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English oral proficiency of EFL students at a Danish university

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Abstract: English oral proficiency is increasingly valued in education and the job market, yet it is still underrepresented in second language (L2) instruction and research. This study explores to what extent this paradox applies in a Danish educational context. Drawing on data from three English-related programs at Aalborg University – *English; Language and International Studies, English (LISE)*; and *International Business Communication in English (IBC),* the study investigates students' oral language use patterns (extent, contexts, interlocutors), the significance they attribute to oral proficiency, their perceived oral proficiency, and the relationship between the importance attributed to oral proficiency and the perceived oral proficiency, touching on academic, professional, and personal contexts.

The findings show that most students use English daily at university and beyond for listening and dialogue. However, language choice often depends on whether the interlocutor also speaks Danish. Moreover, students are more comfortable discussing everyday topics than academic and professional ones, and many wish to improve their proficiency in relation to the latter. Comfort levels often vary by interlocutor rather than by topic. Most respondents perceive oral and written proficiency as equally important, which likely reflects their academic background and, correspondingly, their career plans involving written English. Considering different components of oral proficiency, fluency and pronunciation are prioritized over grammar and vocabulary. Most respondents assess their proficiency of oral English as near-native or advanced, especially with respect to pronunciation, while assessing their fluency and vocabulary slightly lower. We found a tendency for a positive relationship between the importance attributed by respondents to certain components of oral proficiency and their own perceived proficiency in these components, especially in regard to grammar. This relationship may reflect that the importance of grammar is less salient than the importance of fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary. The findings of the study invite further research into for instance the influence of curricula, language anxiety and students' feeling of comfort in relation to topics.

Keywords: Oral proficiency, English as a foreign language at university, pronounciation, fluency, grammar, vocabulary

1. Introduction and research questions

English skills have become a necessity in the job market, including the ability to communicate in spoken English (Nomenglobal 2024). Likewise, most second language (L2) students and L2 teachers highlight being able to speak the language as the most salient aspect of communicative competence (Andersen 2009; Fernández 2009; Andersen & Blach 2010) and intuitively as the most important part of mastering a language (Ur 1996). The achievement of oral proficiency and mastery of authentic daily language are competences that are students' highest priorities in primary and secondary school/high school primarily, and they see these specific competences as the most important ones for language use in their everyday lives (e.g., Lund et al. 2023: 180-200). They find written language competences less important than oral proficiency, and to some degree they find exercises in written language less engaging and demotivating, perceiving written activities as ones that do not support their own learning goals (Lund et al. 2023: 178, 180, 198).

Despite its widely acknowledged importance, oral proficiency occupies what Fernández & Andersen (2019) describe as a "paradoxical position" in foreign language education. While both teachers and students consistently emphasize the value of speaking skills, instruction in this area remains notably underdeveloped. In many classrooms, writing tends to be prioritized, while (teaching) speaking receives limited, often incidental attention. At best, educators aim to create

opportunities for students to talk. However, systematic and explicit instruction in oral communication – whether dialogic or monologic – is rare. This is due, in part, to the implicit assumption that orality will develop naturally without targeted pedagogical intervention (e.g., Brown & Yule 1983; Bygate 1998; Roldán Tapia & Gómez Parra 2006; Sim & Pop 2016). It is moreover remarkable that oral language likewise has received less research attention than written language in foreign language learning: "Compared with studies on English writing and reading, studies on ES [English speaking] education are relatively very small in scale" (Wang et al. 2022: 2). In recent years, some studies, however, have begun exploring the role of English oral proficiency in Danish educational contexts and how it can be taught (e.g., Andersen et al. 2015; Eskildsen & Cadierno 2020; Krogager Andersen 2020; Holmen 2023). There is, however, still a knowledge gap when it comes to teaching and learning English oral proficiency at universities.

In the context of the global job market, the importance of English oral proficiency is increasingly recognized. Numerous studies highlight that strong spoken English skills are not only valued by employers but are often considered essential for career advancement in a wide range of industries (e.g., Cambridge English 2016; Lønsmann 2024). According to a 2023 OECD study, English, including spoken English, is one of the most in-demand skills in the European labour market. In Denmark, approximately 60% of international companies use English as their predominant corporate language (Lønsmann et al. 2024: 20), and many employees state that they use English on a daily basis (Lønsmann et al. 2024: 55-56). As English continues to serve as the lingua franca in business, science and technology (e.g., Lønsmann et al. 2024: 34-36, 112-113), the ability to communicate effectively in spoken English provides students with a competitive advantage and access to many employment opportunities.

In order to better understand the complex issues concerning oral proficiency in EFL, our study investigates how students of three Danish university programmes with English perceive English oral proficiency. The programmes are *English; Language and International Studies, English* (LISE); and *International Business Communication in English* (IBC). Our study is exploratory, aiming to map the perspectives of the students. More precisely, our aim is to explore how the students experience oral proficiency at university and in other life areas, such as the workplace and private life, and the significance they personally attribute to spoken English.
Thus, our research questions are:

1. *What characterizes university EFL students' English language use patterns (extent, topics, contexts, interlocutors)?*
2. *What significance do university EFL students attribute to oral proficiency in English?*
3. *How do university EFL students perceive their own oral proficiency in English?*
4. *What is the relationship between the significance university EFL students attribute to oral proficiency and their perceived oral proficiency?*

2. Conceptual and empirical background

In this section, we present the conceptual and empirical background of our study. First, we discuss the role of English in Danmark. Secondly, we discuss the complex concept of L2 oral proficiency. Thirdly, we discuss the concept of Willingness to Communicate, and finally, we consider English oral proficiency at Danish universities.

2.1. Danes' relationship with English: language use, opinions, and self-assessment

As early as 1973, Sørensen (1973: 15) claims that English has had an immense influence on the Danish language and in Danish society since WWII, with influential power related to both language and culture in many forms and areas; he mentions politics, business, sports, and technical fields among other areas, pointing to the influence of English in television, radio, newspapers, and

magazines. It is safe to say that the influence of English since then has grown exponentially with the advent of the internet and social media. Young people use (and learn) English in many other ways than being taught in school, e.g., through cultural products like television/streaming series and films and through gaming and social media. In such contexts, people use other registers of oral English than the ones that are taught in schools and universities, e.g., other levels of formality and types of vocabulary, and often mixed with Danish expressions (Lønsmann et al. 2024: 23).

These language use patterns indicate that English is no longer exclusively taught, learned, and used as a foreign language primarily for school-related contexts, but also functions as an everyday language (Lønsmann et al. 2024: 15-16). In some Danish contexts, English may serve as a means for communication, even if all interlocutors are speakers of Danish (Thøgersen & Preisler 2023: 10). Thøgersen & Preisler (2023: 10), therefore, argue that English is an indispensable second language in Denmark, indicating that it is not possible to fully function in the Danish society without a certain (at least) receptive competence in English. Thøgersen (2007) showed that Danes to a large degree have a "laissez faire-attitude" towards English, whereas Kristiansen (2006) found Danes to be English-critical, and Kristiansen & Vikør (2006) stated that Danes are English-positive.

Recently, Bianchetti (2020) contributed to the debate, discussing issues of possible "domain loss" of Danish in higher education, research, and business due to the dominance of Global English. Specifically, she posed the question whether Denmark could be considered a bilingual society. In a net-based survey involving 30 participants, Bianchetti examined the role of English in everyday life focusing on the use of English in several social practices. She concludes that although English is extensively used across various spheres of life, and the participants considered English an important language to master, the status of Danish as first language was perceived as unthreatened. At the same time, participants did not regard Denmark as a bilingual country (yet), which, however, may be due small sample size. The same tendencies regarding the role of English can be found in other Scandinavian countries, see, e.g., Bardel et al. (2023) for an overview of recent research on foreign language conducted in Sweden.

Two surveys on Danes' self-assessed English competences conducted in 1995-96 (Preisler 1999) and 2022 (Thøgersen & Preisler 2023) asked similar questions about skills, contact with English, and attitudes toward the language. Competences were measured through tasks of varying difficulty in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, rated on a 4-point scale. Contact was assessed by frequency and context (e.g., media, apps, social interaction), while attitudes included expectations for Danes' English skills and views on English as a cultural threat or enrichment. Results show that younger, educated, and employed people consistently report higher skills, more contact, and more positive attitudes. In 2022, all age groups scored higher than in 1995-96, and gaps between young and old respondents narrowed. Respondents under 25 averaged near level 4, while those over 66 improved from below level 2 to between levels 2 and 3. Competence differences between simple and difficult tasks were minimal, and contact with English increased markedly from 1995-96 to 2022, particularly among younger people. Listening and reading occur almost daily; speaking and writing nearly weekly. Older respondents report less frequent contact, especially in production. Interestingly, listening declined slightly, possibly due to English being perceived as ubiquitous in 2022, which makes listening to English less noticeable. Expectations for others' English skills remain high across age groups, with slight increases since 1995-96. To sum up, the 2022 study's overall conclusion is that especially young people have more skills in English, more contact with English and see English as a natural part of their lives (Thøgersen & Preisler 2023).

2.2. L2 oral proficiency: components and levels

Second language oral proficiency is a complex phenomenon with several components (De Jong et al. 2012). This componential view is reflected in two of the most commonly used frameworks for

the assessment of language skills. These frameworks are the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR 2020) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL 2024). These scales are in many ways comparable as both use level division and performance descriptors to indicate a person's "can do"-skills (Goethe Institut USA 2025). For this paper, we focus on CEFR, owing to the European context of the study.

CEFR (2020) divides language competences into reception, production, interaction, and mediation, indicating that these different activity types include specific sets of activities ("the what") and require different skills and competencies ("the how") and both oral and written dimensions (in some cases intertwined). The scale divides competences into six levels; basic user (A1, A2), independent user (B1, B2), and proficient user (C1, C2). Furthermore, communicative language competences are divided into linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competences. Linguistic competence consists of general linguistic range, vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary control, phonological control, and orthographic control (CEFR 2020: 130-136). Sociolinguistic competence is described as sociolinguistic appropriateness, including, e.g., linguistic markers of social relations, politeness conventions, register differences, and dialect (CEFR 2020: 136-137). Pragmatic competence concerns flexibility, turn-taking, thematic development, coherence and cohesion, propositional precision, and fluency (CEFR 2020: 137-142).

Adopting such a componential view, we apply Saito's (2017) conceptualization of L2 oral proficiency as composed of numerous linguistic skills spanning pronunciation (e.g., segmentals, prosody), fluency (e.g., breakdown, speed, hesitation), vocabulary (e.g., appropriateness, richness), and grammar (e.g., accuracy, complexity).

2.3. Willingness to Communicate

Unlike written production, oral production is characterized by immediacy, which poses special challenges for L2 speakers, who need to juggle lexical, grammatical, and pronunciation choices at a fast pace without recourse to dictionaries or other reference materials. The immediacy of oral production may impede willingness to communicate orally in the L2. The concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) was introduced by McCrosky & Baer (1985) in the context of first language communication and expanded to second language acquisition and communication by MacIntyre et al. (1998). The concept refers to an individual's ability and readiness to initiate communication in a given situation. According to the pyramid model by MacIntyre et al. (1998), several factors influence the WTC of a foreign language student, e.g., personality, motivation, perceived communicative competence, and social factors. This means that a combination of stable individual traits and situational variables determines a learner's willingness to speak in a foreign language. The theoretical framework of WTC provides a lens enabling us to interpret students' self-reported willingness to engage in English communication across different academic and social contexts.

While WTC has been extensively studied in the context of Asian EFL students (e.g., Peng (2012) on WTC in Chinese classrooms and Yashima (2002) on Japanese students), relatively little WTC research has focused on EFL university students in Scandinavia. Enhancing L2 confidence and WTC is often seen as an important goal for L2 teaching (MacIntyre et al. 1998), and developing WTC is a central task when it comes to strengthening students' oral communication competences, and WTC can be seen as an important predictor of communicative success. Studies have emphasized the importance of classroom climate, teacher support, and peer interaction (Yashima 2002; Peng 2012). Authentic use of the foreign language is another essential part of strengthening L2 confidence and WTC, and teachers encourage learners to use L2 inside and outside the classroom (Reinders 2016). Moreover, students consider interaction in language acquisition a key factor (Muho & Kurani 2014), and students with high WTC and L2 confidence improve their language proficiency, e.g., in terms of fluency (Derwing et al. 2008). This relates well to research (Sundqvist & Uztosun 2023) showing that extramural English activities such as listening to music,

watching TV, and reading, predicts perceived English oral proficiency among European and Asian upper secondary school students. See, e.g., Ducker (2021) for further literature on WTC.

2.4. English oral proficiency at Danish universities

Studies of teaching and learning English oral proficiency at universities specifically in a Danish or Nordic context are scarce, especially studies investigating students' perspectives. A number of studies from other countries focusing on various dimensions of oral proficiency can be found: e.g., Chen & Goh (2011), highlighting challenges of Chinese teachers, Betonio (2017), studying assessment of different student groups at a Philippine university, Cabezas & Beltran (2021), complementing the communicative approach to language teaching with a more grammar-based approach in Chile, Suliman & Salama (2023), highlighting effective techniques for improving oral skills among Sudanese students, and Phukan et al. (2022), focusing on English oral production among non-language students in Ukraine.

In a Danish context, The Danish National Centre for Foreign Languages (NCFF) conducted a study consisting of 59 group interviews with 160 language students (of whom 42 were EFL students) from five Danish universities on students' motivation for studying, their experience of studying, and their future work plans after graduation (Lund et al. 2025: 18). A remarkable finding is that EFL students experience both receptive and productive language competence as much less challenging than students of other foreign languages. EFL students seem to see their English competence as an "unmarked, almost natural" language competence that they "just have" and can use without problems (Lund et al. 2025: 61). It seems less important for them to learn more English, as they see their own language competences as sufficient. EFL students view academic content, not the English language, as a challenge.

English is spoken in class from the beginning (as opposed to the classes in German, French and Spanish studies, where Danish to a large degree is used by teachers and students in class). For EFL students, language training thus takes place in class through lectures and dialogue in English, which improves their oral (and written) proficiency. Students do not express a wish for explicit teaching of English language, and they experience being able to use English at the level required in class. According to the respondents in Lund et al.'s (2025: 62) study, focus in class is less on language, e.g., language correction, and more on academic content. This seems to indicate that grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary play a less dominant role than academic content in EFL study programmes, and to the extent that they do play a role, it is in the form of feedback on written assignments and academic writing, whereas students perceive their oral English as already good (enough) (Lund et al. 2025: 63).

Some students report experiencing improvement in their oral language competences because teaching in class is carried out in English and is almost exclusively dialogue-based (Lund et al. 2025: 64). They also strengthen their written language competences by receiving feedback from the instructor, and specifically, aspects like academic writing and phonetics are mentioned as basic skills a student must learn as a foundation for further studies (Lund et al. 2025: 62-63). Furthermore, they do not find studying abroad for a semester necessary to strengthen their language proficiency or their cultural understanding (as opposed to students of German, French, and Spanish) (Lund et al. 2025: 63).

The formal English level of EFL students at university is determined by the admission requirements of the study programme. English A-level (advanced level)[1] from Danish upper secondary school is a prerequisite for enrolment in an EFL university degree programme, and according to the Danish Ministry of Education and Research (UFM 2025a), students who have completed Danish upper secondary education with English as an A-level subject, are at CEFR level

[1] *A-level* is the official translation of Danish *A-niveau*, which is the advanced (highest possible) level for a subject. The lowest possible level is C-level, which is the basic level, and the intermediate level is termed *B-level* (UFM 2025b).

C1. This means that students enrolling in an EFL programme at university are defined as being at level C1.

A study on students' and teachers' self-assessment of English language proficiency in English-medium university education conducted at Copenhagen Business School (Jensen et al. 2011) reports that the majority of students (and certainly those from Denmark) enrolled in English-medium university degree programmes in Denmark rank their own English proficiency quite highly (in terms of global English skills as well as academic English skills). While respondents (N= 1794) hailed from various countries (Sweden, Germany, Norway, Iceland, Italy, France, China, among others), Danish students accounted for over 60% (Jensen et al. 2011). Danish students ranked their overall proficiency at 4.76 (on a 6-point scale with the overall average across all respondents being 4.73 for overall proficiency).

3. Methods

In term of methodology, we conducted a survey among students of three Danish university EFL programmes at Aalborg University: *Bachelor and Master in English* (see English Bachelor's Curriculum 2022; English Master's Curriculum 2022); *Bachelor in Language and International Studies, English* (LISE) (see LISE Bachelor's Curriculum 2022); and *Bachelor and Master in International Business Communication in English* (IBC) (see IBC Master's Curriculum 2023; IBC Bachelor's Curriculum 2024). In these programmes (all three), students specialize in English language, in combination with other subjects like international studies (LISE), literature and culture (English), or business communication (IBC). All students from all three programmes received an invitation to participate in the survey.

The survey was designed from a quantitative perspective and with qualitative data elicitation included only as a supplement. Hence, all multiple choice or scale questions in the survey were obligatory, while **qualitative responses were optional and were only included where** we **wished to gain further insight into some of the quantitative questions.**

The survey's first four questions concerned respondents' background (specific degree programme, native language, etc.). The next group of two questions concerned the students' daily use of oral English for various types of activities at university and outside university. Activities beyond university were included in line with Sundqvist & Uztosun's (2023: 1659) argument that extramural English activities are "a variable that cannot be overlooked in research". In the next two questions, the respondents were asked about their assessment of the importance of oral proficiency in general, and they were asked to rank four components of oral proficiency (following Saito 2017) according to their importance. The next six questions concerned the role of oral proficiency in their current and previous education, the results of which will not be addressed in this paper. Further, the respondents were asked, through eight questions, to assess their own oral proficiency, cf. CEFR. They were given four options: *beginner* (corresponding to A1 or A2 on the CEFR scale), *intermediate* (corresponding to B1), *advanced* (corresponding to B2), and *near-native* (corresponding to C1). We excluded *native* (corresponding to C2), because our respondents all learn English as a foreign language, and included *beginner* for completeness, despite its irrelevance for our respondents. Since any formal testing of the respondents' language proficiency was beyond the scope of this study, we opted for self-assessed proficiency. We thus follow Jensen et al. (2011: 42), who highlight that "[s]tudents' self-assessment of language proficiency has in a number of studies been shown to correlate positively with more objective measures". Jensen et al. (2011) cite Blanche (1988: 81), who finds correlation coefficients in the range 0.50-0.60 or higher, as well as Alderson (2005), who finds that cultural and linguistic background can impact the correlation between self-assessment and objective measures.

Our respondents were also asked to provide information about the types of topics they feel most comfortable talking about in English and those they would like to feel more comfortable talking about in English. Finally, they were asked who they regularly speak English to, who they feel most comfortable speaking to in English, and who they would like to feel more comfortable speaking to in English. These last elements of the survey are related to the respondents' WTC. For most questions, additional space for elaborating or explaining their answers in writing was provided.

Before the survey was distributed, a small informal pilot study was carried out, involving four pilot respondents from other study programmes (Software, Computer Science, Biotechnology, and German) at different levels of study (2nd, 6th, and 8th semester). The aim was to test the survey questions for comprehensibility and for a sufficient degree of comprehensiveness in relation to the intended themes. Based on the feedback from the pilot study, the questions were subsequently revised and adapted.

The survey among all students in the three programmes ran from May 27 to June 11, 2025. It was conducted in English and was distributed to students through the AAU learning platform *Moodle* and *Facebook* groups administered by the student counsellors of the relevant degree programmes. 83 students responded to our survey, but only 51 students completed it. Four of these had a native language different from Danish and were removed to ensure a more homogenous group. The results below are therefore based on 47 responses. Of these, 22 are students of English, 13 are students of LISE, and 12 are students of IBC. The 47 responses represent 31 BA students and 16 MA students.

We used the open-source software R (version 4.4.2) (R core team 2024) and RStudio (Posit team 2024) for data visualisation. In addition, we used the following packages: tidyverse (Wickham et al. 2019), ggplot2 (Wickham 2016), dplyr (Wickham et al. 2023a), tidyr (Wickham et al. 2024), Hmisc (Harrell 2025), and Scales (Wickham et al. 2023b).

4. Results

In this section, we report our findings, based on the quantitative data from our survey and with **selected qualitative responses included to elucidate quantitative patterns, where relevant.** The first group of questions in our survey were four background questions related to degree programme, semester, native language, and whether the respondents have lived in an English-speaking country. The purpose of these questions was to enable subdivision of the students into groups according to their programme and semester, which, however, is not used for this paper, and for screening out respondents with a native language other than Danish, as described in section 3.

4.1. Language use

After the background questions, a series of questions on various aspects of respondents' language use followed.

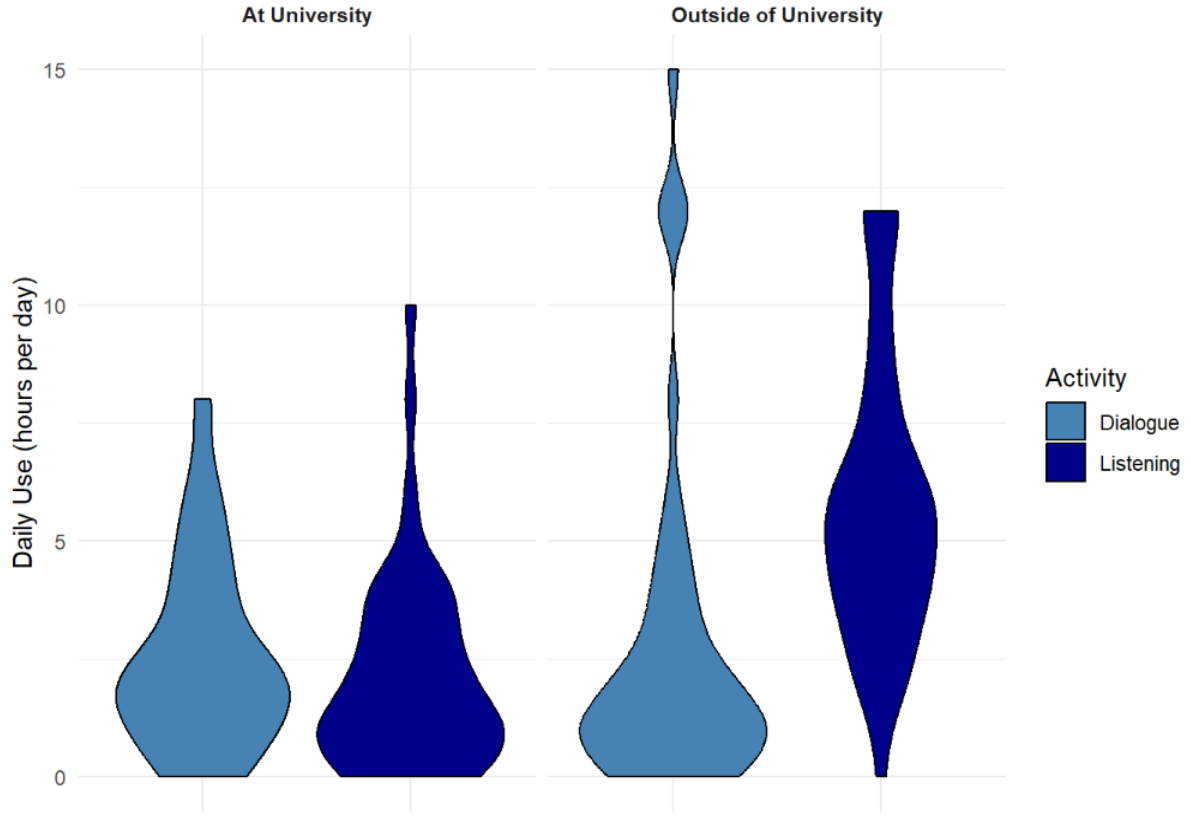
4.1.1. Daily use, activities, and contexts

The first group of two questions were related to the student's daily use of oral English at university and outside university, providing information about the amount of time used daily for different types of oral communication (dialogue and listening to different media), and the use at university in different contexts (specifically talking to a lecturer in class and outside of class, in supervision, and in group work).

Our respondents report using English daily at university for both dialogue (mean: 2.53 hours per day, standard deviation (SD): 2.03 hours per day) and listening (mean: 2.13 hours per day, SD: 2.12 hours per day) for roughly the same amount of time, whereas outside of university they report

spending considerably longer listening (mean: 5.76 hours per day, SD: 3.03 hours per day) than engaging in dialogue (mean: 2.77 hours per day, SD: 3.55 hours per day). Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of responses along the y-axis (hours per day) in a violin plot: the width of the violins at each y-axis value illustrates the number of respondents who report spending that number of hours per day. As illustrated in the figure, the variation is larger (the violins are taller and less curvy) for activities outside of university compared to activities at university, which is also reflected in the larger standard deviations for activities outside of university. This tendency is particularly pronounced for dialogue.

Figure 1. Daily use of English by location and activity



Almost all our respondents (95.7%) report that English is the primary language of communication when talking to a lecturer in class, while only 34% report that English is the primary language when talking to a lecturer outside of class. Whereas 72.3% report that English is the primary language in supervision, only 48.9% report that English is the primary language in group work. See Table 1 for an overview.

Table 1. English as the primary language of communication by context

Context	**Count**	**Percentage**
Group work	23	48.9
Talking to lecturer outside of class	16	34.0
Talking to lecturer in class	45	95.7
Supervision	34	72.3

Respondents give a range of reasonings behind their choice of either English or Danish in the different contexts (quotes are taken directly from students' responses and thus include typos and other idiosyncrasies):

(1) I wish it felt more natural to speak English with fellow students, but since we're both Danish speakers it feels forced and awkward.
(2) When a class is in English I like to keep in class communication in English too. But when conversing with other Danes we often default to speaking Danish.
(3) it's easier to use English when speaking about the study material rather than translating it to danish in my head.
(4) When discussing content from the major courses, English is naturally the language spoken. However, whenever we need some practical information, I can see that most students often ask the teachers for a quick chat in Danish. So, I think most of the interesting discussions about the subjects are conducted in English while practical issues to do with the program structure are held in Danish. At least, that's my impression.
(5) Most of my professors are not native danish speakers, so dialogue with them is in english.
(6) Because many of my professors are from outside of Denmark and do not speak Danish.
(7) Some lecturers primary language is english, though i do believe it is also to train our english more. it switches up, sometimes danish, sometimes english. i don't really mind which one it is. In group work i would say primarily danish unless if someone doesn't speak it then we accommodate to that.

Some respondents argue that they prefer to speak Danish with their fellow students if they are also Danish, as in (1) and (2). However, some respondents point out that they prefer conversing about academic topics in English, see (3) and (4). Finally, some respondents highlight that they have to use English as their lecturers or fellow students do not speak Danish, as in (5), (6) and (7). Overall, the respondents seem very positive towards using English in different activities related to their studies, one respondent even stating: "The only reason I don't speak English more is because I live in Denmark – in all honesty English is my preferred language".

4.1.2. Topics

Being given a wide range of options to choose from (allowing them to select a maximum of five), the respondents were also asked to provide information about which topics they felt most comfortable talking about in English and which topics they would like to feel more comfortable talking about in English. **We chose to limit the maximum number of topics in order to reduce the risk of respondents clicking "yes" to all options without reflection. This restriction forced respondents to make up their minds, while still making room for individual differences.**

More than 70% of our respondents report being comfortable talking about everyday practical topics (78.8%), lifestyle (72.3%), personal experiences & well-being (87.2%), and popular culture (83%), and less than 10% report wishing to be more comfortable talking about these topics. For business and academic topics, however, the proportion of respondents reporting that they wish to be more comfortable talking about these topics is larger (business: 46.8%, academic: 66%) than the proportion reporting that they are already comfortable talking about these topics (business: 8.5%, academic: 44.7%). For politics & current affairs, the proportion of respondents reporting that they wish to be more comfortable talking about this topic (23%) and the proportion reporting that they are already comfortable talking about this topic (26%) are almost of equal size. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of responses in a bar plot.

Figure 2. Topics that respondents feel comfortable talking about in English and wish to feel more comfortable talking about in English

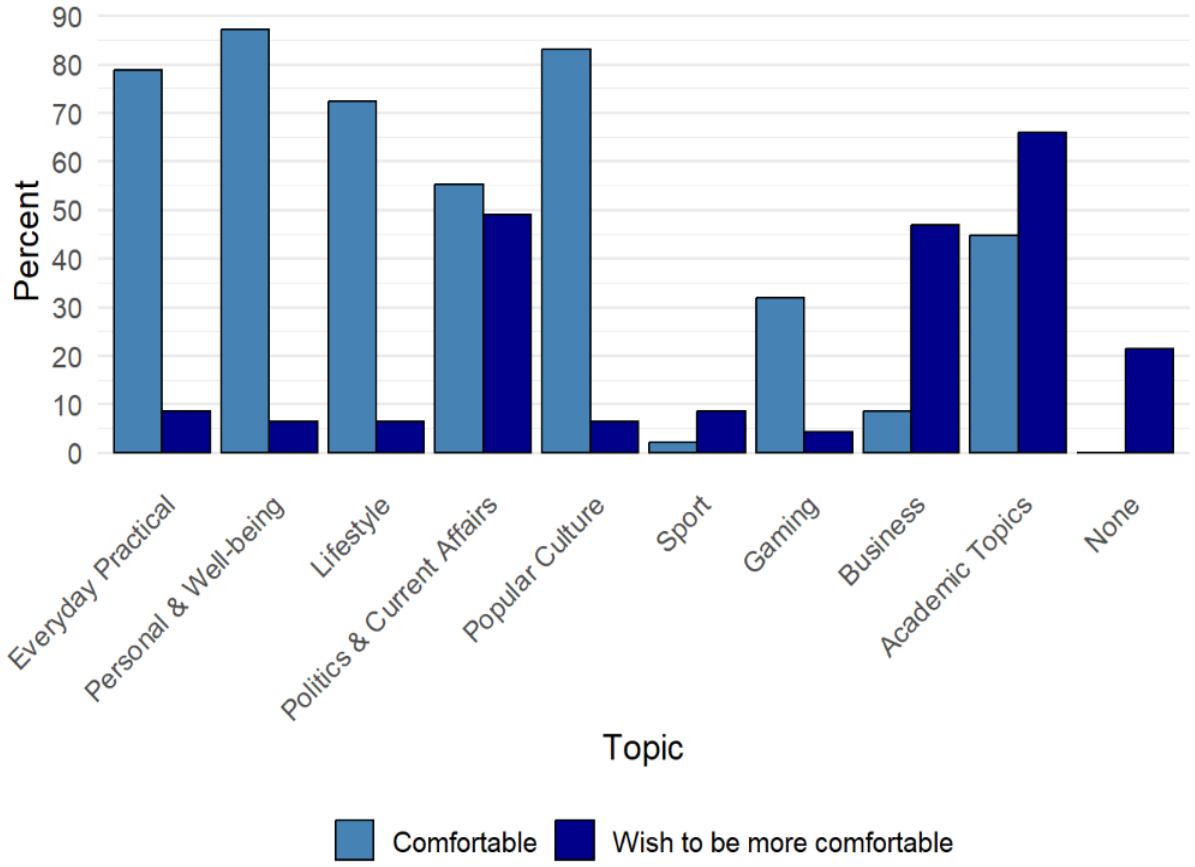
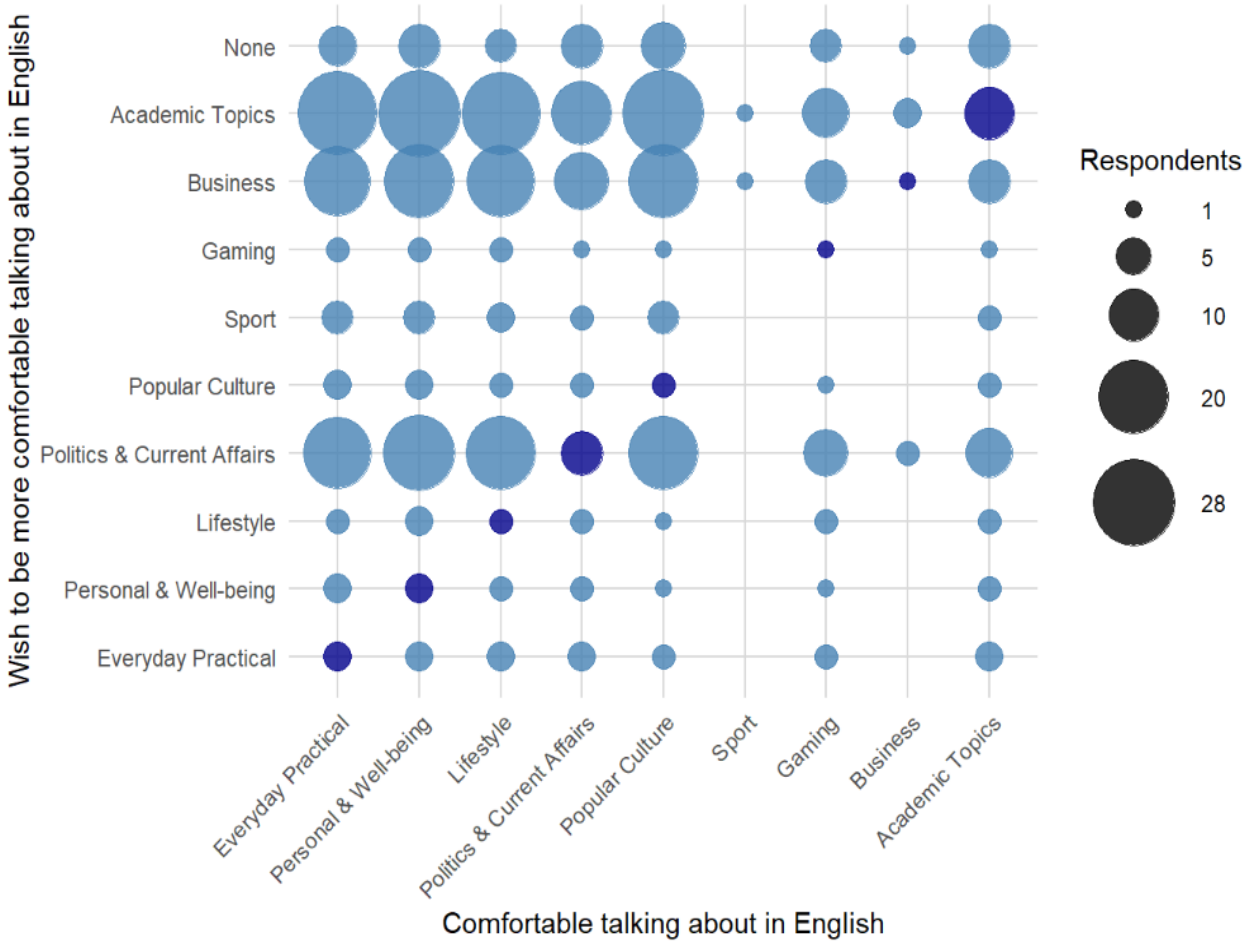


Figure 3 below illustrates the relationship between which topics respondents already feel comfortable discussing in English (x-axis) and topics they wish to feel more comfortable discussing in English (y-axis), revealing areas of strong confidence versus areas where respondents would like more practice. Larger dots indicate more respondents. Across a range of already comfortable topics, respondents report a wish to be more comfortable discussing academic topics, business, and politics & current affairs, all topics central to at least one of the three study programmes. The diagonal highlights topics that respondents are already comfortable discussing in English and wish to be even more comfortable discussing in that language. Dots on the diagonal are generally small (few respondents report wishing to be more comfortable discussing topics they are already comfortable discussing) with the exception of academic topics and to some extent politics & current affairs.

Figure 3. Relationship between topics respondents feel comfortable discussing in English (x-axis) and topics they wish to feel more comfortable discussing in English (y-axis)



Some respondents added here that the topics they are not comfortable speaking about in English are also topics they would not be comfortable speaking about in Danish with one respondent stating: "I'm at the level of proficiency where the topics I feel uncomfortable talking about in English are the same as the ones I feel uncomfortable taking about in Danish". Though this comment indicates a perception of similar proficiency level in Danish and English, it also indicates that some respondents may have interpreted the phrase "being comfortable speaking about" as relating to not wanting to or being uncomfortable speaking about certain personal topics or lack of knowledge and interest in certain other topics, e.g., gaming, business, and politics. Indeed, another respondent adds that their selection of areas which they would like to be more comfortable speaking about is "due to my personal experience and knowledge within the fields, which are lacking a bit. I might hesitate on these topics due to a lack of knowledge". However, another respondent added: "I'm more confident speaking in my native languages and therefore I feel that I'm anonymous when speaking in English. A lot of my personality gets lost when I speak in English". This comment is perhaps less about specific topics and more about other aspects of spoken language such as being able to make jokes and puns and being able to keep up with conversations in casual settings that may be fast paced, even if mundane. The issue here is perhaps less about a lack of vocabulary in speaking about certain academic topics and more about issues in fluency.

4.1.3. Interlocutors

The respondents were asked who they regularly speak English to, who they feel most comfortable speaking to in English, and who they would like to feel more comfortable speaking to in English. Again, the respondents were provided with a wide range of possible answers.

Most of our respondents report speaking English regularly to fellow students (85.1%), friends (76.6%) and teachers (87.2%), while only few respondents report speaking English regularly to other familiar groups (family: 10.6%, colleagues 10.6%, employers 8.5%, clients/customers 12.8%), with new acquaintances taking up an in-between position at 25.5%. Respondents who speak English to friends regularly are generally comfortable doing so (70.2%), and few wish to be more comfortable doing so (12.8%). In comparison, the proportion of respondents speaking English regularly to fellow students and teachers who are comfortable doing so is considerably smaller (fellow students: 46.8%, teachers: 29.8%), and the proportion wishing to be more comfortable doing so is larger (fellow students: 29.8%, teachers: 40.4%). Regarding speaking English to teachers, the proportion of respondents wishing to be more comfortable is larger than the proportion already feeling comfortable. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of responses in a bar plot.

Figure 4. Interlocutors that respondents speak English to regularly, feel comfortable speaking English to, and wish to feel more comfortable speaking English to.

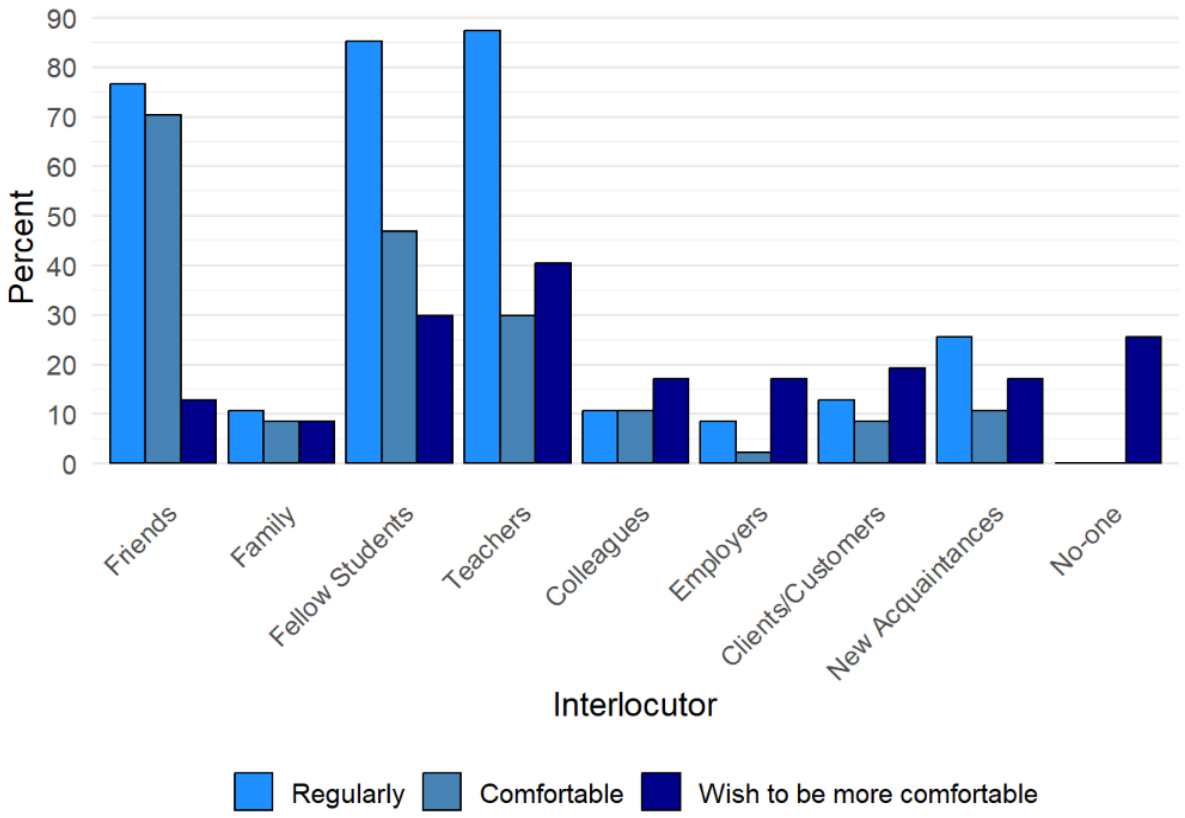
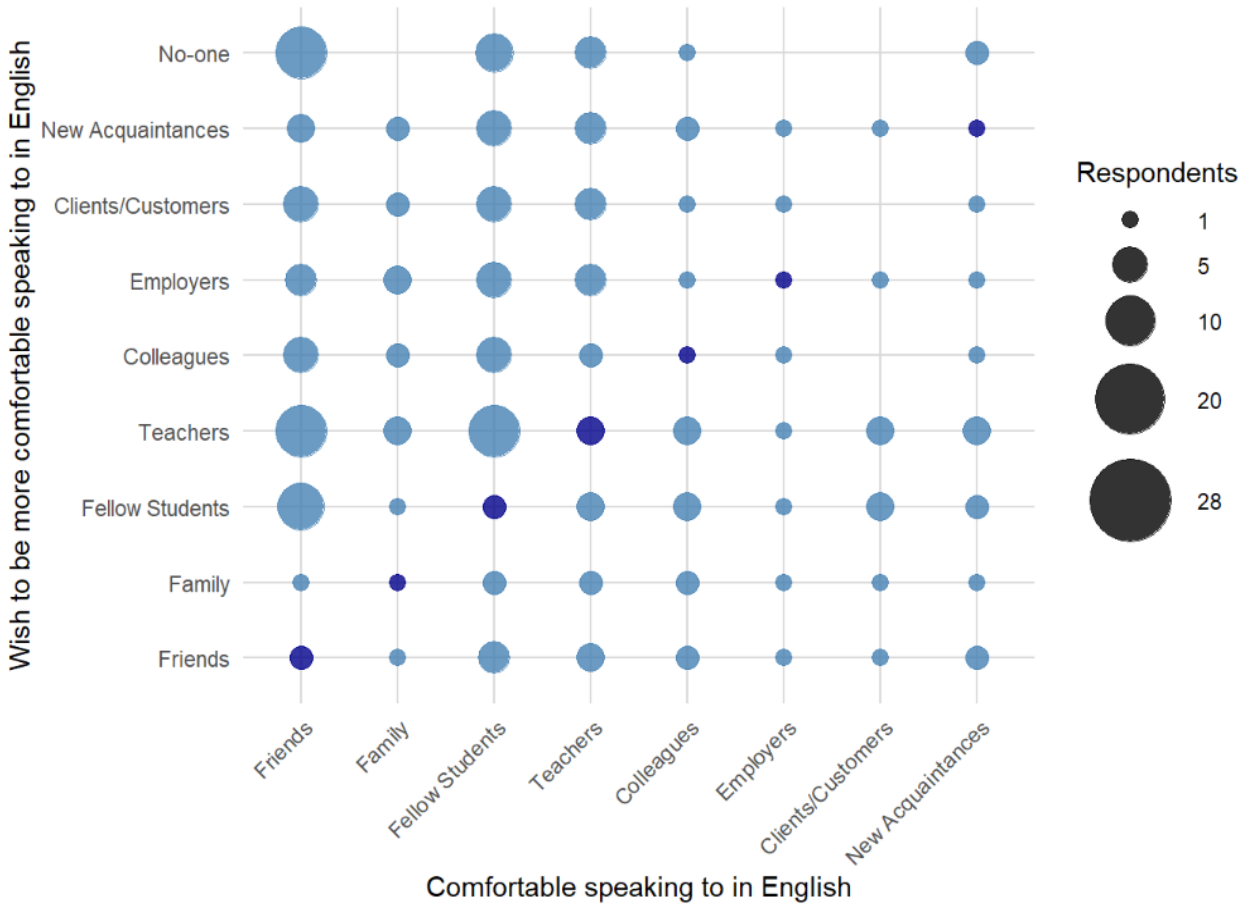


Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between which types of interlocutors respondents already feel comfortable talking to in English (x-axis) and which types they wish to feel more comfortable talking to in English (y-axis), revealing relationships of strong confidence versus relationships where respondents would like more practice. Larger dots indicate more respondents. Figure 5 shows a flatter distribution than we saw in Figure 3 (dot sizes are more uniform), indicating that patterns

for interlocutors are less general than for topics. Two slight tendencies can be observed, however: across a range of wishes, many respondents feel comfortable talking to friends and fellow students in English. The diagonal highlights interlocutors that respondents are already comfortable talking to in English and wish to be even more comfortable talking to in English. Dots on the diagonal are generally small (few respondents report wishing to be more comfortable talking to interlocutors they are already comfortable talking to).

Figure 5. Relationship between interlocutors that respondents feel comfortable speaking to in English (x-axis) and interlocutors they wish to feel more comfortable speaking to in English (y-axis)



Respondents were mainly concerned with English proficiency in these questions – either their own or that of the interlocutor.

(8) When speaking to people who I feel are better at English, I get a bit insecure.
(9) I don't feel very comfortable speaking english in general, because I don't feel good enough, especially in uni even though I major in it.
(10) The only time I feel uncomfortable speaking English is when the other person is bad at English.
(11) Sometimes I just find it a little awkward speaking English to people who also know my native language, but I don't feel that way with friends or fellow students my age.

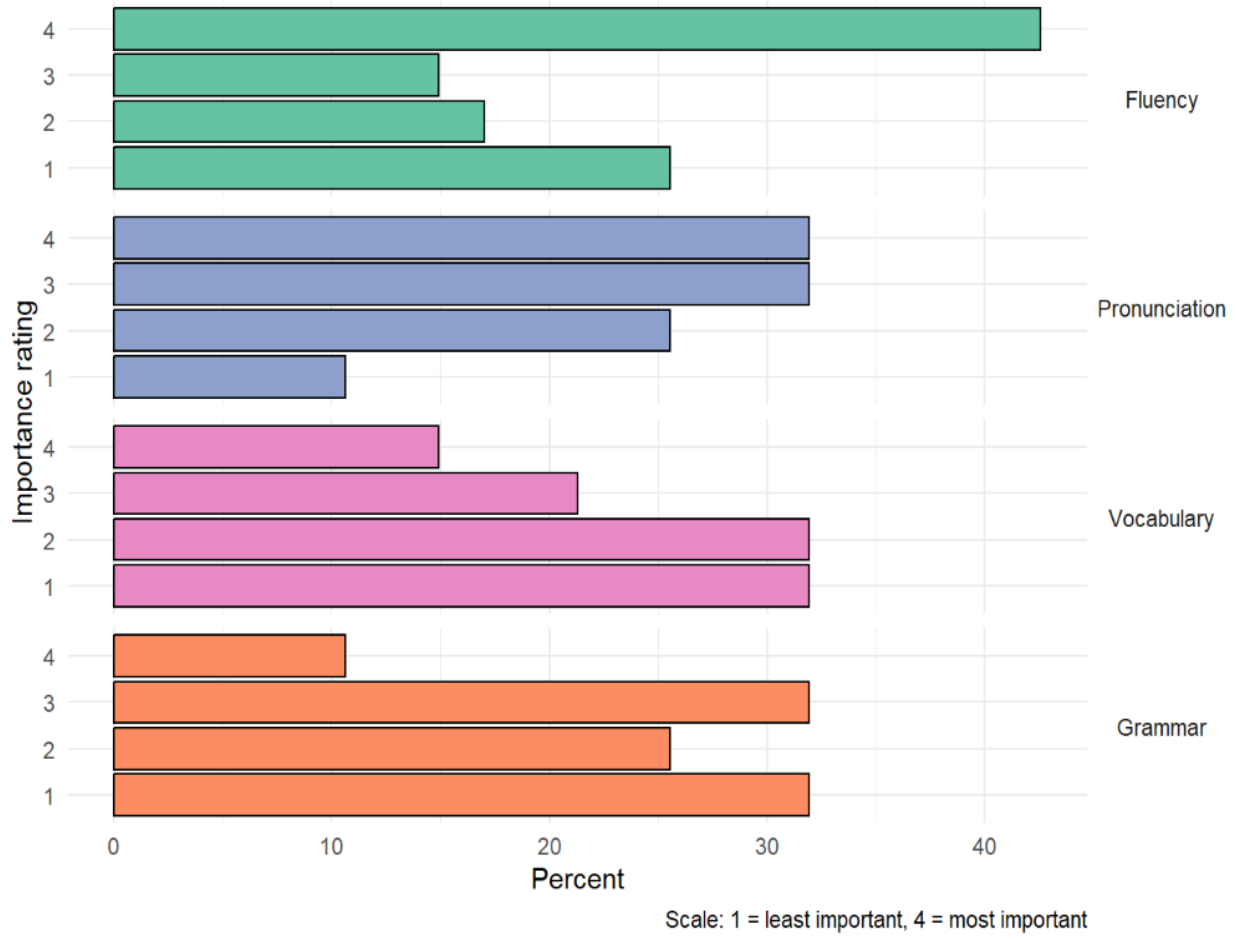
Some respondents mentioned feelings of insecurity, see (8) and (9). However, another respondent

had a different view, see (10). Finally, a few respondents mentioned speaking English with people who also know Danish, as is often the case at university. One respondent added feeling awkward in these situations, see (11).

4.2. Importance ratings and self-assessed proficiency

The respondents were asked to rank four components of oral proficiency according to their importance. Following Saito (2017), our survey thus distinguished between four components of oral proficiency (fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar), and respondents were asked to rank them relative to each other, leading to a 4-point scale from 1 (least important) to 4 (most important). The fluency component was rephrased as "speak without hesitation or long pauses" in the survey to make it semantically transparent for the respondents. Our respondents generally assign higher importance ratings to pronunciation (mean: 2.85 points, SD = 1.00 point) and fluency (mean: 2.75 points, SD: 1.26 points), and lower importance ratings to grammar (mean: 2.21 points, SD: 1.02 points) and vocabulary (mean: 2.19 points, SD:1.06 points). Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of responses in a bar plot. Longer bars toward the top indicate greater perceived importance, and longer bars at the bottom indicate lower perceived importance.

Figure 6. Relative importance of oral proficiency components



Respondents' comments show that students perceive components of oral communication in different ways and associate them with different purposes:

(12) Without substantial vocabulary the speaker is not able to express their point or ideas fluently and it might lead to confusion, restricted conversation or avoiding communication alltogether. Being able to speak without hesitation or long pauses builds confidence and allows for fluent communication. The pronounciation is important to be able to make the point clearly so that the other party can understand. In oral presentation grammar is the least important because the other points make up for any grammatical mistakes.

(13) Long pauses cause misunderstanding and so does mispronunciation. A use of a large vocabulary increase understanding and the use of grammar is more important in writing.

(14) Unless you're in some kind of professional/public speaking setting, hesitation does nothing to hinder someone's understanding of you. To an reasonable extent, the same is true for grammar (with exceptions). A lacking vocabulary or bad pronunciation, on the other hand, would make understanding more difficult unequivocally.

(15) Fluent speech, to me, is the most important. If there is too much hesitation or searching for the right word, you can lose faith in your own capabilities. The vocabulary is an undeniable help when speaking English in an academic setting. If the pronunciation is good, you're more likely to be taken seriously, however, I don't necessarily think that sounding like a native speaker is of the utmost importance. And lastly, Grammatical mistakes will happen when you're speaking, there is no way around it. While I will obviously strive to pay attention to all of the elements listed above, the grammatical mishaps are possibly the easiest to 'mask' when having a conversation.

While the comments above either focus on the speaker, as in (12) and (15), or the listener, as in (13) and (14), they all seem to place grammatical competence towards the lower end. The respondent in (13) even states that grammar is more important in the context of written communication. High fluency and a large vocabulary are linked to aspects of speaker self-confidence ((12) and (15)) and good pronunciation is linked to being taken more seriously (in (15)).

Moreover, the respondents were asked to assess their own oral proficiency, both overall and with respect to the four components (fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) on a 4-point scale from 1 to 4 (1 "beginner", 2 "intermediate", 3 "advanced" and 4 "near-native") and compared to their own written proficiency ("stronger", "equally strong", or "weaker").

Self-assessed proficiency generally clusters at near-native and advanced levels. Overall self-assessed proficiency (mean: 3.43 points, SD: 0.54 points) mirrors self-assessed proficiency in pronunciation (mean: 3.49 points, SD: 0.62 points), grammar (mean: 3.43 points, SD: 0.58 points), and fluency (mean: 3.43 points, SD: 0.70 points), while self-assessed vocabulary proficiency (mean: 3.13 points, SD: 0.74 points) is generally lower than the other components. Figure 7 illustrates the distribution of responses in a bar plot. Longer bars toward the top indicate stronger self-assessed proficiency, and longer bars towards the bottom indicate lower self-assessed proficiency. The number of respondents reporting intermediate level is smaller for self-assessed overall proficiency than for the various components. Self-assessed pronunciation shows the highest number of respondents reporting near-native level.

Figure 7. Self-assessed oral proficiency overall and divided by component

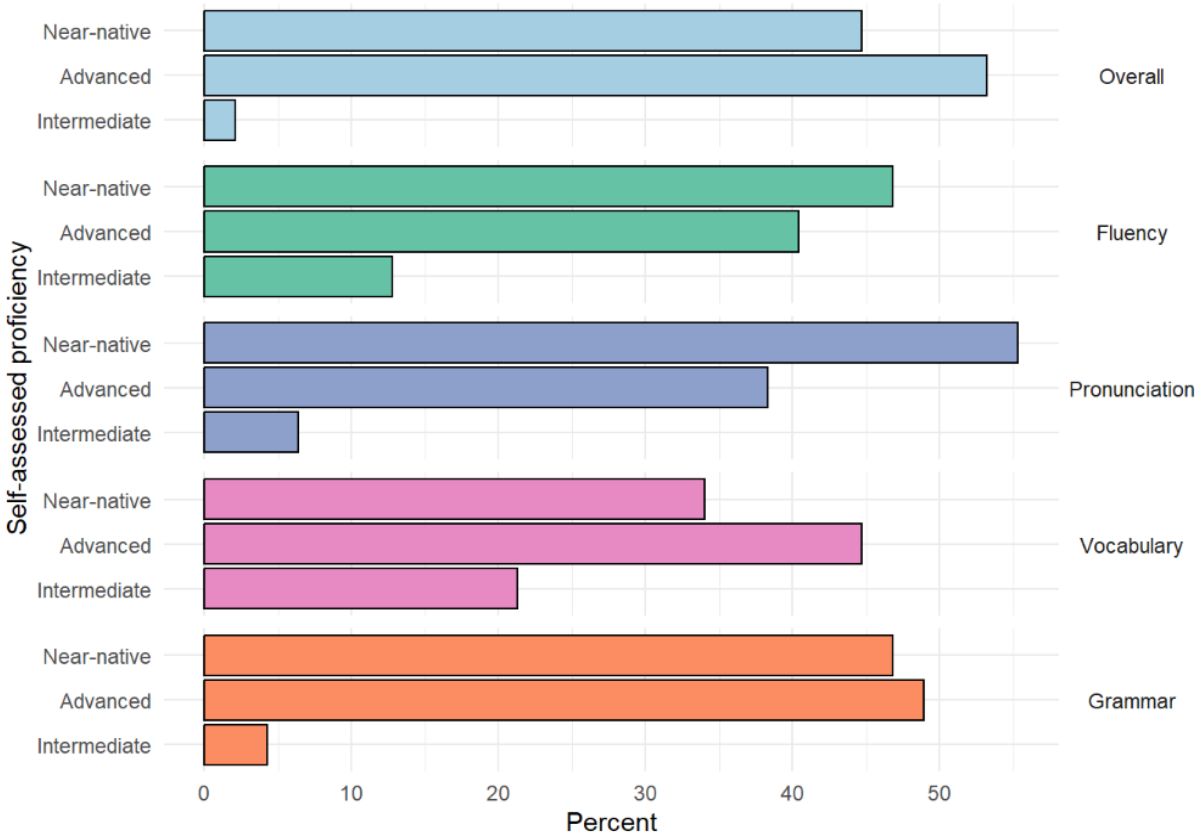
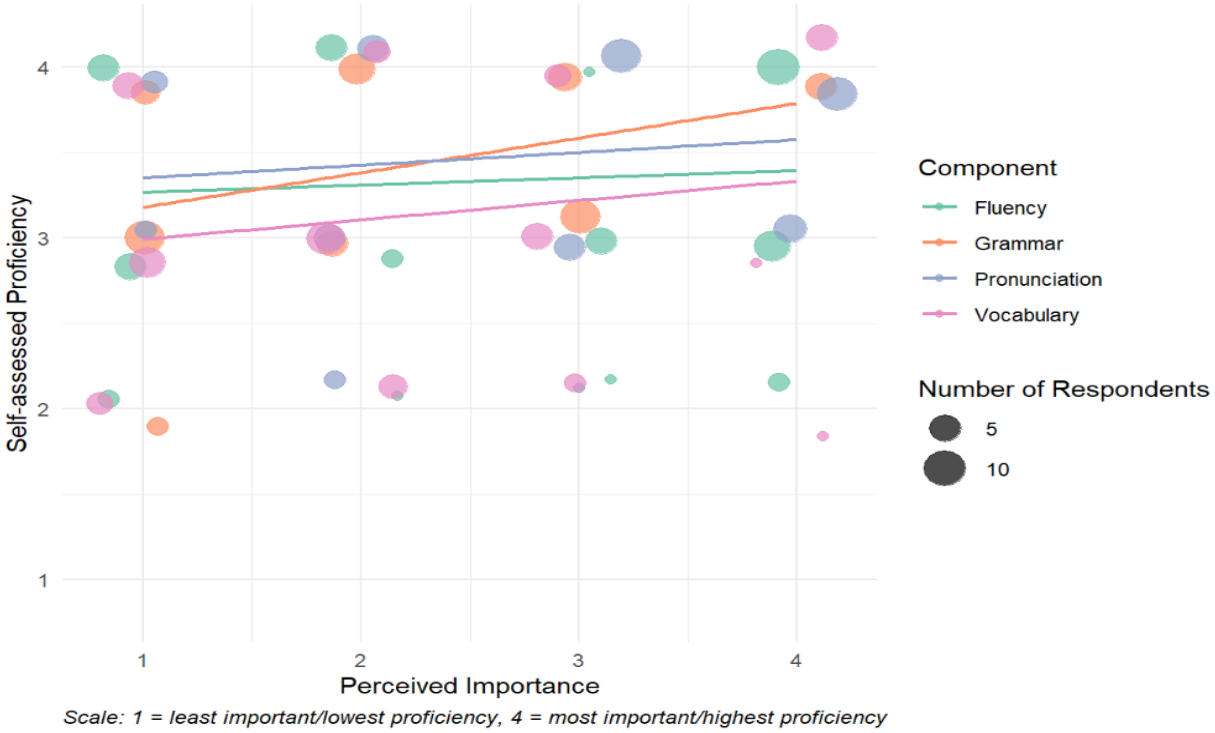


Figure 8 illustrates the relationship between perceived importance and self-assessed proficiency divided by component in a dot plot. Dot position is jittered to allow all dots to be visible, and larger dots indicate more respondents. Lines represent estimated regression tendencies. There seems to be a slight positive relationship between importance ratings and self-assessed proficiency, such that more importance and better self-assessed proficiency go hand in hand. This relationship seems to be stronger for grammar (the tendency line is steeper) than for the other components of oral proficiency.

Figure 8. Relationship between relative importance and self-assessed proficiency divided by component



Furthermore, the respondents were asked to rate the importance of oral proficiency in comparison to written proficiency ("more", "equally", or "less" important than written proficiency). Most of our respondents (83%) report that oral proficiency and written proficiency are equally important, 17% report that oral proficiency is more important, and no one reports that oral proficiency is less important than written proficiency. With respect to self-assessed oral compared to written proficiency, however, our respondents are almost equally divided between assessing their oral proficiency as weaker than their written proficiency (42.6%) and assessing their oral proficiency and written proficiency as equally strong (44.7%). Only 12.8% assess their oral proficiency as stronger than their written proficiency. Table 2 shows the relationship between relative importance of oral and written proficiency and relative self-assessment on oral and written proficiency in a cross-tabulation of number of respondents. 38.3% report the combination of equally strong proficiency and equal importance, while 29.8% report the combination of stronger written proficiency and equal importance.

Table 2. Relationship between relative importance of oral and written proficiency and relative self-assessment on oral and written proficiency. Number of respondents.

	Oral more important than written	**Equally important**	**Oral less important than written**
Stronger oral proficiency	2	4	0
Equally strong proficiency	3	18	0
Stronger written proficiency	3	17	0

Respondents who argue that oral proficiency is more important include comments such as (16), (17) and (18) below:

(16) Depends on the context, but oral proficiency is often more useful. There are tools that can easily help your written proficiency.
(17) Because written proficiency can be expanded by tools such as language models or translation options but in oral proficiency the speaker is often pressured to make their points fast, clear and coherently without the option to pause and look for tools to help.
(18) Oral proficiency is more valuable simply because basic communication seems more practical when you encounter someone who doesn't speak English. Written proficiency is only valuable in specific professional settings, usually.

As these comments show, respondents mention that different tools are available to aid in written communication, whereas no such tools are available for spoken language. In addition, when communicating with other speakers of English as a foreign language, the primary interaction will also be spoken.

Some of the respondents who chose "equally important" elaborate as follows:

(19) it's important for me to be able to communicate clearly and effectively in both oral and written English
(20) To speak and write is equally important, as it increase understanding, use and level of language
(21) They are important in different situations. For example, in group work oral proficiency is less important if you can make yourself understandable, but written proficiency is more important as the rest of the group will have to pick up the slack.
(22) I believe English communication is about balance. To be able to write and speak equally well is the goal, I'd say. Written proficiency is an advantage in school and at work, especially when communication with international collaborators involves cross-cultural research, whereas oral proficiency must be good in all face-to-face instances of talking with other users of English.

The answers reflect that the respondents are overall concerned with a sort of balance in their proficiency, as can be seen in (19), (20), (21) and (22). Many of them highlight the use of written or spoken English in different contexts, indicating that these contexts are of equal importance.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In this section, we discuss our findings in relation to our research questions and the conceptual and empirical background reviewed above. We will also briefly discuss limitations of the study and present suggestions for further research.

5.1. Response to research questions

Our study set out to investigate four research questions. In this subsection, we discuss the response to each in turn, relating our results to the conceptual and empirical background reviewed above.

1. What characterizes university EFL students' English language use patterns (extent, topics, contexts, interlocutors)?

The vast majority of our respondents use English daily at university and outside of university, for both listening and dialogue, with more variation in the number of hours spent on English language

activities outside of university. As their degree programmes structure their English language activities at university, while their language use is freer outside of university, this makes sense. In connection with curricular activities, the majority use English as the primary language when talking to a lecturer in class and in supervision related to semester projects, while almost half of our respondents use English as the primary language in group work and only a third use English as the primary language when talking to a lecturer outside of class. The comments in the questionnaire revealed that the choice of language often depends on whether or not the interlocutor (be it a fellow student or a teacher) is able to speak Danish or not. Students mentioned feeling awkward speaking English with fellow students who are also Danish speakers.

Most respondents were comfortable talking about everyday practical topics, lifestyle, personal experiences and well-being, and popular culture in English, with very few expressing a wish to be more comfortable talking about these topics. Fewer respondents were comfortable talking about academic topics, business, and politics & current affairs in English, and more respondents expressed a wish to be more comfortable talking about these topics. As academic topics are central to all three degree programmes and business and politics & current affairs are central to at least one of them, it makes sense that our respondents express a stronger wish to be more comfortable talking about these topics in English. With the exception of academic topics and to some extent politics & current affairs, few respondents report wishing to be more comfortable discussing topics they are already comfortable discussing. Given the importance of academic topics at university, it seems plausible that even students who are already comfortable talking about academic topics in English wish to feel even more comfortable doing so. Furthermore, the finding corresponds with the NCFF study reporting that the challenge of the subject-specific content might exceed the linguistic challenge (Lund et al. 2025). The fact that the students express lower levels of comfortability than in the NCFF study might reflect that university EFL students have a higher awareness and higher standards in regard to their English competencies.

Most respondents speak English regularly to friends, fellow students, and teachers, while few speak English regularly to family, colleagues, employers, and clients/customers. While those who speak English to friends regularly are generally comfortable doing so, the proportion of those who speak English to fellow students and teachers regularly and who are comfortable doing so is smaller, and the proportion wishing to be more comfortable doing so is larger. This pattern is particularly pronounced with respect to talking to teachers, where the proportion of respondents who wish to feel more comfortable is larger than the proportion already feeling comfortable. The frequent and multifaceted use of spoken English, the variety of interlocutors and the overall relatively high level of comfort and ease are well aligned with previous research, some of which we have presented above. The results can also be linked to the study by Sundqvist & Uztosun (2023: 1657), which showed that "the frequency of EE [extramural English] activities promotes positive perceptions of speaking competence" and that learners who are active "reported feeling more positive about their speaking ability". Also, our findings can be related to the concept of WTC, in that we found a relatively high level of WTC amongst the respondents. However, our respondents report that a lack of authenticity in the communication situation and language anxiety can influence their WTC negatively. Moreover, compared to the responses to the question about topics, the responses relating to interlocutor types show greater variation across respondents, suggesting that patterns for interlocutors are less general than patterns for topics. We wonder whether this difference between topics and interlocutors stems only from differences in respondents' English-speaking network outside of university, or if variation in language anxiety may impact interlocutor comfort more than topic comfort.

2. What significance do university EFL students attribute to oral proficiency in English?

Our results show that most of our respondents consider written and oral proficiency equally

important, which thus partially replicates previous findings (cf. Fernández & Andersen 2019). Our finding that written proficiency is generally considered as important as oral proficiency might be because our respondents are studying EFL at an academic level. As EFL students at university, they are likely to have career plans involving written English. This observation was also shown in some of the respondents' comments. Moreover, the equal importance attached to oral and written proficiency can be understood in the light of the concept of "mediation" in the updated CEFR, which highlights that oral and written communication are often intertwined.

On average, our respondents consider fluency and pronunciation more important components of oral proficiency than grammar and vocabulary, which was also shown in some of the respondents' comments. This may relate to our respondents' formal background in English, which may have drawn their attention to typical traits of Danish-accented English. The comparatively lesser importance of grammar and maybe also vocabulary perhaps reflects a functional approach to oral proficiency, in line with CEFR's emphasis on functional language and pragmatic competencies over formal features of the language. When forced to choose, students may tend to focus on what they are able *to do* with their language skills, rather than on correctness, stylistic nuances and linguistic sophistication. In addition, some of the comments by respondents indicate that grammar is most often associated with written proficiency (and not oral proficiency), which could also explain why it is rated as being less important for oral communication in English. Fluency and pronunciation, on the other hand, are solely linked to oral proficiency and so may simply be more easily identifiable as being important to oral communication (as opposed to grammar and vocabulary, which are important for both written and oral proficiency).

3. How do university EFL students perceive their own oral proficiency in English?

The majority of our respondents report oral proficiency skills at near-native or advanced levels, both overall and with respect to the four components (fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar), with vocabulary proficiency receiving the lowest self-assessments. This replicates in part the findings of Thøgersen & Preisler (2023) and Jensen et al. (2011) showing that young people see themselves as competent English users. This seems to apply to our respondents too, especially regarding pronunciation, where the vast majority of respondents see themselves as "near-native". Maybe surprisingly, it applies to a lesser extent when it comes to fluency and vocabulary. However, the self-assessment in Thøgersen & Preisler (2023) included questions involving language knowledge of a rather basic character, although at different levels. Thus, there is a discrepancy between previous results showing that EFL students experience their English competence as an "unmarked, almost natural" competence that they "just have" (Lund et al. 2025: 61), as a certain minority of our respondents see themselves at "intermediate level" in fluency and vocabulary. One reason may be that our respondents, who are studying EFL, have greater awareness of the fine nuances of English and in their study-related activities are exposed to academic work at a high linguistic level with challenging texts and exercises. This may give them an awareness that there is vocabulary they do not yet possess and therefore find fluency challenging. This might be seen as an interesting contrast to the description provided by the Danish Ministry of Education and Research, which states that students are (supposed to be) at CEFR level C1 at the time of enrolment (cf. UFM 2025a). It might also indicate that fluency has not been in focus to a sufficient degree either in the actual daily practice of the respondent or in their previous or present education.

4. What is the relationship between the significance university EFL students attribute to oral proficiency and their perceived oral proficiency?

We found a slight positive relationship between the importance that respondents assigned to a particular component of oral proficiency (fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary) and their self-assessed proficiency in that component, suggesting that respondents find components they

feel proficient in more important than components they feel less proficient in, or that respondents feel more proficient in components they find important than in components they find less important. This relationship seems to be stronger for grammar than for the other components of oral proficiency. This raises the question why the relative importance of grammar is more strongly tied to grammatical proficiency in comparison to the relationships between the relative importance and self-assessed proficiency for pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary. It might be the case that the contribution of grammatical details to the overall message in an utterance is less salient than the contribution of fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary and therefore requires a certain grammatical level to be noticed as important. This stronger relationship between perceived importance and self-assessed proficiency for grammar begs further research.

The responses to the questions comparing oral and written proficiency did not show a similar positive relationship between relative importance and self-assessed proficiency as the responses to the questions about components of oral proficiency did. While more than a third of our respondents report the combination of equally strong proficiency and equal importance, a slightly smaller group of respondents say that their written proficiency is stronger than their oral proficiency and that both proficiencies are equally important. This mismatch might cause some frustration for students. Below, we consider how this issue may be investigated further.

Comparing our data with the two surveys carried out by Preisler in 1995-96 and by Thøgersen & Preisler in 2022, we must highlight the difference of the empirical basis. While the other two studies surveyed a cross-section of the Danish population, our study focused on young people with comparatively high competency in English and motivation for learning even more English. However, relevant similarities of the findings concern the use pattern of extramural English, which reflects the ubiquity of English in Danish society. The use of English in everyday life in Denmark has only increased since the two other studies due to the steady increase in mediatization and digitalisation of modern culture.

Our findings indicate that the respondents are linguistically relatively well equipped to enter the Danish job market. However, improvements can be made in regard to their use pattern of intramural English and how EFL programmes can facilitate this. We recommend that programmes place even more emphasis on using spoking English as part of curricular activities.

5.2. Limitations

The scope and design of the present study entail specific limitations, particularly in relation to sample size and generalizability. As the sample is rather small, including only students from one Danish university, it is impossible to generalize about students at Danish universities and even more so about university EFL students as such. The study does, however, provide important indications of how certain student groups perceive English oral proficiency in general and their own English oral proficiency in relation to their world.

Furthermore, certain limitations must be considered due to the data collection method and the wording of the questions in the survey. Possible bias should be acknowledged in the wording of the answers to the question regarding the relative importance of written and oral proficiency, as some respondents might be inclined to seek equilibrium, meaning that they do not want to emphasize one mode of proficiency over the other. This might have contributed to the vast majority of our respondents replying that both oral and written proficiency were equally important. Also, there seems to have been variation in respondents' understanding of the question about the topics that they were "comfortable talking about". Thus, some respondents understood the question as related to social and personal comfort when speaking about personal topics, whereas others understood it to refer to English language speaking comfort. A point that might have been responsible for incomplete answers was the restriction of the maximum number of "comfortable" topics that respondents could choose, which might have restricted the range of responses that we received. We

believe, however, that this limitation was worth the increased validity gained by forcing respondents to consider all topics. Finally, since the questions invite self-assessment and this study does not include tested competencies, the risk of social desirability-bias needs to be considered when interpreting the results. This particular type of bias means that participants may want to appear more or less competent than they actually are and answer accordingly. However, as mentioned previously, Jensen et al. (2011) argue that a number of studies have shown a positive correlation between self-assessed competence and tested competence.

5.3. Suggestions for further research

While this study provides valuable insights into students' use and self-assessment of their oral proficiency in English, further research is needed to explore additional factors and contexts that may influence communicative behaviour.

One possible avenue would be to investigate differences and similarities across the three degree programmes to see if priorities, opinions and use patterns are the same for the three student groups, or if differences in the three curricula are reflected in students' language use patterns, self-assessment and perceptions of importance. Along with the yet unanalysed data collected in this survey, such a study would involve an examination of the curricula with a view to identifying differences and similarities in the descriptions and in the emphasis on oral proficiency (and oral language skills more generally speaking) in the three programmes. Our data shows a mismatch between the importance students assign to oral and written proficiency and their own reported proficiencies in these areas, which might lead to frustration among some students. Thus, a study investigating the link to curricula could also include recommendations for degree programmes.

Another important aspect that needs to be further investigated based on the data we have collected but not analysed for the present paper is students' perception of the position of oral proficiency through the entire L2 learning process, from the first grade in primary school to university. This includes analysing to what extent students at different educational levels are instructed in oral proficiency and to what extent they are given the possibility to practice oral proficiency in their learning environment.

Due to the limitations in sample size mentioned above, an expansion of the sample size would be recommendable, i.e., expanding the study to include a survey among students at other Danish universities or even other Scandinavian universities to examine differences and similarities across educational practices and systems in relation to students' communicative behaviour. Moreover, it would be interesting to expand the investigation with focus group interviews with students to obtain further details and contexts relating to the reasons for their opinions and priorities. A thorough investigation into this field across Scandinavia would be very beneficial and helpful for the development of the teaching and acquisition of oral proficiency.

Furthermore, we would like to explore our finding that perceived importance and self-assessed proficiency are more closely connected for grammar than for fluency, pronunciation and vocabulary in order to identify what makes grammar special in this respect. Due to the complex nature of the possible reasons underlying this pattern, further exploration into this should draw primarily on qualitative methods in order to allow for details and complexities to surface in the findings.

Finally, it would be interesting to further investigate the relationship between language anxiety, self-confidence, self-assessment, and WTC. Language anxiety clearly plays a role in the students' WTC, as indicated by MacIntyre et al. (1998), both in the classroom, where students fear being judged and/or corrected by peers and instructors, and related to students' (daily) use of L2 and their lack of comfort using L2. This study has uncovered interesting differences in students' levels of comfort (or the lack of it) when talking about various topics with other people. Further investigation into this field would be of great interest, e.g., into the reasons for students being

(un)comfortable talking about specific topics, but not about others, and the relevance of the specific topics for the students' future linguistic development and career opportunities. New insights into this field would be beneficial for discussions on topics for instruction at school and university.

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