2000) adds that input should be comprehensible and meaningful.

In most cases, Harmer (1998) and Cook (2001) argue, students learn a language to use later in real-life situations. Therefore, the more authentic the spoken language the students are exposed to the better they can adapt to situations outside the classroom. Celce-Murcia et al. (2014) add that, to later successfully navigate an English-speaking environment, students also need to know formality, politeness, directness, and how to communicate nonverbally. As successful communication depends on the socio-cultural context or pragmatics of the English-speaking world, it is not enough for students to only be accurate or fluent in English. Here, the authentic texts come to the rescue.

Both Cook (2001) and Celce-Murcia (2014) agree that the more authentic the text presented to the learner is the more valuable it is. However, for a text to be helpful, it must be understandable to the student, so the teacher must evaluate its quality and validity. Celce-Murcia (2014) adds that there is only so much the teacher can do to

provide authentic texts that they deem suitable for their students given the students' levels, context, and other factors. Unfortunately, not many pedagogical textbooks contain texts that are considered very authentic.

In addition to being authentic, the input should be comprehensible for the students. Hedge (2000) claims that meaningful input inspires students to tackle language at a slightly higher level than they are currently at. For input to be significant, it has to be essential or topical to the learners, and it needs to be authentic. It also implies that the teachers should adjust their speaking so that it is suitable for students.

Spoken grammar

An aspect that may not rise very often when talking about speaking skills is the grammar of the spoken language. It is discussed by Harmer (1998:49), Hedge (2000:271-272) and Celce-Murcia (2014:108-110). Hedge (2000) also discusses how teachers should actively include it in teaching.

Spoken grammar that is used in speaking is different from written grammar. Harmer (1998) points out two characteristics of speech: incomplete sentences and repetition. Celce-Murcia (2014) specifically draws attention to how spoken grammar uses elliptical forms, such as *Want a bite?* instead of *Would you like a bite?* or an *ad* for an *advertisement*. In addition to speech consisting of incomplete sentences, as Harmer (1998) states, she specifies that natural speech does not consist of sentences but of phrasal chains that contain a cluster of words connected by simple conjunctions *and* or *but*. The other feature mentioned by Harmer (1998) - repetition - can be seen, for example, in a typical response to an exclamation *It is cold!* - *Cold? Yeah, cold! Cold! So cold!*.

Another way that spoken grammar is different from written grammar is the paralinguistic features we can use. According to Harmer (1998), they are the non-linguistic ways that affect speech, like tone to emphasise, the ability to speak faster or slower, louder or softer. In addition, in face-to-face situations, the people involved can also use facial expressions and body language. While speaking, it is also easier to fix mistakes or clarify one's meaning than in writing.

Spoken grammar varies due to the relationship between the speakers that determines the level of politeness that should be used. Hedge (2000) points out, for example, that there is a difference between asking *I will borrow your phone, yeah?* and *I am sorry, but would you mind if I used your phone for a bit?* Students must understand the difference. It can be taught directly or indirectly by letting students develop it themselves during different tasks and ways of communicating through role-plays or problem-solving tasks. Other indirect ways, as she suggests, would be for the teacher to open up the conversation. The teachers can do it by showing ways of asking for repetition or for someone to speak slower, how to ask clarifying questions, methods of checking if everyone understood, and ways of getting information or how to keep the conversation going by using simple phrases or utterances like *yes* or *uh uh*.

Pronunciation

Another important aspect of teaching English speaking skills is pronunciation, which Cook (2001) states is one of the two necessary elements of a language when it comes to speaking; the other is vocabulary, which is discussed later. According to many teachers, Hedge (2000) adds, pronunciation is one of the most challenging areas for

students. It is up to the teachers to decide when to focus on this aspect and which of its elements to focus on. Pronunciation is a topic touched upon by Cook (2001:67-85), Celce-Murcia (2014:136-153), Ur (1996:47-59), Harmer (1998:50-51) and Hedge (2000:285-287).

Pronunciation consists of different elements. Celce-Murcia (2014), Harmer (1998) and Ur (1996) identify three, apart from speed and volume: sounds, stress, and pitch and intonation. Words are made of different phonemes, and there is no one-to-one rule or correspondence in how written letters and spoken sounds sound. Stress, or emphasis placed on the words in sentences, can be expressed by raising the volume or changing the pitch. Pitch is the level at which the speaker is speaking. It varies depending on the speaker's mood - when the speaker is excited, it is higher, but when the speaker is annoyed, it is lower. Intonation can be referred to as “the music of speech” and is connected to the pitch. Hedge (2000) also mentions stress and rhythm as the main features of spoken language. Both can be a specific focus in accuracy-based speaking activities to show the importance of intonation and its effect in conversations.

Learning pronunciation may not be the easiest for students. Hedge (2000) argues that, as it is a problematic area where it is easy to fail at first attempts, the students may feel awkward or embarrassed. Therefore, the teacher needs to create an environment where the students feel comfortable making mistakes.

There are different ways of teaching pronunciation. Cook (2001) points out that some methods of teaching pronunciation include communication and imitation. Imitation can either be repeating what a teacher or someone in the video or on a tape said. Celce-Murcia (2014) and Ur (1996) suggest the same and add recordings such as different videos, systematic explanations and instructions on which part of the mouth the sound is

produced. Other activities include repetition of drills, learning by heart, tongue twisters and students' self-correcting by listening to the recordings they had previously made. However, the most crucial activity is practising. Celce-Murcia (2014) suggests that computer-assisted instruction is relatively positive as it is primarily self-directed. She adds learning rhythm, songs with a catchy tune, explicit lyrics, and multiple occurrences as excellent ways to teach pronunciation to students. Another way would be playing games, as they are both fun and have a sense of competitiveness.

Vocabulary

Another important aspect of teaching speaking skills is teaching vocabulary. It is discussed by Cook (2001:46-65), Ur (1996:60-74) and Hedge (2000:109-138). Cook (2001) deems it one of the two necessary elements of spoken language, the other being pronunciation. Ur (1996) roughly defines vocabulary as the lexical items teachers teach students in a foreign language. The vocabulary item learnt may not be a single item, as it can be a phrase or an idiom that consists of more than one word but has a single meaning or an idea. Therefore, the term “vocabulary item” might be more precise than “a word”.

There are different aspects when it comes to teaching vocabulary. Ur (1996) and Hedge (2000) point out that for the student to learn a vocabulary item successfully, they must know the following: its form, grammar, collocation, aspects of meaning, and word formation. Under the form, it is meant that students must learn to pronounce and spell the word or a phrase. If the vocabulary item does not follow the general grammatical concepts, it needs to be taught separately. Under collocation, it is meant that teachers should show different or typical combinations that are made with the item at hand. Its

denotation, connotation, appropriateness, and relationship with other vocabulary items could be discussed regarding meaning. Furthermore, for word formation, if it goes with any prefixes or suffixes or combines with another word to make one item should be discussed. It is similar to how dictionaries add information to the vocabulary items.

There are many ways to teach vocabulary. Cook (2001) suggests different strategies for effectively teaching vocabulary by learning the meaning of words, repeating them, and linking new learning to existing knowledge. Making connections with prior knowledge helps students remember what they have learned with the correct pronunciation. The teachers can effectively do this in both online and physical classroom situations. Ur (1996) agrees that if the items can be linked to each other or previous knowledge, it is easier for students to learn them. Activities she suggests for teaching vocabulary effectively include sharing ideas, brainstorming by making word trees around the new word or a phrase, and identifying the words the students already know. She does, however, point out that it is better to teach vocabulary in different sessions rather than all at once, as it gives students more time and opportunities to learn those specific vocabulary items.

Ur also (1996) suggests the following activities to develop speaking skills: describing a picture, comparing pictures, things in common, making a shopping list, or solving a problem.

Conducting speaking activities

Speaking tasks benefit students by helping them develop their communication skills. Harmer (1998) suggests three main reasons why speaking tasks benefit the

students: rehearsal, getting feedback, and engagement. Ur (1996) agrees with that but adds even participation and appropriate language level. For example, roleplaying as a shop clerk and a customer gives students a chance to rehearse real-life situations where they need to communicate. It is for the students to get the feel or the gist of what might be ahead of them, to practice in the safety of the classroom. Teachers get an idea of how their class is doing, what areas need improvement, and so do students. Speaking activities can boost students' confidence and the satisfaction that someone understands them in a foreign language. Moreover, when the teacher sets up the speaking task well, and the students are all engaged in it and get proper, gentle feedback, this could be a satisfying experience for both the students and the teacher. Also, students can gain even more confidence from it if it is a speaking task or a topic they enjoy, be it a role-play or a discussion. Unless the teacher starts to dominate, it is all right for the teacher to join the speaking task. The students might appreciate it as well. However, it is better for the teacher to observe the students, as then they get a better overview of their students' skills and see how the activity is going and whether or not they should intervene. Sometimes, the intervention would take place as prompting to advance the discussion further or role-play, but the teacher should do this sympathetically and sensitively. While students get to talk a lot, as much as possible within the time frame of the activity is the main aim. Unfortunately, it might still be the teacher speaking most of the time. In addition, ideally, everyone gets to share their part, and the most talkative or outgoing students do not dominate the activity. All students are enthusiastic and *want* to talk on the topic and express their ideas, at least try to. Lastly, the language is at an acceptable level for the students, not too hard or too easy, and they understand each other.

There can also be problematic instances that might occur during speaking activities. According to Ur (1996) and Nouruziani and Eslami (2013), there can be inhibition. Students can feel that they have nothing to say, have low or uneven participation, and use their mother tongue. Sipra (2013) even adds using smartphones casually that is not relevant to the task at hand to this list as speaking tasks involve an audience. Since classes usually have many students, they might feel intimidated, be afraid of any mistakes they might make, and feel shy as some students may not like the attention that falls on them or feel like they have nothing to say. The students might feel guilty as they cannot think of anything to say while they should be speaking. Low or uneven participation as a group of more talkative students dominate the activity does not allow the rest, perhaps more introverted or shy students, to give their input. Lastly, they use their mother tongue, as it is easier and feels more natural to the students.

One of the ways to let students practise and develop their speaking skills is through group work. In some cases, according to Norouziyan and Eslami (2013), it might bring down anxiety levels and create a more relaxed environment for the learners. However, while it does that, it might cause some problems for the teacher, for example, learners using their native language instead of the target language. Therefore partially losing control over the learners during group work might result in crucial time loss. It is also mentioned that during group work, teachers are unable to monitor them, errors students make might go unnoticed, and they are unable to give students all the necessary feedback on their communication. Celce-Murcia (2014) adds that it is also vital for the teacher to decide whether their students possess essential interaction skills. They should do some preparation exercises beforehand, such as focusing on the vocabulary. Another issue is that not all students are as talkative or skilled in social skills as their peers. One

way to fix that would be to make smaller groups, but that depends on the size of the class and the teacher's ability to oversee them. Students also need to know the purpose of the activity, the length they can do it, and end with a follow-up activity that helps them understand the outcome of the activity.

One way to practise coherent monologue, Celce-Murcia (2014) recommends that students do presentations, whether in a group or alone. It is a relatively frequent activity the teachers give students. Topics vary depending on the level of the students and the purpose of the task. There is a certain leeway with presentations. Teachers usually only give specific structures - the rhetorical genre and time restrictions, and the rest is up to the students. They select the topic, present it to the rest of the class, and answer questions their peers have. While it can be frightening for some students or get boring for the other students, giving their peers a task during the presentation is better. So their peers could provide them with feedback, which could benefit both the presenter and the other students. A presentation could also be done as a video, which allows for a more in-depth critique later. Videotaping also helps the students see how they are perceived and their pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary abilities.

Correcting

Another important aspect of teaching speaking skills in English is correcting students' mistakes. Hedge (2000:393-395) and Harmer (1998:94) give their approaches to this topic.

For example, it is easy to point out the students' mistakes and help them fix them. Cook (2001) points out that if a teacher does correct a student's pronunciation to

pronounce the message correctly, the student may be able to correct the mistake and learn the correct pronunciation of the word, or the student may be confused and hesitate to repeat something. In some cases, it is still necessary to correct the mistakes. Hedge (2000) agrees and adds to it by saying that, especially with the correction of pronunciation, it should be done as much in a positive way as the teacher finds possible.

In the case of a fluency-oriented activity, the issue is different. Harmer (1998) argues that the same approach to correcting pronunciation as in an accuracy-oriented exercise would not be appropriate in an exercise involving natural speech as in a passionate discussion over any engaging topic. Therefore the correction by the teacher could have the opposite effect and disrupt the flow. The constant interruption of that kind, pointing out students' mistakes, could also "destroy the purpose of the speaking activity" (Harmer 1998:94) and bring down engagement. One way to effectively help students correct their errors during this kind of activity would be to ask the students themselves after the activity to point out anything they noticed and correct that mistake.

The issue of the right way to correct students stays under debate. Harmer (1998) states that while there are no definite guidelines or rules as to what kind of ways of correcting would be the best to use, there is this general principle of observing and noting down for the teacher themselves during the activity and then giving feedback later. It is important not to single out a student for criticism in front of their peers. Harmer also suggests that correcting should be done sympathetically and sensitively when students make mistakes. Teachers need to notice and draw students' attention to their mistakes.

1.2 Teaching speaking skills in the online classroom

Before the pandemic began in March 2020, teachers had a choice of whether or not to implement ICT in their teaching. After the Estonian government announced distance learning, it became a necessity rather than a choice, as it was then prohibited to meet in an offline classroom. Therefore, as soon as the teachers deemed themselves more or less ready, they moved their teaching online, and distance learning began.

This section focuses on teaching speaking skills in an online environment. First, it explores different platforms on which it is possible, then some other digital resources that facilitate or support teaching and learning speaking skills, and then some issues that might arise.

Online Platforms

For a class to successfully take place in an online environment, it needs to take place on a platform that meets all the needs of the teacher and the students. Some of the most widely used and researched platforms are Skype, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

One of the digital platforms that teachers can use for face-to-face meetings is Skype. Taillefer and MunozLuna (2013) suggest that Skype effectively mimics face-to-face communication and has a chat feature to chat and send files and images. Still, unfortunately, this tool does not offer anything more. Therefore, teachers have to find alternatives to provide more to their students. A study conducted by Palpanadan et al.

(2021) among 100 Malaysian undergraduate students revealed that using Skype boosted their motivation to speak English better and fluently while also helping them develop their speaking skills. In addition to what Taillefer and MunozLuna (2013) see as the advantages of skype, Palpanadan (2021) mentions that it is easy to learn how to use it, and it is fun. Also, the way everyone's online presence is situated gives the feel of an offline classroom. The drawbacks they found included not connecting as smoothly (as it did with Google Meet), the necessity of installing the software first, and their device's battery draining fast.

Another digital platform that the teachers also used is Google Meet. Google Meet allows meetings, structure, postings, and saving lectures, as is suitable for the academic framework. Souheyla (2022) asked twenty Arab EFL teachers about their experiences with this platform. The positive aspects mentioned were as follows: they could use different online learning materials flexibly, they could access various online resources with ease, it developed the teacher's and learner's autonomy, overall satisfaction, efficiency in managing a remote class, proficiency in conducting online classes, and comfort. The aspects the teachers did not like about Google Meet included overloaded content, lack of attentiveness from the students, lack of human interaction, lack of discipline, lack of socialisation, and even plagiarism. Chiablaem (2021) conducted research among EFL learners and found that they thought Google Meet helped improve their English speaking skills.

In addition to the aforementioned, Yen (2021) discusses a platform named Microsoft Teams (hereafter MS Teams) and how it was received at a university in Vietnam. MS Teams is a platform that offers online channels, chat options, file storage, video calls and screen sharing. Students really liked the chatting option, the possibility of

doing games, group presentations, the option to rewatch lectures if they had missed them. The challenges for teachers included technical difficulties, lots of effort (they have to be livelier for the lesson to remain interesting and they have to prepare for each lesson thoroughly), and students' attendance (checking their attendance and managing them in the online environment).

A digital platform that is considered to be the most popular and even essential among teachers to help students learn from their homes is a video-conferencing tool Zoom. Wong (2020) lists it as a great digital platform for creating a digital classroom by providing face-to-face live video learning environments. Ramadani et al. (2020) researched using Zoom among EFL high school students and teachers in Kumanova. They found that this platform that joins an online classroom environment with a convenient chat room was rather exciting and valuable for the students and easy to use. The teachers found it convenient that they could schedule meetings in Zoom and that they did not have to change their lesson plans thanks to Zoom's features. Instead, they could just add illustrative material to "make the lesson more attractive". Four teachers said it was an excellent platform for conducting discussions, presentations, slide sharing, video sharing, or just chatting. Three teachers also noted that students were more encouraged to ask questions during the Zoom lessons and motivated to participate in the lesson activities. It also offers breakout rooms to do group work effectively. Some drawbacks they brought out were that the lessons could only be 20 minutes, which the teachers did not think was enough time to cover topics. Nuryanto (2021) reached the same conclusion after conducting a study among 60 EFL Vocational High School students and added that while it helps with speaking, it does not remove the pressure.

Online resources for teaching speaking skills

When the online platform has been chosen, but teachers still want to bring in a variety of activities, they can turn to additional digital resources to further accommodate their students' journey of learning speaking skills in online English lessons.

As many students prefer spending time on their smartphones, it is clever to use them in the classroom, be it in an online classroom or an offline one. Sipra (2013) recommends utilising smartphones' microphones and cameras to do project-based video tasks. They can either be done alone or as a group and cover various topics. The students can do them in different ways. It also gives otherwise camera-shy students a chance to complete the task and speak while they are not necessarily seen in the video, reducing their anxiety.

One form of an online resource that is readily available and teachers might turn to is videos. Azmi (2017) suggests that web technology and especially Internet video connections are used in classes for non-language communication. Additional blogs, podcasts, and digital videos are used to motivate students further. In that case, it might positively force them to share their ideas and comments on the content provided in the video, positively influencing and developing their speaking skills in the process.

Another digital resource that the teachers can use is video blogs. One-semester elective course done by Göktürk (2016) among ten Turkish EFL learners proved that using video blogs effectively improved their speaking skills. While most of the course happened in a physical classroom, 30 per cent were video blogs. They did six voice blogs

and presentations. The differences between the first three and last three blogs were noticeable in fluency, vocabulary, using fewer filler words, and confidence.

Another multifunctional online resource is YouTube. In addition to being a platform to upload and watch videos, Meinawati et al (2020) conducted research to see the effects of teaching present continuous tense to 10th-grade students. They first chose a song and the first activity was a gap-filling exercise where students had to listen to the lyrics of the song and find the verbs. Then they orally discussed the tense of the verbs, then the students did pair work to practice. The teacher found it helpful as students were a little more talkative and more at ease, despite still making mistakes. However, some issues that were countered include students getting distracted by popular YouTube videos and offering their own titles to watch instead; unskippable advertisements also distracted the students; students needed extra time to practise since the method was new to them; and lack of stable Internet connection, which hindered the learning process.

Problems that might arise in an online classroom

Teaching in an online video-conferencing platform lets the teacher and students see face-to-face. Norouzian and Eslami (2013) note that synchronised computer-based communication simultaneously facilitates face-to-face communication as it resembles an offline classroom environment while also transcending the learning process across the four barriers of the classroom. It promotes communication and, in addition, reduces the interaction imbalance that generally tends towards outgoing and more capable students, giving everyone an equal opportunity. It minimises the psychological, linguistic, and

cultural barriers to classroom interactions, creating a less threatening and less stressful environment, especially for linguistically unstable and shy learners. The online environment is learner-centric, and learners can see each other's faces. Seen in real-time, this leads to more honest communication. It does not necessarily increase the success rate of language ability, but it can change the pattern of class interaction.

However, learners might still feel hesitant to talk with the teacher and participate minimally unless specifically called upon in the online classroom setting. Norouzian and Eslami (2013) claim that the students' previous negative experiences, anxiety about making mistakes in front of their peers and teacher, pressure to respond quickly without having the time to construct the message ultimately, or low participation in someone else take over. These are some of the barriers to successful learning. It makes teachers struggle to make their classes enjoyable and spark enthusiasm in the students while creating an environment where they feel comfortable enough to talk without the fear of making mistakes, just as they would in the offline classroom.

Communication between the students and teachers is also different in an online environment. Ngoc et al's (2021) study of the perceptions of online learning in MS Teams carried out among 212 EFL Vietnamese Van Lang University students shows that the students feel a lack of interaction between themselves and the teacher. Ramadani (2020) also adds that in relation to the lack of interaction in online teaching, the teacher's body language and voice become more meaningful than in the physical classroom. The more animated the teacher is, the more motivated the students are to learn.

Another type of problem would be technical difficulties. Ramadani (2020) points out that, to successfully conduct a class in Zoom, both the teacher and the students need a stable Internet connection; otherwise, there could be sound or video disruptions that

would hinder the flow of the lesson. Ngoc (2021) adds the poor technical skills of the students themselves to the Internet disruptions as a problem. It varies from not being able to fully use the online resources the teachers have chosen to forgetting passwords, and it does disrupt the flow of the class.

This chapter provided an overview of different aspects of teaching speaking skills, different activities to use both online and offline, the issues the teachers might face, and different online platforms and resources that in general the teachers found useful. The next chapter will focus on the interview conducted with four Estonian secondary school teachers in January 2021.

Chapter 2: Estonian EFL teachers' views on teaching speaking skills offline and online

Chapter 2 focuses on a small-scale study that looked into the experiences of the four secondary-level EFL teachers while teaching speaking skills in the mandatory online setting during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the study, the methods used and the teachers' answers will be discussed here.

Part 2.1 gives an insight into the purpose of the study and research questions. Part 2.2 discusses the methods used, the design, procedure and subjects of the study. Part 2.3 focuses on their answers concerning their experience and views on teaching speaking skills before and during online learning situations. Part 2.4 is a discussion on how the teachers' answers correlated with those in Chapter 1.

2.1 The purpose of the study and research questions

The purpose of the study was to find out how teachers coped with mandatory online setting when teaching speaking skills. Thus, the main research questions were:

1. How had the teachers previously taught speaking skills?
2. What was their teaching during the mandatory online teaching period like?
3. How satisfied were the teachers with the online platforms and digital tools they used?

2.2 Methods: design, procedure and subjects

In order to answer the research questions, a questionnaire was designed in English (see Appendix 1). It consists of 18 questions, six of them dealing with the teachers' background and 12 are specifically about teaching speaking skills online and offline. The questions were based on a similar study conducted among EFL high school teachers in Kumanova using Zoom in their classes done by Ramadani and Xhaferi (2020). Their questions asked about teachers' experiences with using Zoom, the difficulties they faced, how they evaluated and assessed the students, and if Zoom increased students' motivation. These questions were made more general, the assessment and evaluation were removed, and background questions were added. The interview questions used both terms speaking and oral skills as they were not differentiated.

The structured interview questions were divided into two sections: the teacher's teaching background (Q1 - Q6) and their experience teaching speaking skills, particularly in an online setting (Q7 - Q18). The first part focused on the teachers' background. Questions 1-3 were about the teacher's background concerning how long they had been teaching and what grades they were teaching when the interview was conducted. Questions 4-6 were about getting a better understanding of their background concerning teaching speaking skills before the mandatory online setting, how much they focused on these skills and whether they already used any digital tools to develop students' speaking skills.

In the main part of the interview, there were questions concerning the current mandatory online teaching situation. Questions 7-8 were about how much and if, then what they had to change about their teaching style when the compulsory online teaching

began. Question 9 was about how much the teachers estimated they spent teaching speaking skills in the new online setting. Question 10 asked if the teachers had done any work they previously thought to do in writing orally instead. Question 11 was about whether or not the students themselves offered any ways to help develop their speaking skills. Questions 12-15 focused on the digital tools the teachers had used, which ones they liked and which ones they did not like and whether they had let students use any digital tools outside of class. Questions 16-17 were about how the students' attention and attentiveness differed between written and spoken tasks and whether turned on or off camera affected it. The last one, number 18, wondered if the teachers felt more creative when approaching speaking skills than in pre-pandemic time.

The study subjects were recruited among the teachers teaching in Tallinn and Harju county. These schools and teachers were chosen because, should they have wanted to meet face to face, it would have been easier for the interviewer. Forty teachers were contacted through their school-assigned emails with a request of having an interview with them. Only four responded positively, three from Tallinn and one from Harju county.

The teachers who were willing to participate were reached again, and then it was agreed which online platform (Skype or Zoom) they would prefer for the interview. Two of the four teachers wanted the interview on Skype, and two chose Zoom. Two also requested the interview in Estonian because they felt more comfortable expressing their thoughts in Estonian. The interview was conducted in Estonian with them (see Appendix 2 for the interview questions in Estonian), and the answers were later translated into English. The interviews were conducted in March and October, 2021. The duration of the interviews varied from 20 minutes (Interview 4) to 35 minutes (Interview 3). Table 1 provides more detailed information about the four teachers interviewed.

Table 1. Background information for the teachers.

	Gender	Years of experience	Grades taught	Training in digital tools	Interview language	Length of the interview
T1	F	4.5	2, 4, 6, 10	none	English	25 min
T2	F	1.5	5-8, 10	none	Estonian	32 min
T3	F	8	6, 10	none	English	35 min
T4	F	14	4-6, 10	Harno courses	Estonian	20 min

All four teachers were women and taught in 12-year schools that included both primary and secondary classes. While all the other teachers taught full-time and were local, T3 was from a foreign country, had training as an interpreter with some semesters' worth of courses of actual teaching, and was also a student at a university during the time of the interview. The teachers' teaching experience and familiarity with digital tools also varied. T1 had been teaching for four and a half years, T2 for one and a half years, T3 for eight years and T4 for fourteen years.

The teachers were all teaching the 10th grade, but their primary experience was in primary and lower-secondary classes. They also all taught grade 6 in addition to the 10th grade; the other grades varied: T1 was teaching grades 2, 4, 6, and 10; T2 was teaching grades 5-8 and 10; T3 was teaching grades 6 and 10; T4 was teaching grades 4-6 and 10.

Regarding their teacher training and digital tools, especially those focused on teaching speaking skills, three of the teachers said they had not had any training after starting their work as a teacher; only T4 said she had continuous training in those digital tools because she had taken courses offered by Harno (the Republic of Estonia Education and Youth Board). T1 and T3 said they had previous experience using Skype and Zoom to connect with students, but it was with fewer students and not as a mandatory full-time

setting with everyone in the class. Teachers 1, 2 and 3 also expressed their desire to have had more training before the mandatory distance learning instead of the trial and error process that they went through, but they managed and are now more experienced.

2.3 Results: the four teachers' experiences and views

In general, three of the four teachers (except T2) said that mandatory online teaching was a significant change. T4's school even had regular distance learning days before the pandemic. T1, T2 and T4 said that despite regularly using online tools prior to it, it was still a significant change having to use them full time and not getting to meet in a physical offline classroom. T3 said that the most significant change for her was getting used to being stuck at home all the time. It meant getting used to the fact that her home was now her workplace and a place to rest and unwind was hard to stay disciplined. It also made her more understanding of the students' situation, and in turn, she was more lenient with them. T2 said it was not hard to switch to the online teaching environment because she had only taught at that school for three months before the mandatory distance learning.

The significant change meant that they had to change their teaching methods as well. The teachers had to adapt their ways and figure out how to do everything online. T1 said she used to show videos to the students to teach vocabulary and pronunciation, and they had to repeat the words and phrases they heard. It was harder to do online because of numerous reasons: video would malfunction, the students could not hear the actor and the teacher had to say the words herself; they either would not hear each other or, when the

microphones were all on, it would be a “cluster of noises”. T2 said that online lessons better suited some of the material for the online environment. Her most significant difficulties were the potential technical difficulties and fewer actual lessons where they would meet than they would have had otherwise. For T3, the mental strain on both her and her students was what she took to heart. She was, therefore, more lenient on her students. In addition, as everything is “2D” during online lessons, she had to become more animated than in the physical classroom, where she could walk around, see the students’ body language, anticipate their thoughts, and do games that would encourage moving around. T4 felt demotivated in the beginning when her lessons were in Google Meet due to the seeming impossibility of doing pair and group work, which were an essential part of her teachings. After some time, she tried giving her speaking assignments in Google Docs or Google Forms, and the students had to do it either as pair or group work, record their answers and upload them to either Google Meet, Vocaroo or Padlet. She later discovered Zoom and its breakout rooms, and it became easier.

As far as speaking skills are concerned, three teachers (T1, T2 and T4) said teaching speaking skills was a relatively small part of their teaching and T3 said that she tried to dedicate all the video lessons to developing speaking skills. All four mentioned talking and discussing in online classrooms, be it with everyone or in Zoom breakout rooms. T4 also added quizzes, Kahoot, and Jeopardy. They all used videos and audio recordings, both premade to promote discussions or help the students learn the vocabulary or let students make their own as an assignment. T1 pointed out that she did not focus on pronunciation; however, she corrected the students all the time. T1 and T3 encouraged their students to use dictionaries to find a word they did not know or could not pronounce correctly and then discuss it with the rest of the class. T1 also said she used to have

speaking cards printed out and used them actively in her offline classroom when students came up to her desk, chose one, read it aloud, and discussed it together. The students were fond of this activity. It was harder to do online as students would see all the cards and lose interest. However, she did try to implement them in online classrooms one way or another. T2 said she let students do a project with the theme given. The students were free to do whatever they wanted, a story, a drawing, a theatre show, or a model, and then they had to make a video and present what they had done. She also let them record their presentations, expressively reciting a poem, and end of the period conclusions (which could either be written or recorded). It did not matter whether the student was visible. All four did not feel more creative after the mandatory distance learning, but T2 did say she could now think of more variations of the tasks and assignments.

When it comes to doing tests orally and group work, the teachers had different approaches. T3 said that she knowingly let students do more speaking tasks of presenting or discussing a given topic and then answering additional questions to fix a bad mark and get extra credit. T4 said she would not do tests orally because there are too many students to go through all of them and give proper feedback. Three teachers (except T2) said they gladly used the Zoom breakout rooms for group work. T2 gave the students a group project to watch a video and then recorded their roleplay interview on the topic with a classmate.

In response to the question about e-platforms, it turned out that all the teachers used Zoom as their main e-teaching platform. T1 and T3 also occasionally used Skype. Still, T1 reported that she does not like using Skype due to its limitations, mainly because it is impossible to divide students into groups separate from the main call. T4 also used

GoogleMeet, but when she discovered Zoom and its breakout rooms, she used both, depending on the lesson plan. However, she did point out that now that she was more experienced, she could be comfortable doing pair and group work in both. T1, T3 and T4 used Zoom breakout rooms, and T1 and T4 emphasised the necessity of monitoring students there to ensure they were doing the assignment and using English instead of Estonian. T1 also used karaoke to help with students' pronunciation, such as singing Christmas Tree with them during Christmas time. The students loved it. T1 and T3 used videos to spark a discussion. T1 said that she was surprised to find that her students liked Peppa Pig videos more than Harry Potter ones, but she thought it was more due to the choice of video. T2 revealed that with uploading the audio and video assignments, she prefers students upload them as unlisted on YouTube because if they did it in Google Drive, the students often forget to share rights to view the content. It got so frequent that she said that if they did not also share rights and she could not get access to the assignment, she, unfortunately, had no choice but to mark the work as undone.

Table 2. E-platforms and digital tools the teachers used.

	E-platforms used	Other digital tools used	Problems encountered	Preferences
T1	Skype, Zoom	Videos, karaoke	Skype's limitations	Zoom with its breakout rooms, videos, karaoke
T2	Zoom	Audio and video files	Technical difficulties, students not sharing Google Drive permissions	Homework uploaded as unlisted YouTube videos, creative projects, presentations
T3	Skype, Zoom	Worksheets (ISL Collective), YouTube videos, Bamboozle	Worksheets too plain and had to be changed	Zoom (chat and video options, breakout rooms)
T4	Google Meet, Zoom	Kahoot, quizzes, Jeopardy, Vocaroo, Padlet, videos	Mostly technical: security of Padlet, some pages have automatic correcting that cannot be trusted	Pair and group work,

When comparing the students' work in oral and written tasks, the teachers pointed out that it was hard for students to focus on oral and written tasks in general. T1 and T3 said that they tried to leave writing assignments as homework. T3 and T4 discovered that hardships in focusing were even more evident when they were doing a task for a long time. T2 thought that it was because of their home environment, as everyone who was able to had to work from home. Therefore, the students could be distracted by their family or pets, especially if they could not be alone in their room during the lesson. T3 figured it was something “their generation was going through” due to the students' age. She thinks the students are better at one-on-one assignments rather than tasks requiring a monologue, like presentations, but they are working on that.

Despite the teachers' efforts to keep the students engaged in the lessons, it was still apparent at times that they had lost track of the class or were doing something else behind their screens. It directly relates to the teachers having a rule that the cameras had to stay on at all times. All teachers said they did not allow turning off cameras unless it was a technical difficulty. T1, T2 and T3 said that when the camera was off, it was harder to make sure that the students were focused and they, therefore, tried to make sure from time to time. T1, T2 and T4 said that sometimes it was evident that a student was not paying attention as they sometimes did not even turn on their microphone before asking around three times. T3 said that as she was a student working on her second Bachelor's Degree, she knew very well how tempting it was to do everything else, even clean the apartment when her camera was turned off. T1 said that she decided to look more homely so that even the shy students would feel more at ease in front of the camera.

2.4 Discussion: comparison of the four teachers' views with the results of previous studies

Overall, as much as the teacher's experience overlapped with what was discussed in Chapter 1, they were nearly the same. The teachers discussed some of the same general speaking activities as are listed in the methodology handbooks: chatting in the online classroom, discussions with T1's speaking cards, pair and group work, and making presentations, both pre-recorded and live. The closest to mentioning input was T1, who wondered if the students did not like the presented video due to the choice of the video. The teachers also thought it was good to develop pronunciation and vocabulary using videos, for example, T1 let students repeat the words. Regarding correcting the students' mistakes, at least T1 and T3 mentioned they did it actively but did not comment on the technicality of how they did it, other than referring them to the dictionaries at times.

The teachers' views of and experiences with the online platforms they used were nearly identical to those found in previous research discussed in Chapter 1. Online platforms the four teachers used were Skype, Zoom and Google Meet (T4). The Skype users (T1 and T3) pointed out the platform's limitations - not letting them do much except to have face-to-face meetings and use the chat options, which fortunately also allowed sending files - as did Taillefer and MunozLuna (2013). T4 started with Google Meet and was satisfied with it, like Souheyla (2022) and Chiablaem (2021). It also allows face-to-face meetings, but as she, at first, could not figure out how to successfully do pair and group work, she was not happy with it. After finding a way to do pair and group work by making separate call links, she was more satisfied. When their lesson plans needed more options, T1 and T3 turned to Zoom, as did T2 and T4, as suggested by Wong (2020)

and Ramadani (2020). They all liked the option of breakout rooms, as it was then easy to allocate students to do pair and group work alone without disturbing anyone else, which was in accordance with what Ramadani (2020) found. Ramadani (2020) also mentioned the option to share slides and videos, but the four Estonian teachers did not mention sharing slides, except for T3 who said students were able to do presentations live as well. T1 said she tried sharing videos through Zoom, but not very successfully, as the sound often did not transfer. While Yen (2021) recommended the MS Teams platform with its possibilities, none of the teachers interviewed for this thesis used it.

The most popular online resources for teaching speaking skills were videos. All the teachers used them to either spark a conversation or discussion with the students or let them make videos as home assignments. T1 and T3 mostly used videos to discuss them with the students, while T2 and T4 let them make their own, using their smartphones or web cameras, which was also suggested by Sipra (2013). While T1 specifically used YouTube to show videos to her students, as Meinawati (2020) also suggested, T2 would rather use it as a platform for students to upload their video homework because it is easier to access an unlisted YouTube video than it is to hope that all the students remember to give access to their homework stored in their Google Drive. The difficulties T1 encountered when using YouTube were not the same as what Meinawati (2021) discovered. T1's issues were with the students not being able to hear the video on the online platform they used rather than the students getting distracted by the endless videos YouTube has to offer, as Meinawati (2021) mentioned.

When asked about the difficulties they experienced, three teachers mentioned technical difficulties that might arise in an online classroom. T1 said that she "hates"

Skype due to its limitations. T2 mentioned them in general terms. For example, something could malfunction, and the connection from either side is not stable enough, the videos chosen might not work, the microphones or cameras do not work, or the platform itself decides to malfunction, as Ramadani (2020) found. T2 added that the students forgot to share permissions for their Google Drive homework, and the teacher could not access it. Difficulties, other than technical, involved students speaking in class. T1 and T3 said they were first afraid that the students would not talk in online classrooms. However, they talked even more than in their offline classrooms, suggesting more topics to discuss. T4 also brought out that as the spontaneous speech was more prone to occasional stumbling and mistakes, it should be focused on more.

This chapter focused on the research done on the experiences of four Estonian secondary school EFL teachers while teaching speaking skills both before and after the distance learning began. The online platform that met most of the teachers' needs was Zoom, and other digital tools they used included karaoke, Kahoot, quizzes, Jeopardy, audio and video. After starting distance learning, they had to become more aware of the technical difficulties that could arise, and T3 had to become more animated.

The Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to gain insight into how Estonian secondary school teachers taught speaking skills in an online learning environment during the mandatory distance learning from March 2020, and for that, a structured interview was conducted with four Estonian secondary schools' EFL teachers in Tallinn and Harju county. The questions were based on a study conducted by Ramadani and Xhaferi (2020) to research the EFL Kumanova high school teachers' experience with using Zoom in their classroom. This topic was chosen because teaching speaking skills is a challenge even when they can be taught in an offline, physical classroom, and before the mandatory distance learning, implementing ICT into their teaching methods was the teachers' own choice. However, this changed when the situation with COVID-19 reached the height of a pandemic and stricter measures had to be taken.

This thesis asked three research questions. The first question was how the teachers had previously taught speaking skills, the second question was what their teaching during the mandatory online period was like, and the third was how satisfied the teachers were with the online platforms and digital tools they used. In answer to the first question, it turned out that, despite mostly focusing on writing skills, the four teachers had used the facilities that the physical classroom can offer. They talked with the students, used discussions, and let them make presentations. The first teacher liked to use speaking cards with a discussion topic and play videos for her students, so they could listen and repeat the new vocabulary items and develop their pronunciation as well. The third teacher used worksheets from different online resources, changed them a little, and used them as topics

of discussion. She also let the students correct their bad marks with different speaking assignments.

The second question focused on the teachers' experience with online teaching. As mandatory distance learning started suddenly, it did not give teachers a lot of time to react. However, they had to adapt to the new situation and also adapt their teaching styles. While two teachers said that they were first afraid if the students were going to talk at all in the online classes, it turned out they were more prone to speak than in an offline classroom. First teacher said that she had to take into account that teaching vocabulary and pronunciation became harder, because the students could not hear each other and they might have not even heard the video through the online platform. The second teacher said that she was constantly aware of the possible technical difficulties, but as she was new in the school and new to the material used, it was all new for her anyway. She and the third teacher also brought out that they also had to adapt to there being fewer lessons and them being shorter than those in physical classrooms. Only the third teacher said that she tried to make all the online classes for speaking. The fourth teacher said that despite her school having distance learning days prior to the pandemic, it was still hard to switch to full-time online teaching, especially as she first could not find a way to use pair and group work, which were essential to her classes. Three teachers also said that they needed the students to keep their web cameras on at all times, and if it was not possible, they had to try and make sure that the students were still paying attention in class and not doing anything else, and it required an extra effort.

The third question explored the online platforms and digital tools the teachers had used and their opinions on them. Firstly, the online platform used by all the teachers was Zoom. They all really liked the breakout room option in addition to the face-to-face

meetings and the chat option. Two teachers also used Skype but found there to be too many limitations and preferred Zoom. The fourth teacher used Google Meet at first, and after finding Zoom's breakout room and the way to do pair and group work in Google Meet, used both platforms in her teaching. Secondly, the digital tools that the teachers used. All the teachers let the students make videos as an assignment. Two teachers also used videos, including YouTube videos, to either spark a discussion or, in the first teacher's case, teach new vocabulary and pronunciation. The second teacher liked the YouTube's feature of unlisted videos, as it is easier to access them as opposed to the students' uploading their homework in Google Drive and forgetting to give access to the teacher. Secondly, the tools used. In addition to the aforementioned videos, YouTube and different worksheets, the first teacher found karaoke popular with the students. It was fun and useful, again, when teaching vocabulary and pronunciation. The third teacher also used Bamboozle, the fourth teacher Kahoot, quizzes and Jeopardy to bring variety into their classrooms and help keep students motivated when learning English.

In conclusion, the most used platform that met all the needs that the teachers had was Zoom, as it involved a video call option, a chat box, breakout rooms, and the teachers could share slides and files. The digital tools they used were all different, and they were satisfied with them: audio and video files, YouTube, karaoke, worksheets for discussion topics, Kahoot, Jeopardy, quizzes. The first teacher also had speaking cards. Therefore, while the platforms were similar, there was a wide variety of digital tools used. Teacher two also said that she now can think of more variations of her assignments for the students. Teacher three said that she became more animated so the students would focus better. While this distance learning did not make them more creative, it did make them more experienced. There is always a possibility of technical difficulty.

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Appendix 1: Interview questions

Background

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. Did your teacher training involve digital tools used to develop speaking skills?
3. What grades are you teaching?
4. How did you develop students' speaking skills pre-online teaching?
5. How much did you focus on speaking skills?
6. Did you already use any digital tools before distance learning? Especially those that focus on developing oral skills.

Main

7. How big of a change was mandatory distance learning for you?
8. After starting the distance learning, how much would you say you had to change your teaching style? Especially about teaching oral skills.
9. How much did you focus on oral skills during the distance learning?
10. Did you do any oral tests or exams?
11. Did the students themselves offer any ways to develop their oral skills?
12. Which digital tools did you use to develop students' oral skills?
13. Which of the digital tools do you prefer and why?
14. Which did you not like and why?
15. If and which digital tools did you let students use outside of class?
16. How did the students' attentiveness differ regarding oral and written exercises?
17. How did the turned on or turned off camera influence the students' activeness?
18. Do you feel that, after starting distance learning, you are more creative when it comes to the creation of oral exercises?

Appendix 2: Intervjuu küsimustik

Taust

1. Kui kaua te olete õpetanud?
2. Kas teie õpetajakoolituses räägiti suuliste keeleoskuste arendamisest digivahenditega?
3. Mis klasse te õpetate? What grades are you teaching?
4. Kuidas te eelnevalt õpilaste suulist keeleoskust arendasite?
5. Kui suur osa keskendus suulisele keelearendusele?
6. Kas kasutasite juba enne distantsõppele minekut digivahendeid, mis keskendusid just suulisele arengule?

Põhiosa

1. Kui suur muudatus oli teie jaoks distantsõpetamisele üleminek?
2. Mida pidite oma senise õpetamisstiili suhtes distantsõpetamisele üle minnes muutma? Just suulist keeleoskust silmas pidades.
3. Kui suur osa distantsõppest keskendus suulise keeleoskuse arendamisele?
4. Kas tegite ka mõne töö suuliselt?
5. Kas õpilased pakkusid ka ise välja mingeid viise, kuidas nende suulist keeleoskust arendada?
6. Milliseid digivahendeid kasutasite suulise keeleoskuse arendamiseks?
7. Milliseid digivahendeid nimetatutest ise eelistate ja miks?
8. Milliseid digivahendeid teile ei meeldinud ja mis olid nende puudused?
9. Kas ja milliseid digivahendeid lasite õpilastel kasutada tunnivälisel ajal?
10. Mil määral erines õpilaste tähelepanu suuliste harjutuste puhul kirjalikest?
11. Mil määral mõjutas õpilaste aktiivsust suuliste ülesannete puhul sisselülitatud või sisselülitamata veebikaamera?
12. Kas tunnete, et olete pärast distantsõppele üleminekut loovam suuliste ülesannete väljamõtlemisel?

Resüme

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Eili Lusti

Developing Students' Speaking Skills in Online EFL classes: A Study of Estonian Secondary School Teachers' Views

Õpilaste rääkimisoskuse arendamine inglise keel võõrkeelena veebipõhistes tundides: Eesti keskkooliõpetajate arvamused

Magistritöö

2022

Lehekülgede arv: 50

Käesoleva magistritöö fookuseks on Eesti koolide inglise keele õpetajate kogemus distantsõppel õpilaste suulise keeleoskuse arendamine. Selleks viidi läbi intervjuu nelja Eesti õpetajaga, kolm neist Tallinnast ja üks Harjumaalt. Töö eesmärk oli leida, kuidas need õpetajad enne distantõppega alustamist õpilaste suulist keeleoskust arendasid, kuidas nad tegid seda distantõppe ajal ja milliseid veebiplatvorme ja muid IKT vahendeid nad tunnis kasutasid ning millised olid nende kogemused.

Magistritöö koosneb neljast osast: sissejuhatus, esimene peatükk, teine peatükk, kokkuvõte. Sissejuhatuses on ülevaade Eestis ning üldiselt suuliste oskuste õpetamisest, keskendudes Euroopa keeleõppe raamdokumendile ja Eesti riiklikule õppekavale. Esimene peatükk keskendub kirjandusülevaatele sellest, kuidas erinevaid suulise keeleoskuse aspekte arendada ja tegevusi läbi viia nii tavaklassis kui veebiplatvormil. Teine peatükk on läbiviidud intervjuust, eesmärkidest, meetodist, osalejatest, intervjuu tulemuste analüüsist ja arutelust. Lõpus on kokkuvõte.

Põhiline veebiplatvorm, mida need neli õpetajat kasutasid, oli Zoom. Kasutati ka Skype'i ja Google Meeti. Kõige rohkem oldi rahul Zoomi-poolsete võimalustega. IKT-vahenditest kasutati video ja audio faile, YouTube'i, karaoket, Kahooti, viktoriine, Jeopardyt. Esimesel õpetajal olid eraldi rääkimiskaardid erinevate vestlusteemadega. Kolmas õpetaja kasutas ka töölehti erinevatelt veebilehtedelt, kuid muutis neid ümber, et õpilastel oleks huvitavam. Kõige rohkem toodi välja tehnilisi probleeme, mille tõenäosusega õpetajad arvestama pidid. Oli ka olukordi, kui õpilastel oli veebikaamera välja lülitatud ja õpetaja pidi end mitu korda kordama, et õpilane mikrofoni sisse lülitaks ja vastaks. Kolmas õpetaja ütles, et pidi rohkem animeeritud ja ilmekas olema, et õpilaste tähelepanu tunnis hoida. Nad ei arva, et nad oleks peale distantõppe alustamist loovamad, küll aga kogenumad, ja teine õpetaja leidis, et oskab nüüd rohkem ülesandeid varieerida.

Märksõnad: inglise keele õpetamine, suulised oskused, IKT, veebiplatvormid, COVID-19 pandeemia

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