# Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

# MASTER'S THESIS

Fostering students' intercultural competence: An investigation of students' perceptions of Americans and the US election in a school project

## Johan Langberg Vattøy

Master's in Education with English didactics
Department of Language, Literature, Mathematics and Interpreting
Supervisor: Jena Habegger-Conti
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# Preface and acknowledgements

## Preface

In my work experience as a teacher, I have always been intrigued by students' conceptualisations of other cultures. Teaching about other nations, religions or lifestyles can be quite challenging, and I do not recall learning about the framework of intercultural education. By this, I mean how to encounter other cultures, or to be aware of how my way of seeing the world might cause conflicts and confusion when meeting other cultures. Therefore, to develop my own knowledge about this topic was my initial thought with this thesis.

## Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Jena Habegger-Conti. Your intelligent feedback and instruction have been vital for me in achieving the writing of this thesis. Whenever I have been stressed or worried, your kindness and calmness have given me the strength to believe in myself and to see other solutions. I count myself lucky for having the opportunity to work with you, and I thank you for the laughs and the professional conversations.

I would also thank the lower secondary school in Bergen, as this research project could have not been carried out without their hospitality. A special gratitude to the English teacher who allowed me to conduct my research during the school project. Furthermore, I am grateful for the Master's in Education with English didactics programme at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL), as the arranged seminars have given me knowledge about how to properly conduct my research.

Even though the coronavirus (COVID-19) has made this year difficult, I have had the opportunity to meet my peers and other MA students at campus. I am grateful for the discussions, coffee breaks, and laughs we have had during this stressful year. Because of you, I have had the motivation and drive to write this thesis.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family for your love and support. From another part of the country, you have shown that you have believed in me. A special gratitude I give to my brother, Kim-Daniel Vattøy, for feedback and excellent advice.

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Johan Langberg Vattøy

**Abstract**

This thesis investigates the extent to which students demonstrate intercultural competences (IC), and reports on a school project carried out in English teaching in lower secondary school. Fostering IC is becoming increasingly important, as our encounters with people with different beliefs and values occurs almost daily through social media, traveling and living in a multicultural society. As the new English curriculum in Norway has a greater focus on the development of IC, I believe that teaching IC in English as a foreign language (EFL) needs to be further researched.

The objective for this thesis is to investigate students' perceptions before and after a school project about American culture and the US election. The school project took place in two eighth-grade classes in Norway and was developed and carried out by the teachers. Consequently, I conducted qualitative research, where six students participated in focus group interviews and pre- and post-surveys.

This thesis found that the students share different descriptions of how they perceive Americans, where some are superficial and without depth (stereotypes), others are connected to cultural topics such as the American dream, work ethic, and economical issues. Five key challenges to IC were identified: an "*us vs them mentality", a new knowledge – same attitudes tendency, stereotyping, the struggle of ambivalence,* and *paths to students' intercultural learning process.* EFL teachers must be aware that some of the competence aims may cause an "us vs them mentality" due to their emphasis on describing other cultures' lifestyles and mindsets, rather than focusing on students' own attitudes and skills when encountering other cultures. Furthermore, we must be aware of students' stereotypes and the natural process of categorizing, and to map out and examine how their stereotypes are formed and the factors that cause the creation of them. The interviews and the pre- and post-surveys revealed that the students gained a lot of new knowledge from the school project. However, their attitudes suggested they did not gain a new understanding of why Americans vote as they do. This thesis concludes that in order to teach students about attitudes, there must be explicit classroom instruction of IC. Lastly, when students encounter other cultures, ambivalence will most likely occur when the students try to make sense of new knowledge in light of their previous understanding. This ambivalence can go in two directions: one is prejudice, stereotyping, and previous understanding, where the other is new understanding. In this case, teachers' guidance might be of vital importance, to make sure students to not stick with their prejudices.

**Sammendrag**

Denne masteroppgaven undersøker i hvilken grad elever viser interkulturell kompetanse (IK), og rapporterer fra et skoleprosjekt som er utført i engelskundervisningen i ungdomsskolen. Å fremme IK blir stadig viktigere ettersom møtene våre med mennesker med annen tro og verdier skjer nesten daglig gjennom sosiale medier, reiser og livet i et flerkulturelt samfunn. Ettersom den nye engelske læreplanen i Norge har større søkelys på utviklingen av IK mener jeg at det er behov for mer forskning på undervisning av IK i engelskklasserommet.

Målet for denne oppgaven er å undersøke elevers oppfatninger før og etter et skoleprosjekt om amerikansk kultur og det amerikanske valget. Skoleprosjektet fant sted i to åttendeklasser i Norge, og ble utviklet og gjennomført av lærerne. Ut ifra dette gjennomførte jeg et kvalitativt forskningsprosjekt, hvor seks elever deltok i fokusgruppeintervjuer og før- og etterundersøkelser.

Denne oppgaven fant at elevene deler forskjellige beskrivelser av hvordan de oppfatter amerikanere, hvor noen er overfladiske og uten dybde (stereotyper), er andre knyttet til kulturelle temaer som den amerikanske drømmen, arbeidsmoral og økonomiske problem. Fem nøkkelutfordringer til IK ble identifisert: en *"oss mot dem mentalitet", en ny kunnskap - samme holdningstendens, stereotypi, strevet av ambivalens og veier til studentenes interkulturelle læringsprosess*. Engelsklærere må være klar over at noen av kompetansemålene kan forårsake en "oss mot dem mentalitet" på grunn av deres vekt på å beskrive andre kulturers livsstil og tankesett, snarere enn å sette søkelys på elevenes egne holdninger og ferdigheter når man møter andre kulturer. Videre må vi være klar over elevenes stereotyper og den naturlige kategoriseringsprosessen, og kartlegge og undersøke hvordan stereotypene deres dannes og hvilke faktorer som forårsaker opprettelsen av dem. Intervjuene og spørreundersøkelsene avslørte at elevene fikk mye ny kunnskap fra skoleprosjektet. Derimot foreslo deres holdninger at de ikke fikk en ny forståelse av hvorfor amerikanere stemmer som de gjør. Denne oppgaven konkluderer at for å lære elever om holdninger må det gjennomføres eksplisitt klasseromsundervisning av IK. Til slutt, når elevene møter andre kulturer, vil ambivalens trolig oppstå når elevene prøver å gi mening om ny kunnskap i lys av sin tidligere forståelse. Denne ambivalensen kan gå i to retninger: den ene er fordommer, stereotyping og tidligere forståelse, og den andre er ny forståelse. I dette tilfellet kan lærernes veiledning være av avgjørende betydning for å sikre at elevene ikke holder fast ved sine fordommer.

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# List of abbreviations

**CA**          Cultural awareness

**CCA**         Critical cultural awareness

**COE**         Council of Europe

**EFL**         English as a Foreign Language

**ESL**         English as a Second Language

**IC**          Intercultural Competence

**ICA**         Intercultural Cultural Awareness

**ICC**         Intercultural Communicative Competence

**NESH**        The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the
                Humanities

**NSD**         Norwegian Centre for Research Data

**UNESCO**      United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisatio

# 1. Introduction

"The lessons one learns at school are not always the ones that the school thinks it's teaching" (Rushdie, 2012, p. 31).

## 1.1 The context and background of this study

In Norway, English as a school subject has increased status and attention. This has to do with globalisation and how frequently English is a part of students' daily lives through media, tourism, traveling, etc. (Jensen, Arnett & McKenzie, 2011, p. 287). Furthermore, English didactics has become an important element of the national curricula (LK20). The field of research have also grown remarkably in the last years, which "contributes knowledge that is useful for the teaching of English in Norway" (Rindal & Brevik, 2019, p. 419). Despite the fact that Norwegians learn English already in the first year of school, and many consider themselves to be fluent speakers, it is not considered a second language. According to Rindal & Brevik, Norway distinguish itself from postcolonial countries such as Nigeria and India, as English is not an official language in Norway (2019, p. 435). English as a subject, however, has become mandatory in school with its own curriculum. Therefore, many researchers consider it as a second language (ESL). However, because English is not an official second language in Norway, and because some children in Norway are learning English as a third or fourth language, in this study I will use the term EFL.

EFL teachers in Norway have a duty to follow the English subject curriculum (LK20), which is considered a third-generation document that involves basic skills, core elements and competence aims (Simensen, 2020, p. 35). In terms of the cultural values the curriculum says that "English shall help the [student] to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns" (UDIR, 2020). When it comes to the intercultural understanding of communication patterns, there are no explanations of how this can be developed. The curricula also address how language learning and proper linguistic can lead to communication and understanding. However, according to Wang

> There is no guarantee for a successful communication even if the correct linguistic forms are given. Therefore, a reasonable move is to take the learners' attention away from linguistic forms and pay more attention to these non-linguistic factors which affect communication. Successful communication involves, besides linguistic forms, respect for and understanding of each other's

culture, mutual negotiations in the interaction, and the ability to interpret the intentions of the interlocutor (2013, p. 29).

Furthermore, the curriculum states that "the subject shall develop the [students'] understanding that their views of the world are culture-dependent. This can open for new ways to interpret the world, promote curiosity and engagement and help to prevent prejudice" (UDIR, 2020). This is supposed to be achieved through reflection, interpreting and critical assessment of different types of texts in English. When it comes to the development of intercultural competence, it states that:

> the [student] shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society. Thus the [students] will develop intercultural competence enabling them to deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns. They shall build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others' identities in a multilingual and multicultural context (UDIR, 2020).

Additionally, LK20 states that after 10th grade the students should be able to "explore and describe lifestyles, mindsets, communication patterns and diversity in the English-speaking world" (UDIR, 2020). In other words, English teachers are supposed to expect students to obtain IC through describing and having knowledge of other cultures. However, when looking at the interdisciplinary core element *democracy and citizenship,* it has a different focus than describing other cultures. It directs the aspect of developing students understanding of how the world is culture dependent. Furthermore, having the ability to communicate efficiently in English can promote curiosity and engagement, resulting in new ways of interpreting the world (UDIR, 2020). Even though it is positive that culture has a more important and central space in the new curriculum, the information and guidance on how to teach IC is inadequate. In the autumn 2020 a local Bergen school ran a project involving perceptions of Americans in connection with the US election. This provided an ideal opportunity for collection data on these perceptions. The main goal of this thesis was thus connected to the school project with the research aims:

1. What are students' perceptions of Americans and the US election as expressed in a school project in English lower secondary school?
2. What are challenges related to fostering students' intercultural competence in English based on students' statements on Americans and the US election?

## 1.2 The school context

This school in which this study was conducted is known for being innovative and thinking "outside the box", and the teachers express that textbooks are used infrequently as they believe there are better ways of reaching the competence aims. The English teacher I collaborated with is the personal tutor (Norwegian: kontaktlærer) for one of two eighth-grade classes in English and social studies that worked with the school project.

**Aim**

The school project was developed by the teachers, and the aim of the school project was to learn about the cultural variety among Americans, using the US presidential election as a central event. The context of the school project was relevant as students were assumed to read or hear about the election, Trump, and Biden several times a week on social media in a relatively biased perspective. Furthermore, they were to break down American stereotypes in order to understand why Americans vote as they do. Consequently, the aim of this thesis is to investigate democratic principles within intercultural education in this school project and explore how students report their attitudes and beliefs.

**Content**

The students learned about how the US presidential election is constructed and how/why Americans vote as they do. Moreover, they learned about American culture, and how there are great differences in terms of Americans' living situation, depending on geography, income, etc. One of the main sources of information was a documentary called *UXA* (NRK, 2020). In the documentary we meet Thomas Seltzer, an American born Norwegian musician and TV-personality. Through a journey in the United States of America, he documented the living conditions and concerns of many among America's working and middle class. His mission was to find out what happened to the "American dream", and in the five episodes he addresses topics such as racism, poverty, and drug abuse. In addition to knowledge of the election and American culture, the students were taught how to give a speech and to convince the audience. This was necessary as they were supposed to create their own TED-talk presentation. Next, almost 50 Americans participated in an open-ended questionnaire that the teacher created and collected before the project started. Their answers consisted of their background, political perspective, and how they feel about Trump/Republicans and Biden/Democrats.

**Working methods**

The students worked with authentic materials such as news articles, different texts, and YouTube videos about the US election and American voters. After three weeks of learning about the topics, the teachers handed out instructions for the "role card" to a character the students were supposed to create. The role card had to include age, sex, residence, background (profession, education, family etc.) and political standpoint. It was up to them to choose if they wanted to portray a supporter of Trump or Biden in the TED-talk. They then had to create and rehearse their speech before recording their TED-talk, trying to convince the viewer who to vote for. In other words, the students needed to get an understanding of their character's attitudes, values, and way of thinking (which are central terms of IC). I believe this study to be important because there has been little research done at the MA level in Norway on teaching culture in English.

## 1.3 Previous research in Norway

While many MA theses have investigated the use of picture books or literary texts to promote IC (e.g., Brekke, 2017; Furnes, 2016), little seems to have been done on teaching culture in the EFL classroom. Benedicte Brekke looked at teacher's attitudes towards IC and found that more recent research on intercultural competence should be implemented in the teacher education (2017). Lydia Kristin Furnes looked at decentring with a picture book amongst 5th graders, and her study indicated that it can be used as a teaching tool in order to develop the ability to decentre (2016). There is, however, one MA thesis that have investigated the characteristics of teaching culture in lower secondary school. Sigrid Graedler Listuen found in her study, that the majority of teachers focused mainly on developing the students' general knowledge. Furthermore, the teachers also mentioned strengthening communication and helping the students to see other ways of living. Her findings conclude that the objectives of teaching culture in the classroom should be more directed towards the development of students' intercultural competence (2017).

The field of intercultural education has also been very much researched on a higher degree level in Norwegian EFL contexts, but again in relation to language and literature with a special focus on textbooks and picture books (e.g., Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2017; Hoff, 2016). Hild Elisabeth Hoff expresses how the intercultural reader must be aware of the different voices, structures, and perspectives in foreign language texts, just as the intercultural speaker when

encountering other cultures (2016, p. 60). In Hoff's study of "fostering the intercultural reader?", her findings show that students "must be encouraged to compare and contrast the narrative styles and structures as well as the different cultural, historical subject positions represented in the texts" (2017, p. 455). This means that the students should have the skills and knowledge of comparing (explained in the theoretical framework) when looking at "other texts". Brown & Habegger-Conti found in their study that textbook images represent indigenous people in a lower position of power than that of the viewer, and distance the viewer, which contradict the general cultural aims of English language learning in Norway (2017, p. 16). To make sure that students are critically aware of how cultures are portrayed in textbooks is an important part of teaching intercultural education. Nevertheless, there seems to be a knowledge gap around ideas and attitudes within learning culture in the EFL classroom. Therefore, this study can contribute to the further investigation of the field.

## 1.4 The outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 has introduced the contexts and background, the school project, research questions, and previous research in Norway. Chapter 2 elaborates on central definitions, theoretical framework for understanding intercultural competence, Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (1997), critical cultural awareness, intercultural awareness, the struggle of ambivalence, cultural identity, globalization, and democratic citizenship. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology and research design of the thesis. The philosophical background, research participants, data collection methods, data analysis, validity, reliability, and research ethics are deliberated. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the data analysis, which consists of students' perceptions from the focus group interviews and the pre- and post-surveys. Chapter 5 discusses the findings with respect to the overall research questions. In chapter 6, conclusions, reflections, and further research are considered.

# 2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, I will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of my thesis. First, I will introduce my use of terms, the historical aspect of intercultural competence, what the term is about, and what culturally educated is in the light of UNESCO and the Council of Europe. Next, I present Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (1997) and some of the components that belongs to his model (attitudes and knowledge). Then, critical cultural awareness is explained in the light of Byram's model, as well as the further development of the framework (Holliday, 2011). Lastly, I address intercultural awareness, the grammar of culture, cultural identity and globalization, and democratic citizenship as I consider them essential to fully understand what intercultural competence is about.

## 2.1 Definitions of central terms

### 2.1.1 Culture

*Culture* is probably one of the most difficult terms to define as it is such a large concept and is perceived differently in a variety of contexts. Raymond Williams, one of the founders of the cultural studies movement, believes that "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (In Jenks, 2005, p. 1). However, in order to understand what intercultural education is about, it is necessary to be aware of how I perceive culture in this present study. One way of understanding culture is to see it in contrast with *nature.* Nature is about what is born and grows organically, whilst culture is what has been grown and groomed (Kramsch, 1998, p. 4). In other words, culture is formed and created by humans through tradition and geographic areas. I rely on Claire Kramsch's definition of culture, which is a "membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings." (1998, p. 10). In addition, the members share a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting. (p. 10). Chris Jenks introduces the term *sub-culture*: "(…) Sub-cultures are sub-sets – smaller, more localised and differentiated structures, within one or other of the larger cultural networks" (2005, p. 136). In the present study, this can be related to, for example, how supporters of a political party can be considered a sub-culture, whilst the larger cultural network can be considered "American culture".

When discussing how we perceive culture, it is important to distinguish between an *essentialist view* and a *non-essentialist view*. According to Holliday, Hyde & Kullman, an essentialist view involves perceiving culture (as nature) as something that "has a physical entity, as though it is

a place, which people can visit. It is homogeneous in that perceived traits are spread evenly, giving the sense of a simple society" (2017, p. 3). This way of thinking is usually what drives sexism and racism (p. 2). Non-essentialist view on the other hand, sees culture as "a social force which is evident where it is significant. Society is complex, with characteristics which are difficult to pin down" (p. 3). What Holliday, Hyde & Kullman points out here, is that if we have a non-essentialist view on culture, it is much healthier, and we become more open to understand that culture is not a static and simple concept. In other words, we must teach our students to be aware of how we encounter culture. Having an essentialist view on culture might lead to stereotyping, which can affect our openness and curiosity of other cultures. It can also lead to *culturalism,* which is "using culture as an explanation for everything that a representative of another country does, thinks, etc. while ignoring the fact that other reasons might apply (Dervin, 2016, p. 113).

### 2.1.2 Defining intercultural education and intercultural competence

The term *intercultural* is about the exchange, inter-dependence and interaction "between" cultures due to the word *inter.* Furthermore, intercultural includes the relationship between one's own values, lifestyles, and lifeworld to others. In other words, it focuses on the cultural differences from one culture to another (Allmenn, 2011, p. 34).

Intercultural education is an enormous field within research (sociology, anthropology, psychology, education, and communication), and therefore a variety of terms are used (Portera, 2011, p. 21). These include intercultural education, competence, effectiveness, and sensitivity to name a few. In this thesis I will define and work with some of these terms, however, *intercultural competence* (IC) will be used as a foundation. To define IC can be challenging as there are multiple disciplines of this concept. However, I must clarify how I intend to use the term for this thesis, as I also mention *intercultural communicative competence* (ICC). According to Michael Byram, IC is the "ability to interact in their own language with the people from another country and culture" (1997, p. 71). In Byram's view, a person who has developed ICC is someone who is:

> able to build relationships while speaking in the foreign language; communicates effectively, taking into consideration his own and the other person's viewpoint and needs; mediates interactions between people of different backgrounds, and strives to continue developing communicative skills (1997, in López-Rocha, 2016, p. 107).

I prefer to use the term *intercultural competence* in this thesis as it is what the English subject curriculum uses in Norway. Furthermore, Spitzberg and Changnon's defines IC as "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who … represent differences or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations of the world" (2009, in Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017, p. 9).

## 2.2 Intercultural education

As teachers our job is to prepare our students for the real world, and in our best way shape them into becoming good citizens. Teaching intercultural competences may help prevent prejudice and discrimination and may help people of culturally diverse societies to live together. Furthermore, it will help people to communicate within the societies, as well as across borders (Barrett, Huges & Reynolds, 2014, p. 2). In this section, I will introduce what intercultural education is about and its purpose.

### 2.2.1 Historical development of intercultural competence

In order to understand intercultural competence, it is necessary to understand the historical aspect of the term. The term derives from Dell Hymes' *communicative competence* from 1966, which is about the importance of understanding how language is acquired and the ability to use it appropriately (Byram, 1997, p. 7). In Byram's view, it was misleading that sociolinguistic competence was used as a fundamental concept in communicative language teaching, as Hymes' description of first language acquisition and communication among native speakers was transferred into foreign language teaching. In 1983 Stern's major review of language teaching discovered that the socio-cultural emphasis was not clearly developed yet (p. 8). This led to a diversion between sociolinguistic competence and cultural competence, and in the 1980s and 1990s these terms had still not been clarified, as Hymes language teaching was not linked with the cultural sphere. The reason for this, was that Hymes did not focus on foreign language teaching (FLT) and cross-cultural communication. Byram also refers to Jan van Ek's framework for comprehensive foreign language learning objectives, and how it concerns personal and social development for the individual learner (social competence) (p. 9). The theories of Hymes and van Ek can be of importance when understanding the concept of *intercultural communicative competence* (see section 2.2).

Other researchers of intercultural education have a different perception of where the term derived from. Lily Arasaratnam-Smith claims that the concept of intercultural competence is

based on the researchers like Rachel Davis DuBois, who impacted the American curriculum in intercultural education with her work on understanding between culturally diverse groups (Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017, p. 7). Furthermore, she expresses that intercultural competence was previously labelled cross-cultural effectiveness, and that in the 1970s it was developed a quantitative measurement of different variables such as openness and curiosity, in order to find out how to effectively communicate across cultures (p. 8). In the 1980s the term IC was introduced, and at the time there were cultural studies from different nations with a focus on Spitzberg & Cupach's *interpersonal communication competence*. There are many definitions and theories on intercultural competence, and in the 1990s these increased in number. Even to this day, there is still not just one correct definition, and there are varied models and directions we must consider when delving into intercultural competence. However, one of the most used models is Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (1997).

### 2.2.2 Intercultural competence

When investigating the field of intercultural competence, a name that is constantly referred to is Michael Byram. He is one of the most respected researchers of the field and has contributed to the development of how many perceive intercultural competence today. Byram et al. present three components of intercultural competence: *attitudes, knowledge,* and *skills* (2001, p. 5). The term, intercultural attitudes, is about the importance of setting our values, beliefs, and behaviours aside, and through openness and curiosity be willing to see "others" through their perspective and set of values, beliefs and behaviours. Next, knowledge of how social groups and social identities function is crucial when interacting with someone from another culture. Intercultural knowledge can be defined as "having two major components: knowledge of social processes, and knowledge of illustrations of those processes and products" (p. 6). This means to have knowledge of a person's worldview, and knowledge of how we see ourselves in addition to others. Last, but as important, intercultural skills is presented. This considers the skills of comparing and resolving misunderstandings. Byram et al. state that the skills of comparison, of interpreting and relating are crucial when looking at documents side by side from different perspectives (p. 6). Furthermore, to be able to find new knowledge and integrate it with what we already know is a part of intercultural communicative competence, which will be elaborated later. An example is to find out how to communicate and ask people from other cultures questions about their own values. To sum up, this description relates to the skills of discovery and interaction.

Usually when we talk about someone who speaks English, we talk about the native or the foreign speaker. The *intercultural speaker,* however, is someone who "has the ability to interact with "others", to accept other perspectives and perceptions of the world, to mediate between different perspectives, to be conscious of their evaluations of difference" (Byram & Zarate, 1997; in Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001). As teachers, one of our goals should be to "groom" our students to become intercultural speakers.

### 2.2.3 Culturally educated and the Council of Europe

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), being culturally educated will affect our mindset and how we respond to different situations, as it shapes our beliefs and feelings (Dasli, 2019, p. 220). UNESCO presents three central principles of intercultural education. The first principle is about *culturally responsive teaching*, defined as a "critical form of pedagogic practice that battles against assimilationist school curricula and ideologies … [and] enables students to appreciate their diverse identities by making use of the everyday experiences they bring into the classroom learning environment" (p. 220). This concerns a dialogue between the teacher and the students and is seen as a problem-posing method that focuses on the student's reflection on their own cultures, which can lead to a "mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other's lives" (UNESCO, 2006, in Dasli, 2019, p. 222). The second principle is about how intercultural education involves the processes and skills students need to become critical and responsible citizens. The last and third principle expresses how intercultural education helps students to respect and understand individuals and groups (ethnic, social, cultural and religious) as well as other nations. This involves developing students' openness and teaching them to put their assumptions aside (p. 224).

The Council of Europe (COE) presents three core principles: *human rights, democracy* (democratic processes and culture) and the *rule of law* (justice and equality). They stress that intercultural education is vital in achieving all three core objectives (Barrett et al., 2014, p. 2). The teacher is crucial when developing students' intercultural competence, as it is not acquired automatically, but is learned and practiced through life and education (p. 12). When teaching intercultural competence, it is important to the students understand that it is not about abandoning our own culture, nor to adopt other cultures. It is about:

> being open to, curious about and interested in people who have other cultural affiliations, and
> the ability to understand and interpret their practices, beliefs, discourses and values (…), [which]

…. enables people to interact and cooperate effectively and appropriately in situations where cultural "otherness" and "difference" are salient (Barrett et al., 2014, p. 12).

This definition can help students understand that it is not about getting rid of their values and beliefs, but about understanding the beliefs of others they will meet in daily life situations.

## 2.3 Byram's "Model for intercultural communicative competence"

In 1997, Byram presented his model for intercultural communicative competence. He expresses that there are five *Savoirs,* which in French means knowledge or "to know". These five components are seen as the foundation of the model and they are all connected. They consist of *Savoir* (knowledge), *Savoir être* (attitudes), *Savoir faire* (skills of discovery and interaction), *Savoir comprende* (skills of interpreting and relating), and lastly *Savoir engager* (Critical cultural awareness). These are further explained in Figure 1 and the upcoming sections. It is when mastering all components in the model one fully achieves intercultural communicative competence.

Byram's model emphasises language and describes how "the intercultural speaker corresponds to the needs and opportunities of a foreign language learner with personal experience of interaction with people of another culture involving the use of a foreign language" (1997, p. 70). Byram expresses that having intercultural competence is about having the ability to interact with another culture while using our own language, by using the attitudes, knowledge, and skills in order to understand another culture. Intercultural communicative competence, however, is the ability to interact while using a foreign language (p. 71). Furthermore, he stresses the importance of having knowledge of language competence, and the importance of using the language appropriately. For instance, if you are visiting a British region, you should be aware of how they use different terms and dialects to fully achieve an interaction and understanding. To be able to critical assess "others" and to critically look at our self-reflection, is essential when working with ICC.
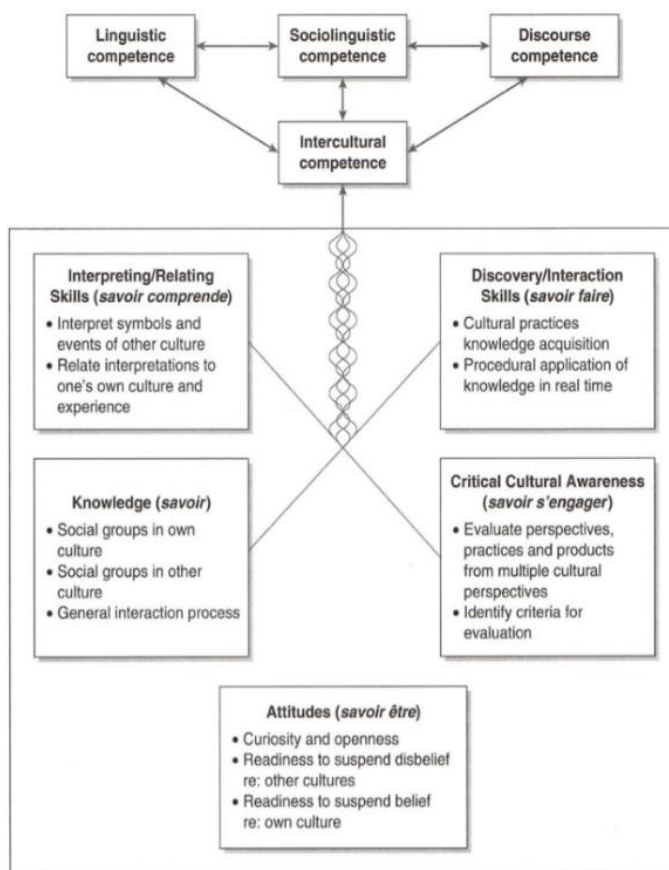
Figure 1: Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence

### 2.3.1 Savoir être (Attitudes)

When engaging other cultures in Norway or traveling to another country, one will most likely experience new influences and impressions. Byram's concept of *attitudes* or *savoir être* is possibly the most important part of his model, as it not only includes communication, but is essential in all parts of intercultural education. According to Byram, curiosity and openness are key words when working with cultural attitudes, and it is not just the unfamiliar phenomena one must have the interest in seeking, but also the familiar (1997, p. 34). This means that relativizing oneself is an important part of understanding others and it is called *decentring* (explained in section 2.3.1).

Byram also argues that one must have "interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices" (2008, p. 230). Teaching students to be curious will not only help them when they are traveling, but it can trigger more engagement and interest in the classroom as well. Students might come across pictures or texts in class that they seek to understand on a

deeper level, however, instead of raising their hand in curiosity, they might purely accept the situation considering their previous knowledge and beliefs. As a teacher, it can be difficult to teach our students about attitudes, and we easily can impact their perspective either negatively or positively. That said, it is not about teaching students to "choose a side" of a situation, but rather to trigger openness and curiosity (Byram, 1997, p. 29). If we allow ourselves to be open enough to suspend disbelief and judgement of others, we will also more easily operate with the skills of discovery and interaction (Byram, 1997, p. 34 & 35). According to Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-von Ditfurth, there are several methods to help students develop attitudes (2007). One is to use visual aids when working with texts in order to trigger interest. Furthermore, to get the students to work with texts written by or about people from other cultures, and to work with authentic materials about others' lives and real-life worlds can help the students become curious about seeing cultural situations from different perspectives.

### 2.3.2 Savoir (Knowledge)

In addition to Byram et al.'s definition of knowledge (2001, p.6), Byram defines savoir as "knowledge of social groups and their products and practises in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (2008, p. 231). According to Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-von Ditfurth, developing knowledge can consist of working with facts (through film, pictures, texts, the internet, etc.), and working with stereotypes (2007). Usually, prejudice from students' prior knowledge exists and needs to be investigated. This matter will be elaborated in section 2.3.2.

### 2.3.3 Criticism of the model

As almost every other model, Byram's model of ICC has also received criticism. Hoff argues that it is important to look at the model as parts of a whole instead of separate objectives for learning. For example, "attitudes" play a role where "critical cultural awareness" is concerned (2014, p. 515). In other words, we cannot completely rely on achieving competence in just one section of the model, as the competences might complete and strengthen each other. Furthermore, Fred Dervin criticises the model's reliance on "attitudes", which is measured in "showing" curiosity and openness. He argues that it is possible to show without believing in what we are showing. Furthermore, he questions the political bias of "critical cultural awareness", as Byram's model is based on the previous work he did for the Council of Europe (2016, p. 76).

## 2.4 Critical cultural awareness

Critical cultural awareness (CCA) is also one of the components in Byram's model and can be defined as "an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 1997, p. 53). As teachers our job is to encourage our students to make the students consist and explicit in their judgments of their own society and others (p. 54).

### 2.4.1 Decentring

In order to develop CCA, students must learn the concept *decentring*. This derives from Piaget, who defined it as "a feature of operational thought, the ability to conceptualize multiple perspectives simultaneously" (Fincher, 2012). Adrian Holliday also provides a description of decentring, which consists of putting aside established descriptions, seeking a broader picture, and looking for the hidden and unexpressed (2011 p. 28). When seeking the broader picture and the unexpressed, we can use the term *thick description.* Holliday defines this as "an analysis of all the facets of a social phenomenon that make up its full complexity and involves piecing together interconnected data to build a picture of what is going on" (2011, p. 29). It is about finding more information about a phenomenon and getting a greater understanding of how something might be, instead of presuming how it should be in light of our prior knowledge. In contrast to a *thin description*, which is to look at the reported events, a thick description analyses the cultural meaning of an act or a phenomenon (p. 29). For example, if a student who visits China or Japan and experiences someone bowing in his or her direction, we can report that someone bowed towards him/her (thin description). However, the student might not understand the reason the person performed the action. Investigating the situation, the population and the tradition of the Chinese or Japanese people, might provide a richer picture of the situation (thick description).

### 2.4.2 Stereotyping and Othering

When discussing cultural aspects, it is difficult (if not impossible) to avoid the term *stereotypes*. It is defined in numerous ways, one is "a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, race, or community which may lead to treating them in a particular way" (Oxford Reference, 2020). The difference between stereotypes and *prejudice,* is that the latter involves a more emotional reaction. It can be described as negative emotions that are deeper than stereotypes and are never positive (Dypedahl & Bøhn, 2017, p. 47). Dervin defines stereotypes as "a set of beliefs about the characteristics of a social category of people" (2012, p. 186). Kramsch relates stereotyping to our perception of someone's social identity,

which again is culturally determined (1998, p. 67). Despite the fact that we might see stereotyping as something negative, we as humans have a way of wanting to categorize everything we meet. Therefore, stereotyping is a part of a natural process (Dypedahl & Bøhn, 2017, p. 40). Daniel Bar-Tal's studies on stereotypes found that it is important to examine how stereotypes are formed and the factors that cause the creation of them (in Dervin, 2012, p. 186). Often, teachers may try to get rid of their students' stereotypes and replace them with what they believe it the "truth". However, we should map out what the stereotypes are, and then investigate why they are created which can provide us information about where they come from (p. 187).

According to Dypedahl & Bøhn, we can distinguish between *normative* and *personal* stereotypes. Normative stereotypes consider the stereotypes we have without having direct contact with the group we are generalizing (2017, p. 40). This might involve having assumptions about other cultures, nations or religious people that we have never met, for example, *goths, Colombians* or *Buddhists*. Personal stereotypes are the generalizations based on personal experiences (p. 41). For example, we might think that every Colombians act the same as those we met on a short vacation to Colombia. As mentioned, usually we associate stereotypes with something negative. However, there can be positive stereotypes as well. A typical example is the stereotype: "British people are always so polite". This generalization provides a delightful image about how British people are. However, what we might experience, is that not everyone from Britain is polite. This can cause an unnecessary obstacle in the process of learning about another culture. One thing is certain: having negative stereotypes is always a problem as it might affect the dialogue between two cultures (p. 41).

Holliday introduces the concept of *Othering* and defines it as "reducing a group of people to a negative stereotype" (2018, p. 17). This relates to global positioning, and naturally we compare our own positioning to other cultures around the world. Another definition of Othering is "the way members of one social group distance themselves from, or assert themselves over, another by construing the latter as being fundamentally different" (Thornbury, 2012). It can therefore be argued that the concept of Othering is a self-made construction that we see in the light of how we portray ourselves. Dervin argues that the idea of Othering is related to the concept of identity, and that it is about "turning the other into an other, thus creating a boundary between different and the same, insiders and outsiders" (2016, p. 44).

In the classroom setting, students learn about other cultures and their *values*. Values is defined as "the moral principles and beliefs or accepted standards of a person or social group" (The

Collins English Dictionary, in Holliday, 2018, p. 25). Despite the fact that values have positive sides in the way that they represent our "good" principles, Holliday stresses that "they should not be allowed to represent uncrossable barriers that force us into an "us versus them psychology" (2018, p. 25), which again might lead to Othering. This means, that teachers have a vital responsibility in teaching them about openness of others' values. Teaching them ways to encounter other cultures can be of great importance when understanding IC. One way can be to first think about what prejudices we have after meeting someone who has other values, and from this point try to put aside those prejudices to see a greater complexity of who people truly are. Then, to apply the analysis of our reflection into new encounters, is important to see if the prejudices we had have changed (Holliday, 2018, p. 26).

## 2.5 Intercultural awareness

*Intercultural awareness* (ICA) derives from the concept of *cultural awareness* (CA). Will Baker defines ICA as

> a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices, and frames of understanding can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication (Baker, 2012, p. 66)

In other words, it is about being aware of the competences we need to properly communicate with someone of another culture. Baker also provides a table of twelve components of awareness. It provides a picture of what elements within knowledge, skills, and attitudes the L2 learner need to communicate in complex settings. Level 1 presents elements of basic understanding and is called *basic cultural awareness*. It consists of being aware of how a culture carries sets of shared behaviours, beliefs, and values and what role culture and context play in any interpretation of meaning. Next, it involves awareness of our own culturally induced behaviour, values, and beliefs and the ability to articulate this. In addition, to be aware of others' culturally induced behaviour, values, and beliefs and the ability to compare this with our own culturally induced behaviour, values, and beliefs (p. 66).

Level 2 (advanced cultural awareness) consists of a more complex understanding of culture. Here the aims are to be aware of cultural norms and be open to revision. Furthermore, it involves to see multiple perspectives within any cultural grouping and to understand that individuals are members of many social groups (including cultural groups). It is at this stage the awareness of

that the potential for mismatches and miscommunication between specific cultures occurs (p. 66).

Level 3 includes an emergent understanding of cultures and languages in intercultural communication needed for English used in global settings. This includes for example being aware of how stereotypes might be present but being able to move past these in order to understand another culture. (Baker, 2012, p. 66- 67). Intercultural awareness is also about being aware that we are culturally different. One should be allowed to have expectations of people from other cultures, but as important, we must expect that others think differently in social settings than ourselves (Dypedahl & Bøhn, 2017, p. 64-65).

## 2.6 Grammar of culture and the struggle of ambivalence

In the sections above, I have explained what intercultural competence is about. However, to understand how to investigate this topic is another story. Holliday presents the *grammar of culture*, which provides a structure that helps us understand intercultural events in the same way linguistic grammar helps us understand sentences (2018, p. 1). The domains and elements from the model are usually connected and will be of help when "reading" culture. For instance, if I were to investigate students' perceptions about a cultural topic, it would be of great relevance to analyse their statements in the light of these domains, through the following questions: 'Is their statement connected to global positioning? Has is derived from a personal point of view through family and tradition?' These types of questions can be of help when locating why prejudices and misunderstandings occur. As a result of Holliday's analysis of three students' cultural discussions, he presents the notion of *ambivalence and the struggle* (2018, p. 158). In his model (Figure 2), he argues that students attempt to struggle to make sense between their prejudice and their understanding, and the ambivalence enables them to go in both directions.
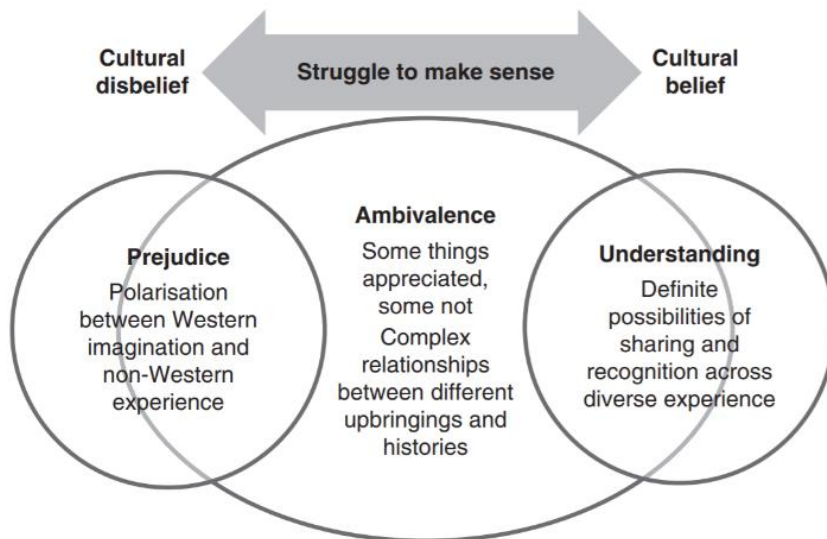
Figure 2: Ambivalence and struggle

Holliday argues however, that it is vital that we guide our students in the right direction, as having stereotypes might lead to prejudice (2018, p. 159). Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to be aware of students' ambivalence and their need for help to gain understanding. I believe Holliday's matter of ambivalence and the struggle is one aspect that is missing from Byram's model, as it is something that occurs between accomplishing his five components. If teachers are aware of this ambivalence, it can be of help when leading the students from stereotypes to new understandings, and thus to support the development of intercultural competence.

Kramsch also views culture as a *place of struggle,* where there will often be a difference with our individual's view of the other's culture, as well as a conflict between the two various cultures we find ourselves belonging to (1993, p. 24). Furthermore, Kramsch introduces the notion of *third space*, which is an "[…] ambivalent space in which third perspectives can grow in the margins of dominant ways of seeing." (2009, p. 237). This space will let our cultural mindset change as it allows room for interpretation. Kramsch argues that our job as teachers is to make our students aware of their struggle, and to help them find a way of living and learning with this ambivalence (p. 240).

## 2.7 Cultural identity and globalization

When teaching intercultural education, it is important to consider the teachers' and students' cultural standpoints. 'Who are you? Where are you?'. These are questions we must ask ourselves to address our *cultural identity*. According to Lene Arnett Jensen, cultural identity is about "taking on worldview beliefs and engaging in behavioural practices that unite people within a community" (2003, p. 190). However, not all members hold uniform beliefs, as factors such as generation, gender, individual differences, religion, and social class can affect our worldview. Forming our cultural identity means to see other societies, morals, and religious ideals in relation to our own. However, this can be quite difficult, as we often feel connected to multiple cultural communities (p. 190-191). In the EFL classroom, we deal with adolescent students. Jensen argues that during this period, developing cultural identity is even more complex, as the students are forming multicultural identities while they have interactions with people from diverse cultures (p. 189). Another reason is that students' cultural identities are affected by *globalization.*

Globalization "involves a multidirectional flow of people, goods, and ideas" (Jensen, Arnett & McKenzie, 2011, p. 287), and one of the main reasons is migration. However, when discussing how cultural identity is affected by globalization during adolescence, media has the greatest role. This involves primarily the internet, television, movies, and music, where adolescents are getting loads of cultural information without even giving it a thought (p. 287). It is therefore of vital importance, that we keep this in mind when teaching culture in the classroom, to make the students aware of where they are getting information and to discuss what they know/believe.

## 2.8 Democracy and citizenship

*Democracy and citizenship* is the term that replaces *intercultural education* in the new curriculum (after the refugee crisis in 2014) to acknowledge that the "problem" is no longer one of relating to foreign cultures, but one of having a strong democracy with attitudes of openness right here in Norway. According to Dypedahl & Bøhn, the curriculum states that promoting democracy and citizenship should develop students' "(…) tolerance of different mindsets and different ways of doing things, while agreeing on some general principles" (2020, p. 84). Therefore, teaching culture and democracy can go hand in hand. Students then might be able to see the similarities when it comes to being respect and being open-minded. Furthermore, UNESCO defines *democratic culture* as:

attitudes and behaviours that seek to resolve conflicts peacefully; recognize that while majorities decide, minorities have rights; are respectful of diversity and mindful of our physical environment; and include all members of society (2018).

In other words, this concept offers a more democratic side to intercultural education and can be of great importance when teaching students about other cultures and societies. This can prepare students to become active citizens in democratic societies and be of help in their personal development throughout life. Similar to Byram's model of ICC, the Council of Europe has created a model of competences for democratic culture:

**Values**
- Valuing human dignity and human rights
- Valuing cultural diversity
- Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

**Attitudes**
- Openness to cultural otherness and other beliefs, world views and practices
- Respect
- Civic-mindedness
- Responsibility
- Self-efficacy
- Tolerance of ambiguity

**Competence**

**Skills**
- Autonomous learning skills
- Analytical and critical thinking skills
- Skills of listening and observing
- Empathy
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills
- Cooperation skills
- Conflict-resolution skills

**Knowledge and critical understanding**
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the self
- Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the world: politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, environment, sustainability

Figure 3: The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)

This model can be used at all sorts of levels in education, and state that a democratically competent student will demonstrate all competences to some extent (UNESCO, 2018).

## 2.9 Chapter summary

To understand how EFL students can learn and practice intercultural competences through life and education, it is important to be aware of the different but related components in Byram's model (1997). Through a specific framework of IC, the students will understand how they can develop critical cultural awareness, which consists of putting aside established descriptions, seeking a broader picture, and looking for the hidden and unexpressed (Holliday, 2011, p. 28). Furthermore, the students should be aware of cultural ambivalence, identity, and globalization, as they are important factors in the process of acquiring intercultural competence.

# 3. Methodology

This thesis' uses a qualitative research design and triangulation is used to collect different sets of data (Mackey & Gass, 2015; Frankfort-Nachmias, Nachmias & DeWaard, 2015). In this chapter, I will first discuss the philosophical background, before the research design is presented. The school project, research participants, data collection methods, and the data analysis are discussed. At the end of the chapter, I will review the aspects of validity, reliability, and research ethics.

## 3.1. Research philosophy

For this MA thesis, I have chosen a *phenomenological* approach as my research philosophy. Alan Bryman defines this as "a philosophy that is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them and how in particular the philosopher should bracket out preconceptions in his or her grasp of that world" (2016, p. 26). The philosophy concerns a qualitative research design, which aims to assemble information about a phenomenon, usually in form of text, audio, and images (Johannesen, Tufte & Christoffersen, 2010, p. 99). In this study, my aim is to look at students' attitudes and beliefs through focus group interviews and pre- and post-surveys. According to Gianfranco Soldati, phenomenology can be used to study the "conscious, phenomenal and subjective qualities of experiences that can be veridical and justified" (2011, p. 385). The whole methodology section is seen in the light of phenomenology, where I have attempted to keep its values in mind when collecting and interpreting the data.

## 3.2 Qualitative research design

In order to answer my research questions, I have chosen a qualitative research design. The main aim of this thesis was to explore students' perceptions of Americans and the US election as expressed in a school project in English lower secondary school (RQ1) and to examine the challenges related to fostering students' intercultural competence in English based on the students' statements (RQ2). Mackey & Gass defines qualitative research as research "that is based on descriptive data that does not make (regular) use of statistical procedures" (2015, p. 215). The intentions of this study are to investigate rich description from a few participants, in order to get insight in their attitudes and beliefs. As mentioned, I rely of multiple data sources, such as focus group interviews and pre- and post-surveys. Therefore, the data collection of the

study is considered a *triangulation*, which is the "use if multiple methods in a study to see if the findings that emerge from each will converge on a common conclusion, thereby increasing the validity of the results" (Frankfort-Nachmias, Nachmias & DeWaard, 2015, p. 170). The same students that participated in the surveys were also the ones who participated in the focus group interview, which means that I as a researcher can consider the students' statements in two settings, making sure I truly understand what they try to say. As the data collection occurs at different stages of the school project, this study also has a cross-sectional design.

## 3.3 Research participants

From the two sets of classes, six students agreed to participate in my research project, three boys and three girls. Since they are eighth-graders (ages 12-13), the students' parents were informed by a parental consent form (see Appendix B) to give their consent (Ringdal, 2018). The parental consent form was approved by the Norwegian Centre of Research Data (NSD) (see Appendix A). In addition to their parents' approval, the students also had to sign approval. It was their teacher who handed out the parental consent form and information about my research project, however, I was the one who collected them. I also asked the students before the project if they were okay with participating, which all the students confirmed. In the *Research Ethics* section, I further elaborate this.

### 3.3.1 Selection of the participants

I was dedicated to select randomly from those who had confirmed that they wanted to participate. On the day I was conducting the pre-survey (and had to begin my project), six students had handed in the parental consent form. This made the selection easy, as these were the students that were asked to participate. When I was going to conduct my interviews, three more students (in addition to the six) had handed in the parental consent form and signed that they wanted to participate. These three students participated in the pilot interview.

## 3.4 Data collection methods

### 3.4.1 Pre- and post-surveys

Surveys can be defined as "a system for collecting information from or about people to describe, compare, or explain their knowledge attitudes, and behaviour" (Fink, 2003, p. 2). My surveys were characterized by open-ended questions, allowing the participants to state their views in their own words and to describe the world as they see it (p. 13). Surveys, in the form of a

questionnaire, is the most common way to collect qualitative information from participants (Mackey & Gass, 2015, p. 102). Despite the fact that my surveys are considered qualitative surveys, there were a couple of quantitative questions as well. To investigate where the students get their information about the presidential election, I created boxes where they could cross off which responses that suited them. For example:

| | Foreldrene dine | | Amerikanske nyheter |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Venner | | Sosiale medier |
| | Norske nyheter | | Annet |

(Appendix D)

In addition, to see if they changed their mind about who they wanted to win the election, in both surveys they were able to cross off the candidate of their choice.

For my research I wanted to look at the students' answers before and after this project, as well as to compare them to the focus group interview. Mackey & Gass argue that an open-ended questionnaire (a subset of survey research) resembles a structured interview (2015, p. 225). In my pre-survey I asked questions such as "What do you think are the similarities and differences between Americans and Norwegians?" and "What do you know about Donald Trump? Write down what you know" (Appendix D). As the students were handed identical surveys, it can be seen as a structured interview. The post-survey consisted of some of the same questions as in the pre-survey, however, its main focus was to ask about the finalized presidential election and how they felt about it. "What do you think about the American presidential election (your opinion)" and "What do you think are the reasons why Americans are so divided right now?" are examples of questions from the post-survey (Appendix E).

### 3.4.2 Interviews

Mackey & Gass expresses how a semi-structured interview can give the researcher the advantage of having the freedom to digress and probe for more information (2015, p. 225). A semi-structured interview gave me the opportunity to provide follow-up questions on what the students said. Even though I followed the interview guide on all of the interviews, some follow-up questions were different in each interview to get the students to elaborate. I chose a focus group interview to get the students talking both with each other and with me as a researcher. Therefore, the interview became more of a conversation rather than a formal interview. Furthermore, in some situations I re-arranged the order of the questions to get a more natural flow of the conversation. Mackey & Gass also stresses how focus group interviews can be useful when asking questions about previously elicited data (in this case the school project)

(2015, p. 225). As these are eighth-graders, I had to also consider that not everyone would be comfortable and have the skill to provide in-depth answers in for example open-ended surveys. Therefore, giving them the chance to give their answers orally might offer a more realistic picture of their attitudes and beliefs (p. 225). According to Brinkmann & Kvale, focus group interviews do not seek solutions to what is discussed, but bring forth a variety of viewpoints on an issue, in this case; their attitudes and beliefs (2014, p. 175).

The interview guide was divided into four sections. *Introduction, Presidential election, TED-talk* and *finalization.* The introduction consisted of questions such as "What role did you create in the TED-talk project" and "how would you describe a typical American?". This was to get them into a comfortable setting as the questions were open and not difficult to answer, but also to provide me some general information for RQ1. The next section asked questions about Trump, Biden and their supporters. Following, questions about the TED-talk project were asked in order to look at strategies and challenges. Lastly, the finalization section consisted of questions about what they have learned and how they felt about the project. The interview guide can be found in Appendix C.

I transcribed the interviews about a week after they were conducted. In the section of "validity in the interview transcripts", I thoroughly discuss my considerations of the transcriptions. I used codes for each participant in my transcript securing their anonymity. There were a couple of times the students forgot that they were not supposed to mention each other's first name, but in my transcripts, I never wrote down the mentioned names.

In the table below, I present the interview information. It consists of the research participants (names are coded), length of the interviews, pages and words of transcription, and what political viewpoint their TED-talk character had.

Table 1: Focus group interview information

| Focus group interviews (names are coded) | Time | Pages (font: Times new roman, size 12) | Words | Character's political viewpoint for the TED-talk |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| John Judith Oliver | 41 min 57 sec | 17 | 5837 | Biden supporter Trump supporter Trump supporter |
| Amy Simon Evan | 29 min 16 sec | 15 | 4517 | Trump supporter Trump supporter Trump supporter |

### 3.4.3 Language considerations

When collecting my data, I wanted the students to give as detailed and honest responses as possible. As some students might think it is difficult or frightening to answer in English, they were asked to talk and to write in Norwegian. This was to allow them to speak more freely and enabled them to be more reflective in their responses. As this study's intention is to be read by researchers and teachers from every part of the world, I have chosen to translate the students' statements from Norwegian into English. It makes the thesis more understandable and readable for English speakers outside of Norway, yet it causes some other aspects that I must consider. Except where minor changes were required to maintain conversational style, the translation from Norwegian has been kept as literal as possible. However, the English language has a far richer vocabulary than the Norwegian language (Helland & Kaasa, 2005, p. 43). This meant that I had to be careful when choosing what English words to use when translating. In addition, how the students' statements sounded in the interview might be different than how they appear when written. I used cursive in an attempt to show the reader where some words were stressed by the students. Example:

> **Norwegian**: Han er *så* Trump.

> **English:** He is *so* Trump.

As mentioned, the English language is considered richer, but there are some Norwegian words that might not exist in English. For example:

> **Norwegian:** (…) men Amerikanere er nok mer vant til det. For å være ærlig, så synes jeg Nordmenn er mer forsiktige og fisefine.

> **English:** (…) but Americans are probably used to it. To be honest, I think Norwegians are more careful and "snobbish".

In the example above, the student uses the Norwegian word "fisefin". This is considered a Norwegian slang and cannot be found in the English dictionary. Therefore, I had to find a word as comparable as possible. In this case, the word "snobbish" was used in the translation. These considerations have been carefully thought through the transcription process.

## 3.5 The data collection

The first step of the data collection was to conduct survey 1, and on Friday the 2$^{nd}$ of October (week 40) I was given the opportunity to gather the participants. I told them about the purpose of the project as well as their anonymity and rights. Furthermore, I expressed the importance of their honesty, and that there are no "wrong" answers: If they did not have something to answer, they could skip to the next question. Their teacher had told me that they were supposed to work with a certain task/test for this lesson, which seemed to affect some of the students' behaviours. I informed them that they would be given extra time to fulfil this afterwards and told them that they should take their time to properly fill out the survey. All six of the participants were present and all the surveys were submitted.

After two weeks, their "project week" took place, and these activities were led by the teachers at the school. Most of the lessons in this week were dedicated to their TED-talk project, consisting of lectures on how to give speeches, how to properly create a TED-talk, and more general lessons where they were able to work with their role cards. I was present to observe their lessons, and I informed the students about my role and purpose of being in there, to take notes about what they were doing, and write down comments they made (anonymously).

At the end of the project week, the students filmed their TED-talk presentations. The following week, I gathered the participants for a focus group interview. On Monday the 19$^{th}$ of October, I conducted the pilot interview. Three random students from the classes were invited to participate. After the interview, I felt that the interview questions were suitable and accurate my research purpose and decided to not make any changes on the interview guide. The following day (October 20$^{th}$), I conducted the two focus group interviews (three students in each interview). Whilst the students were interviewed, the rest of the class were in regular lessons. Their teachers informed me that they could easily redo these lessons later on, making sure the participants did not miss out on any classroom learning.

The students were informed about their role and anonymity of their participation. In line with both national guidelines and guidelines at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, my supervisor and I decided that it was acceptable to use my mobile phone as a recorder, since no personal data was collected. The students were simply there to talk about their perceptions on American culture, the election, and the project. The recordings were stored on a secure memory pen and will be deleted after the thesis is submitted (May 18$^{th}$, 2021).

Exactly one month later, the post-survey was conducted on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November. As the presidential election had ended a couple of weeks before, they were asked to answer questions about the election and the school project.

## 3.6 Data analysis

There are several ways to analyse in qualitatively, however, I have chosen to conduct a *thematic analysis* of the collected data. In contrast to content analysis, critical discourse analysis, grounded theory, etc., thematic analysis does not have an identifiable heritage and does not have a bundle of distinctive techniques (Bryman, 2016, p. 584). Nevertheless, thematic analysis is used by researchers more and more. This is because it more recently has been accepted by the research community as its own method of analysis. According to Bryman, a theme is:

> a category identified by the analysist through his/her data; that relates to his/her research focus (…); that builds on codes identified in transcripts and/or field notes; and that provides the researcher with the basis of a theoretical understanding of his or her data that can make a theoretical contribution to the literature relating to the research focus (2016, p. 584).

Bryman's description of themes provides me as a researcher space and opportunities to look at my data with an open mind in addition to being aware of research topic.

When conducting my thematic analyses, I have taken inspiration from Braun & Clark's *step-by-step guidelines* (2006, p. 86). They present a six-step process, which made it clear and possible for me to get started analysing the different sets of data. In short, Braun & Clark first present *Phase 1*, which is about familiarizing myself with my data. This involves reading the transcripts repeatedly to become familiar with all of the content. Next, *Phase 2* is about generalizing codes. In other words, to label features that appear interesting. These can be either data-driven or theory-driven, or both. *Phase 3* is about connecting the codes and finding themes. These can be created through for example a thematic map, which is a mind-map of the recognized codes connected to themes. *Phase 4* involves reviewing the identified themes, in order to see if there is enough data to support the theme. *Phase 5* is about defining and naming the themes. Lastly, *Phase 6* is about producing a report of the findings (2006, p. 87-93). In the next sections, I explain and provide examples on how implemented principles of thematic analysis into my data.

### 3.6.1 Qualitative analysis of the focus group interviews

To begin the process of analysing my interview transcripts, I first listened to the recordings while re-reading the students' statements to make sure I had transcribed them correctly. In addition, this made me become familiar with the content. I then used the software NVivo to start coding on a broader level. This means that I coded sentences that the students said, and categorized them into themes such as "American descriptions", "American culture", etc. This provided me with a picture of what my data was about. I then started the initial coding (on paper) on a deeper level, in order to see if there were any smaller themes that could be identified. After several rounds of coding, the identified themes were similar to the ones from NVivo, which made me certain of my findings.

As the identified themes are in relation to the research questions, I found an organized and effective way of analysing the students' statements. I created different types of tables, in order to structure the essence of what they are saying. Table 2 and table 3 are examples of how I conducted the qualitative analysis of the students' statement in relation to themes/topics.

Table 2: Example of students' descriptions of Norwegians from interview group 2

| Interview group 2 | Statement | Key words/themes |
|---|---|---|
| Amy | "I think of socialists in a way." | Socialism |
| Simon | "I think of skis, brown cheese, and yeah. That is what I think of." | Stereotypes |
| Evan | "I think of the normal life in Norway… kind of." | Connecting to own life |

Table 3: Example of students' descriptions of Trump from interview group 1

| Interview group 1 | Statement | Key words |
|---|---|---|
| John | "I think that Donald Trump is extremely childish." | - Childish |
| Judith | "I think he is racist and homophobic, and rude towards women... and things like that."<br><br>"I have seen interviews where he does not care about what others think about… when something (about him) comes out, he only says fake news. That makes him kind of arrogant." | - Racist<br>- Homophobic<br>- Rude towards women<br>- Careless<br>- Fake news<br>- Arrogant |
| Oliver | He is a very rich person who uses money to manipulate people to believe he is better than what he | - Rich<br>- Manipulative<br>- Racist |

| | is. Because he is very racist in his tweets, and he is criticised on how he formulates them… but many see this as a good thing and do the same things in their lives. When the President can do it, so can you. It becomes a habit, for example that there occurs more racism in the society." | - Criticised<br>- Bad role model |
|---|---|---|

### 3.6.2 Qualitative analysis of the surveys

When analysing the surveys, I first coded the transcripts and found themes/categories. The themes were then recognized, and I realized they were similar to the ones from the interview transcripts. I created a table inspired by Vattøy (2015), where I analysed their statements and found the essence in what they said.

Table 4: Example of table of reduction

| Student / Reduction | What do you know about the upcoming US presidential election? | What do you know about the Democratic party in the US? | What do you know about the Republican party in the US? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Amy<br>**Reduction:**<br>Knowledge of the candidates.<br>Targeted advertising.<br>Believes Americans are polarized.<br>Knowledge of the parties and their beliefs.<br>Compares to Norwegian politics. | "Biden vs Trump. They have used a lot of money on the election campaign. People in the US are getting commercials related to their political standpoint. People in the US are more polarized now than before. It is in November." | "They have a donkey as a logo. Joe Biden runs for them. They can be compared to the red side of Norwegian politics. They want higher taxes. Barack Obama ran for them." | "They have an elephant as a logo, I think. They want lower taxes. They can be compared to the blue side of Norwegian politics." |

I also conducted an analysis of their attitudes and beliefs from the surveys. I created columns for the categories "personal opinion about the US election" and "change in perception".

Table 5: Students' attitudes and beliefs about the US election

| Student | Personal opinion about the US election | Change in perception | Recap |
|---|---|---|---|
| John | I think the US election is a bit weird. I think they should be able to vote for the president they want. | My perception on the US election has not changed by itself. I still have the same | *A questioning attitude towards the election.* |

| | | perception but another perspective. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Judith | After everything, all the school projects, I gained more understanding of Trump and those who like him, but I am really happy Biden won. | As I said, more respect for Trump, but not much. | *New understanding of Trump and his supporters. Satisfied with the result.* |
| Oliver | That it is exciting, but it is bad that a country's president has so many opinions. | Why people vote for Trump. | *Exciting to learn about the election. New understanding of why Americans vote for Trump.* |

After several rounds of analysing and interpreting the surveys, I presented a narrative summary of what the students stated before and after the election in the findings section. This analysis will be of help in the discussion of my results. To make sure I did not "cherry pick" responses that suited my own interests I found it necessary to present what each student said about the topics.

## 3.7 Validity and reliability

In this section, I will address the *validity* and *reliability* in the present study. When conducting a research project, it is of significant importance to discuss these terms as they represent the quality of the research.

### 3.7.1 Validity

In social research, validity "refers to the credibility of out interpretations" (Silverman, 2013, p. 285), as well as "(….) whether you are observing, identifying, or "measuring" what you say you are" (Mason, 1996, in Bryman, 2016, p. 383). LeCompte & Goetz divides validity into *external validity* and *internal validity*. External validity is about generalization, and how the study can be credible for other social settings. This relates to how qualitative studies usually focuses on small samples, and I must argue how it can or cannot be legitimate for a larger group. The present study is seen as a case study on six 8th graders and cannot be generalized for a large group of students across social settings, as it concerns personal attitudes and beliefs about a topic. Internal validity is about the correspondence between the researcher's interpretations/observations and the theoretical ideas he or she develop (Bryman, 2016, p. 384).

To ensure the theoretical terms and descriptions that are being used in this study are valid, the transcriptions were analysed (or read through thoroughly) by both me the researcher and the supervisor. Validation was confirmed when both of us were settling on similar terminology. Earlier, I also mentioned that triangulation strengthens the validity. In my study I use different types of data collection methods to seek knowledge about the same phenomenon from diverse perspectives. In addition, I conducted a pilot interview with three other students, in order to see if there were any questions or words they did not understood. Nevertheless, no misunderstandings were identified, which made me confident that the interview guide was valid.

**Validity in the pre- and post-surveys**

The surveys in this study resemble more a structured interview rather than a quantitative survey, as the questions are open-ended (Mackey & Gass, 2015, p. 225). This means that *concept validity,* which "relates primarily to quantitative research and to the search of measures of social scientific concepts" is not of relevance when investigating the validity of my surveys (Bryman, 2016, p. 41). The validity in the surveys relies on the *objectivity* of interpretation, which Brinkmann & Kvale refers to as freedom from bias. To be completely free from bias is nearly impossible, however, we can try to do solid research and produce knowledge that has been systematically cross-checked and verified (2014, p. 278).

**Validity in the interview transcripts**

Brinkmann & Kvale argues that "validity refers in ordinary language to the truth, the correctness, and the strength of a statement." (2014, p. 282). Furthermore, they present seven stages of validation. Step 4, *transcribing*, is about "(…) how valid the translation form oral to written language is involved by the choice of linguistic style of the transcript" (p. 284). In my transcription, my intention was to transcribe the conversation as trustworthy as possible. Therefore, I included examples of laughter = (laughter) and pauses = (…), to make the reader see and interpret how the participants were expressing themselves during statements. Example:

> **Participant**: But in the background it looks like he is in the hospital … but he looks mad. Reminds me of Trump a little bit. But Biden because he looks young. His chins. Butt chins. (Laughter appears)

*Research validation* can be a great way of cross-checking if the researcher's findings match with the participant's experience (Bryman, 2016, p. 385). As I interviewed eighth-graders, it was difficult for me to come back and cross-check every finding with the students. However,

during the interviews, I consistently asked the students if they could confirm that I had understood them correctly. For example:

> **Participant:** Could have helped and explained us a little bit more. Okay, here is the information. Go figure it out they said.
> **Researcher:** So, more guidance?
> **Participant:** Yes.

### 3.7.2 Reliability

As validity is of vital importance, the *reliability* in qualitative research is as much, if not more important. Reliability "pertains to the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings; it is often treated in relation to the issue of whether a finding is reproducible at other times and by other reserachers" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014, p. 281). In quantitative studies validity and reliability is often more "simpler" as it involves statistical matters and measurements. In contrast, qualitative studies are about the involvement between researcher and participant, which makes the findings difficult, if not impossible to identically reproduce. As in validity, LeCompte & Goetz introduces the terms *external* and *internal* reliability. External reliability is the degree to which a study can be replicated, while internal reliability is about "whether, when there is more than one observer, members of the research team agree about what they see and hear" (Bryman, 2016. p. 384). In the following paragraphs I will argue how I have considered reliability in the present study.

**The reliability in the present study**

Silverman expresses how in qualitative research, the most effective way of showing reliability is to "show the audience the procedures you used to ensure that your methods were reliable and your conclusion valid" (2013, p. 301). Throughout the whole thesis, but especially in the current chapter, I have tried to justify and illustrate my choices in detail, in order for a researcher to get the opportunity to conduct the same project in another social setting.

When the students were conducting the open-ended surveys and the interviews, I tried my best to avoid involving myself. I was not there to interfere, but to listen. The students were not interrupted during the surveys, and during the interviews I only asked them to elaborate or confirm what they just stated. However, there are some elements one must consider when conducting interviews. The most important thing to keep in mind, is that one is dealing with human beings. The students might have a rough day as something might have occurred at home or at school. This can lead to them not wanting to give as detailed answers as they normally

would (internal validity). In addition, if they are stressed about a situation, they might have their mind somewhere else. Not being focused about what is being asked can lead to short and unclear answers. This is out of the interviewer's control, however, having good interviewing skills can help make the situation as comfortable as possible for the student. This is an example of how reliability is difficult in qualitative research, as different researchers will meet different research participants.

## 3.8 Research ethics

It is of vital importance to discuss *research ethics* when conducting research within social science. According to The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH), the term research ethics "refers to a wide variety of values, norms, and institutional arrangements that help constitute and regulate scientific activities" (2019). Furthermore, NESH provides four guidelines that can help the researcher to show scientific moral in practice:

1. norms that constitute good scientific practice, related to the quest for accurate, adequate and relevant knowledge (academic freedom, originality, openness, trustworthiness etc.)
2. norms that regulate the research community (integrity, accountability, impartiality, criticism etc.)
3. the relationship to people who take part in the research (respect, human dignity, confidentiality, free and informed consent etc.)
4. the relationship to the rest of society (independence, conflicts of interest, social responsibility, dissemination of research etc.) (2019)

When I conducted my research, I tried to my best intention to follow these guidelines and to stay true to these norms and values. In this chapter, I have shown that I have constituted good scientific practice and been open and trustworthy when discussing how I conducted my research. In the next sections, I argue how I valued the relationship to the participants, showing them respect, considering their integrity and providing them informed consent.

### 3.8.1 Research participants' integrity

In qualitative research, there are a variety of ethical considerations one must keep in mind when working with human beings. Bryman introduces the concept of "harm to participants", which concerns how unacceptable it is if during data collection; physical harm, harm to participants' development, loss of self-esteem, stress and inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts

occurs (2016, p. 126). During my interviews, I consistently told the participants that I wanted to gather their opinions rather than knowledge. This seemed to make the situation comfortable, especially when they knew their voice was anonymous. In addition, our roles during the interview were presented in the beginning, making them understand that I was there not to guide or control the situation, but to listen. As mentioned earlier, I tried only to confirm or get them to elaborate on their statements. Lastly, I allowed them to speak in Norwegian, which allows them to represent themselves and their opinions better.

### 3.8.2 Research transparency

During this methodology chapter, I have attempted to be as honest and open about my choices as possible. NESH argues that showing data transparency is important when considering research ethics, as the "[r]esearch material should be made available to other researchers for secondary analysis and further use" (2019). In my appendices, I have attached all data material that have been used in this research project (interview guide, surveys, etc.).

### 3.8.3 Duty to inform and right to protection

In qualitative research it is important to inform the participants about the field and purpose of the research. In addition, the participants must be aware of the consequences of participation, in order to feel that their integrity is taken care of (NESH, 2019). Since the participants are 8th graders and considered as children, a parental consent was sent out to the participants parents or caretakers (see Appendix B). This also made sure that the participants understood what the research was about to prevent harm. The parental consent form was created from a template of NSD, and thereby followed NSD's guidelines. Despite that it is called a parental consent, it was important that the students wanted to participate. Therefore, both the parent and the student had to fill inn "I agree" at the bottom of the form. It was completely voluntary to participate, and those who chose not to participate were not affected by this. As the participants' personal privacy is of great importance, the project was conducted in the light of NSD's guidelines. All personal data will be destroyed at the end of the research project. In addition, all research material is anonymised for the participants privacy, and there is no way of identifying who they are.

### 3.8.4 Limitations

The aim of this study was to highlight the beliefs and attitudes of six individual students and the study does not represent the beliefs and attitudes of many lower-secondary students in Norway. The concepts found in this study should be viewed with care, but they are also important issues to consider for improving students' intercultural learning. The research data

was collected and analysed in a specific and limited context. This means that my findings cannot be generalized, however, they must be seen within its context. The students' statements contributed to an in-depth understanding of how they perceive Americans and the US election, and challenges related to intercultural competence. Furthermore, I did not design the school project, which means that I had limited control over the research design. This means that my research is based on a realistic event that would have taken place in a school setting regardless of if I were there or not. Last, I was not a part of the lessons prior to the school project, which means that I had to trust the teachers on what the students had learned.

## 3.9 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I presented and discussed the research design and the methodological concerns. This thesis is considered a qualitative approach, and the data collection method is seen as triangulation. Furthermore, the thesis reports on a school project carried out in English teaching in lower secondary school. The research participants, data collection methods, and the data analysis used in this thesis were discussed. Finally, the aspects of validity, reliability, and research ethic were drawn into consideration regarding the two data collection methods.

# 4. Findings

The main aim of this thesis was to explore students' perceptions of Americans and the US election as expressed in a school project in English lower secondary school (RQ1) and to examine the challenges related to fostering students' intercultural competence in English based on students' statements (RQ2). This chapter presents the findings related to research question 1, which again will be discussed in the light of theory in the next chapter to answer research question 2. The findings emerged from the thematic analysis of the two data collection methods and consist of the students' perception of topics such as Americans in contrast to Norwegians, the US presidential election, and American voters.

## 4.1 Findings on students' perceptions of Americans in contrast to Norwegians

### 4.1.1 The 'typical' American

Early in the interview, the students were asked to describe how they perceived a "typical American". This question was intended as an easy opener to make the students feel comfortable in the interview situation, but it also provided a starting point for how the students perceived other topics. The question is also in line with the main aims of the English subject curriculum in Norway which ask that students be able to describe lifestyles and mindsets in the English-speaking world (UDIR, 2020).

John from interview group 1 (IG1) and Evan from interview group 2 (IG2) are sharing different ideas on how they portray Americans. John describes Americans in terms of their appearance, he thinks about Americans as a "[…] white person. Walks around with his trousers sagging (laughter appears). […] Maybe doing drugs". Evan on the other hand, immediately connects the question to language: "I think of English, but I prefer British English. But I think of American English". In addition, he expresses that he also "think[s] a bit on someone who runs around thinking weapons are surprisingly important".

Amy and Simon (IG2) suggest that Americans can be perceived as self-centred and of egoistic behaviour, although Simon restates his claim in order not to generalize.

> **Amy:** One thinks about them as egoists in a way.
>
> **Researcher:** Why do you think that?
>
> **Amy:** Well, one thinks of them like … Yes, I am the most important, I am going to become rich and be independent.
>
> **Simon:** Yes. […] Many want to become rich, and they really do believe that. But then there are many who do not. […] It is difficult to become rich. The American dream.

Oliver portrays Americans as someone who "works two jobs a day" and is having financial issues. Judith agrees with Oliver (IG1) by emphasising that she thinks of someone who "struggle with everything". When being asked if they believe that Americans live in poor conditions (poverty), two point of views appears:

> **Judith:** "Yes or have it more difficult than Norwegians."

> **John:** "But they are not directly poor, it is more about how they spend their money. […] it depends on if they eat a lot. If they eat a lot of snacks, that is expensive. Then they have to pay a lot of taxes. It also depends on where one lives. […].

Amy, Simon, Judith, and Oliver connect their insights to what they believe is the realistic and "dark" side of the American life, may be as a result of what they have learned prior to the project through the *UXA* documentary and their own research. John and Evan on the other hand, address the question in a simpler matter and connect it to their previous understanding.

### 4.1.2 Norwegian comparisons and the 'typical' Norwegian

After being asked about Americans, the students were asked how they would describe a "typical Norwegian". Not different from the previous question, the students offers both thick and thin descriptions of how they portray Norwegians.

In interview group 1, Oliver starts off with a complete distinction from how he portrayed Americans. "A typical Norwegian is maybe someone who has one job and is paid well. Has the economy in place (financial stable). Eh… yeah, has a family". Interestingly, when John is building on Oliver statement, he provides several stereotypes. "When I think of a Norwegian, then I think of someone who maybe likes fish, potatoes and brown sauce. Normal stuff. […] Probably doing well in school. Yeah, the same as Oliver". Judith continues this pattern, and comments that she thinks of someone who drinks coffee and reading the paper in the morning.

Interview group 2 is not very different from interview group 1. Simon expresses that he thinks of "skis" and "brown cheese" (laughter appears). Amy, however, reveals that she thinks of "socialists". When being asked to elaborate, she says that she thinks of someone who thinks togetherness is important. Evan chooses to connect his answer to his own worldview. "I think a little bit of … the normal Norwegian life like in Bergen, kind of".

Furthermore, to get them comparing Norwegians to Americans, I asked the question "In terms of personality, what are the differences and similarities?". Judith expresses she believes

Americans are used to have it tougher (social differences), which makes Oliver talk about Americans' struggle with their "right to strike" under President Reagan (political differences). Amy on the other hand, expresses that there also are similarities as "we [both] come from the western part of the world". Lastly, Evan expresses that he sees similarities, but there are cultural differences between Norwegians and Americans, and elaborates "[…] they focus more on family, which is a huge culture thing that forms the culture. Also, thanksgiving and things like that".

### 4.1.3 Statements about Americans and Norwegians from the surveys

The students were also told to describe Americans in the surveys. Some had met Americans here in Norway or on vacation in America, and all the shared experiences were reported as positive. They describe Americans as "kind" people. On the question about the similarities and difference between Americans and Norwegians (pre-survey), several comments were made. Judith stated that she believes there are a "big difference with the police and things like that". Simon also shares this experience and expressed that "the difference is that the police kill much more (people), and the similarities are that both countries want to be a good country". In short, many of the students express that there are cultural differences and sets of values between the countries (Oliver, Amy, Evan).

In the post-survey, the students added more information to the same question. John expressed that the difference is "that Norwegians have free education and health care, while Americans have to pay". Judith stated that she believes "there is racism in both societies, but Americans are probably used to it. To be honest, I think Norwegians are more careful and "snobbish" (Norwegian: fisefin) compared to Americans since we have a society that function alright". Amy argued that "Norwegians are similar to Americans, since we are both from the western part of the world and want the best for everyone". She also addressed how media portrays Americans as extreme. In addition, she believes Americans are "probably more about themselves". According to Evan, he wrote that he also believes both Norwegians and Americans live in a capitalistic society with different traditions.

## 4.2 Findings on students' descriptions of the US presidential election, Trump and Biden

The upcoming findings indicate that the students have gained general knowledge about the US presidential election during the project, and some have gotten a new understanding on why American voters vote as they do. Furthermore, their statements reveal that most, if not all of the students, carry negative assumptions about Donald Trump. Despite that some express that they have a greater understanding of why Americans vote for Trump, their perceptions show that they might still be affected by the previous knowledge they had prior to the project. When discussing Biden, some of the students seem to carry a few negative assumptions about him as well. Nevertheless, most of the students are having a more positive attitude towards Biden, and express that his political standpoints are more similar to "how we have it in Norway".

### 4.2.1 Knowledge of the US presidential election

When being asked what they know about the American presidential election the students shared different type of information. John (IG1) expresses that he thinks of Biden and Trump arguing and seems uncertain on how the current political situation is standing.

> **John:** I think of Biden and Trump talking. Or arguing really.
>
> **Researcher:** Yes, you are saying Biden and Trump, who do they represent?
>
> **John:** Biden is… he might become president, or not. I guess you can call him a normal person. And Trump, is he still president?
>
> **Oliver**: Yes.

Judith elaborates on her peers' comments with a broader insight on the election:

> Biden stands for, uhm, yeah free health care, and therefore there must be a little bit higher tax. Since it is not completely free. Trump wants to lower the taxes, because as I have mentioned, there are many who struggle with income and things like that. He wants it to be easier for those who… for a normal American.

Simon and Amy (IG2) also shared general knowledge about which parties the presidential candidates represent. In addition, Simon reveals that he thinks of the election campaign, in terms of that "there are like five million who are not allowed to vote, because they have been to prison or been convicted. […] So, most of those who have been to prison, they voted for Democrats, I think. So that could be negative for Trump". Amy agrees, and believes that "Trump is making it harder for people to vote. They know that if more people vote, they will vote for Biden. […] If all students vote, they would all vote for Biden, or most likely".

The students were also asked "has what you knew from before changed through this project?" Judith expresses working on this project has given her an understanding of Trump:

> I was talking with my mom the other night about this (the project), and then I got a new respect for him. Apparently, he was the one who shared the information about the secret e-mails out in the media. So that became a big deal. […] I have understood why people did not want to vote for Hillary, because she was involved in the scandal".

Oliver reveals that he now has more compassion for those who votes for Trump, because he learned about their history and why they want to vote for him. He argues that "many have lost the hope for the American dream. […] He sees the problems and formulates them in a way, so every individual understands". John (who has portrayed his character as a Democrat), says that learned about which "facts and webpages I should look at. And negative things about Trump".

### 4.2.2 Donald Trump – a bad role model?

As mentioned, some of the students already commented on their perception of Trump through the previous questions about the US election. However, I also asked the question "how would you describe Donald Trump, who is he?", to give the students a chance to elaborate on how they perceived the president. In addition, to find out if they had gained a new perception of Trump after portraying a Republican voter was interesting to investigate.

When the students were asked to describe Donald Trump, several statements were made. John is short and precise in his answer but argue that he believes Trump is "extremely childish". Judith on the other hand, has a lot on her mind. She thinks that:

> he is racist and homophobic, and rude towards women… and things like that. I have seen interviews where he does not care about what others think about, when something (about him) comes out, he only says it is fake news. That makes him kind of arrogant".

Oliver agrees, as he also believes he is racist in his tweets. Furthermore, he expresses concerns about Trump uses his money to manipulate people. In addition, he thinks that Trump being president makes him a bad role model, which allows racism to occur in the society.

The statements from interview group 1 suggest that the students are carrying prejudices and disgusts towards Trump. In fact, there were not any statements from this question that were positively loaded or wanted to see other perspectives. The students were in total agreement on how they perceived this matter; the statements were given as facts and no decentring occurred.

Amy argues that Trump is "promising them stuff, kind of. Like the wall. He promised to build the wall. But that did not turn into much". Simon on the other hand, describes Trump as an "egoist" and "very direct". He expresses that "he says what he wants". Lastly, Evan thinks the presidents says a lot of "stupid stuff", however, at the same time he sometimes makes sense. Similar to the first interview, the statements in interview group 2 is mainly influenced by negative assumptions and prejudices, which portrays Donald Trump as someone who does not seem to be capable of feeling empathy towards the American people. Nevertheless, Evan suggests that Trump sometimes "make sense", which might indicate that he tries to see what his supporters are seeing.

### 4.2.3 Descriptions of Joe Biden

The students' perceptions of Joe Biden were quite different from their perceptions of Trump. In interview group 1, John proposes that Biden knows what he is doing, as he has been vice president under Obama earlier. Judith expresses that "[…] what he stands for is maybe much more human to us in Norway. Because it makes sense that a president would want the best for his people", and indicates therefore that he would be a much better choice as president of the USA. Nevertheless, she also expresses some concern, as she

> saw in an interview, that a journalist asked why he said what he said to Trump. Then he said, 'because everything I said was true', […] but then he is not really better than Trump if he says that.

Judith has mentioned several times that she got information from interviews on Youtube, which seems to be a type of media she prefers when researching the topic.

In interview group 2, Simon and Amy have a mutual understanding on how they perceive Biden:

> **Simon:** His standpoint is that everyone should get health care, the Obamacare.
>
> **Amy:** And he wants to help those who are having financial difficulties. […] He is also more experienced with politics than Donald Trump.
>
> **Simon:** He wants to… I feel like… like he wants what we have in Norway. […] not everyone for themselves, but like that everyone should work together.

These statements suggest that Simon and Amy also feel that Biden would be more suitable as president. In addition, it seems like they believe that Americans would be better off with the same type of politics as Norwegians (themselves) have.

## 4.3 Findings on students' perception of American voters

The upcoming findings investigate how students perceive American voters. They were asked questions such as "what do you know about the persons who votes for him (Trump/Biden)?" and "can you try to describe them?".

### 4.3.1 Perceptions of Republicans

The discussions in each interview were very different when they were asked to talk about the persons who support Trump (Republicans). Interview group 1 was from the very start strongly affected by thin descriptions.

> **Judith:** It is mostly white people around 50 (years of age) or older, who have low education, and do not really know what they want to do with their life. They are hoping their life will become easier.
>
> **Researcher:** Is it primarily those who support Trump, or are there others?
>
> **Oliver:** I think… I believe what Judith says is true. I do not know of any others. But there might be someone in between.
>
> **Researcher:** It might be those people you have been reading about the most?
>
> **Oliver & Judith:** Yes.

These statements suggest Judith and Oliver both have been reading material that portrays Republicans in a specific matter. In the first survey, Judith checked off "friends", "social media" and "other" when being asked how she gathers information about the US election. Oliver also checked off "social media", however, he also gets his information through his "parents" and "Norwegian news". This indicates that their sources of information might be connected to how they portray Republicans in the interview. When being asked about Republicans, John did not provide any statement.

In interview group 2, all three students had something to say about how they would describe Republicans. Simon expresses that he portrays Republicans as "rich" and elaborates with "It is easier for those who are rich to become even more rich, because the taxes will be lower, and that makes it easier for them". Amy has a different picture on how she sees Republicans. "It is primarily middle-aged men, with low or little education. And then there are some right-wing extremists. Or right-wing extremist do not really vote for Biden. Then they are more in the middle of the USA". When being asked to elaborate, she expresses that "[…] Mostly in the mid-west and Texas and there". Evan thinks that those who vote for Trump are "[…] those people who are right over the… closest to the ones with lowest income. Because he (Trump) has promised to give higher salaries, and to create more jobs".

Next, straight after I asked about why these might vote for Trump, I also gave a short summary on what they had just said. This made Simon add more information to the question.

> **Simon:** sometimes it is those who have financial difficulties. Almost no money to pay rent.
>
> **Researcher:** Why is Trump the best option for them?
>
> **Simon:** Because… it is lower taxes.

These comments suggest that Simon thinks that both Americans that are wealthy and those who have financial difficulties are voting for Trump.

### 4.3.2 Perceptions of Democrats

Due to accidental oversight the participants in interview group 1 were not asked directly about who Democrats (or Biden supporters) are. However, in 4.3.3 their comments on the four pictures provide comments on why some of these people might be Democrats.

In interview group 2 however, the students were asked "what do you know about the people who vote for him (Biden), can you try to describe them?". Evan is the first to raise his hand and addresses several descriptions. "They are students, (and) those who want a better climate, and also those who do not have a job. Because it is safer to have a Democrat (as president) there when there are no jobs". When being asked why, he answers that Trump wants to lower the hourly wage, and that Democrats are more about togetherness. Amy and Simon agree, and pin the voters (geographic) to the east coast and the north west coast, while Trump supporters mainly are in the middle.

### 4.3.3 Student discussions of four Americans

In addition, I collected four random photos of Americans to get them talking about who these people might be and who they might vote for. Two of the pictures were gathered from the google search "Americans". The other two, were gathered from the searches of "Democrats" and "Republicans". The pictures were not primarily intended to get the students to stereotype, however, rather to encourage a cultural discussion about American voters and their background.

Pictures provides for the students:

**Picture one:** top left corner (https://www.india.com/news/world/us-senate-confirms-indian-american-physician-vivek-murthy-as-surgeon-general-223198/)

**Picture two:** top right corner (https://www.towleroad.com/2019/10/gay-maga-hat/)

**Picture three:** bottom left corner (https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2020/mar/04/democrats-in-state-decide-to-back-biden/)

**Picture four:** bottom right corner (https://www.skoltech.ru/en/2019/04/a-global-campus-experience/)

## Picture 1

The provided pictures did not only trigger a perceptual discussion; but it also made the students laugh on what they commented. When being asked about "picture one", several comments were made. In interview group 1, the students agreed that this person is a "businessman". Oliver state that he then must be a Biden supporter, as "it seems like he has a (…) money and do not struggle. That he lives in a big city". When being asked why, he elaborates:

> well (…), Trump's people are mostly the people who work a lot. He (picture one) probably works a lot, but it does not seem like he has several jobs. […] It seems like he is stable in one place, that he earns a lot in his job. Maybe a businessman.

Judith agrees, and adds that "he is wearing a suit, a tie, the whole package". She also believes he must be a Biden supporter because of his ethnicity, as "he is not quite… his family is not from America". John agrees on how the suit portrays him as a businessman, however he expresses concern if "he only put on the suit because he was taken his picture (laughter appears)".

In interview group 2, the students are having a similar perception on the person's appearance, however, they do not think businessmen vote for Biden. All students agree that he looks like a businessman because of his clothing. Amy also expresses the same impressions as Judith (IG1), as "he is darker, so he might vote for Biden. Donald Trump is a little bit racist. At the same time, he (picture one) is a businessman, so he might vote for Trump". Simon agrees that he might vote for Trump, as he "want more money for himself". When being asked if there are no businessmen who votes for Biden, Amy and Simon argue that there are some, "but they do not think of the community's best interest". Evan expresses that he is uncertain, but "his personality looks like Biden, but his job looks like Trump".

When I told them that it was interesting to listen to what they had to say about different types of people in the US, Amy added "yes, prejudices also".

**Picture two**

In this picture, the man is wearing a "make America great again"-cap, and it was therefore an easy job for the students to talk about who he votes for. All of the students in both interviews agreed that he (picture two) is a Trump supporter because of his cap, but there were other aspects that made them confident about this as well. Oliver argues that the man probably is a truck driver who works eight to nine hours a day. In his opinion, a typical truck driver is wearing a cap, t-shirt, and has a moustache, which is similar to "especially the ones you see in movies". Judith and John do not comment this any further but agrees with Oliver.

The students in interview group 2 were having similar opinions. Simon and Amy start off the discussion with their shared perception:

> **Simon and Amy:** He is *so* Trump (Simon). You can see it on him (Amy).
>
> **Evan:** Make America great Again.
>
> **Researcher:** Yes, that was a bit revealing maybe?
>
> **Amy:** You can see it on him. White male. It does not look like he has very much education.
>
> **Simon:** And rich.
>
> **Evan:** If you oversee the cap… [...] It is his personality. His age, the colour of his skin, and those things.
>
> **Simon:** He looks very much like a Trump supporter.

In addition to these comments, Simon points out that he does not look very happy. "Like in between happy and not happy". Amy then adds that she thinks he looks superior (arrogant) and a little rude. Evan on the other hand, believes that he looks political engaged and thinks one can have a debate with him.

**Picture three**

This picture portrays a female Democrat, which was revealing because of the Biden-stickers. Nevertheless, the students still discussed other aspects of what they saw in the picture. Judith (IG1) state that she believes she support Biden because "she looks like a relatively happy person".

> **Researcher:** You mentioned that those who votes for Trump usually are white, is that something you consider here?
>
> **Judith and Oliver:** Yes (both). Because Trump do not like BLM (black lives matter) (Oliver).
>
> **John:** (…) she also looks very young. She wants a good future, Therefore Biden.

These statements suggest that the students are thinking of age and ethnicity when discussing who the person vote for. This was identified in interview group 2 as well, as Evan believes the woman votes for Biden due to her "age, the skin colour…". Amy adds another aspect and argues that "women vote for Trump". Simon agrees, and adds that "Trump is a bit mean towards women and often appears racist".

**Picture four**

Last but not least, picture three portrays a person I found on the google search "Americans". His political standpoint is unknown, but the students had their share of ideas. In interview group 1, the students all agree that he looks "rich". Oliver argues that he probably "lives in the outskirts of a big city. Maybe goes to a good school, in college. […] Most of those in college vote for Biden. If everyone there voted he would win easily". John makes his peers laugh, when he says that "he reminds me of Trump a little bit. (I think he votes for) Biden because he looks young".

Interview group 2 is yet again similar to interview group 1. Evan is the first to point out that he looks loke a student. Simon adds that "he looks a bit young". Even though Amy first points out that he looks like a Trump supporter, she argues that if he is young and a student, he must vote for Biden. Nevertheless, she adds that she still thinks he looks like a Trump supporter as he "looks sloppy" and points out that he might vote for Biden anyway.

## 4.4 Findings from the pre- and post-surveys

In this section, the findings from the surveys will be introduced. The findings related to the themes "Americans" and "Norwegians" were presented in section 4.1. However, the rest of the

findings (related to the US election and other findings) are demonstrated here. The findings on the students' self-reports suggest that before the school project, the students are having little or no knowledge about the US election. Furthermore, they are carrying a neutral (non-personal) opinion and attitude towards the topics. In the second survey, however, the students are showing a greater understanding of the US election. In addition, they are showing more attitudes (positive, neutral, and negative) and personal opinions about the given topics.

### 4.4.1 Students' self-reports from survey 1

In order to map out what the students knew about the US election in the early stages (prior to the project), they were asked about what they knew about the topic. John expressed that he did not know anything about the US election and the political parties, but he knew that Trump had corona at some point. When being asked about the presidential candidates, he stated that he did not know anything about Biden but knew that Trump is a "bad president". As my intention was not to make the students feel pressured to show knowledge about the election, the question stated that if they did not know anything about the topic, they could skip to question eight. Judith chose to skip the questions. When being asked about the presidential candidates, negative loaded comments were made:

> **Judith:** What has caught my attention is all the 'stupid' he says (on Trump). I do not know anyone who support Trump personally, and I do not want to either (on Trump supporters). I do not know much of Joe Biden, but if I were an American and knew everything about what Trump had done, Biden would get my vote (on Biden supporters).

Oliver showed that he knew what the US election is generally about, as he argued that "there is only one winner in each state. There are more than two parties, but only Republicans and Democrats can win". When being asked about the candidates, he expressed that he perceives Trump as a "billionaire who carries hate towards Mexicans", and that he does not like postal voting. In addition, he knows that one of his political aims is to disallow abortion. When talking about Biden, he expressed that "he is old" and that his supporters are the "middle class". Amy provided more knowledge about the election but focused on other aspects than Oliver. She was more concerned about that "there is a lot of money spent on the election campaign (over 40 million), and the people in the US are getting advertising for their viewpoint". She also believes the Americans are more polarized than before. Furthermore, she argued how the Democrats can be compared to the red side (higher taxes) of Norwegian politics, and the Republicans can be compared to the blue side (lower taxes). On the presidential candidates, she stated that

Donald Trump had no political experience before he became president. He made great money on properties. He is very rich and pretty old. Those who support Trump are usually white, men and have low education. They usually live in the middle of the country. [Joe Biden] have tried to become president before. His wife died in a car crash, and he is pretty old.

Simon's comments were short and concise. First, he showed general knowledge about who the presidential candidates represented. He then argued that Trump "lies a lot and wants lower taxes". When being asked about his supporters, he stated that they "believes in what he says". Furthermore, he expressed a neutral loaded comment on Biden, that he "want higher taxes" and his supporters want him to bring the US back into the Paris Agreement. The last student, Evan, showed similar knowledge to Simon. When being asked about the presidential candidates, he argued that

He is not a so-called traditional president. He has been president for the last four years (on Trump. They (Trump supporters) hope he will "keep America great" and they like his politics. [Biden] is old and a Democrat. He has a strong environmental policy, and he does not like Trump. They (his supporters) are often younger and likes his environmental policy.

These findings suggest that some of the students (John, Judith, Simon and Evan) have little or no knowledge about the US election, while others (Oliver and Amy) carry more. The comments about the presidential candidates and their supporters are in general neutral or negative loaded, especially towards Trump. These will be discussed up against the comments from survey 2 in the discussion. The students were given the opportunity to check off who they would want to win the election:

Table 6: Students' choice of election result (Pre-survey)

| Donald Trump | Nobody |
|---|---|
| Joe Biden | Judith, Amy, Simon and Evan |
| Someone else | John, Judith, Oliver |

### 4.4.2 Students' self-reports from survey 2

After the school project and the US presidential election ended, the students were provided another survey. Some of the questions were identical to the ones in survey 1, however, they were also given new questions about the election after it was over. In this section, I introduce the students' statements related to their knowledge about the US election. Furthermore, the students' statements related to their attitudes and beliefs are presented. The findings suggest that all of the students have to some extent gained more knowledge about the US election.

**Knowledge**

Regarding the students' knowledge, a variety of different types of knowledge was identified. Simon shows that he has gained more general knowledge: "Biden won and is the new American president. There is a democracy and a voting to pronounce a winner". Judith expresses that she knows Trump does not want to believe that he lost, and that there is a big difference between those who votes for Trump and those who votes for Biden. She elaborates:

> Trump supporters are usually men in their 50's with low education. Biden supporters are usually people who are part of the LGBTQ community, or just sees everything that is wrong with the society.

Oliver also thinks of Trumps defeat, as he focuses on that "Trump sues other states because he believes they are cheating". Amy on the other hand, shares knowledge of the fact that it is hard to vote, and that there was a high degree of turnout (people who voted) this year. She also added that "you have to have majority in congress and the senate to get great impact". Lastly, in addition to knowledge about Trump accusing the election of being a fraud, he expresses that "you must have 270 electors to win. You get a different number of electors from different states".

Some of the students are only showing general knowledge. For example, who won the election and what party they represent. Others are more eloquent in their statements and show that they have developed a wider understanding of how the election works and what occurred in the aftermath. Some students are also connecting their knowledge to how they portray American voters. It is important to be aware of that there might be other reasons why some of the students were shorter in their statements.

**Attitudes and beliefs**

In the surveys, the students were also asked to answer questions related to their personal opinion about the US election, and if they had experienced any change of perception (attitudes and beliefs) after the school project. John expressed that he thinks the US election is "a bit weird", and that Americans should be allowed to vote for the president they want. When being asked about a change of perception, he argues that "my perception on the US election has not changed (…) I still have the same perception but, in another perspective". What he probably means here, is that his perception might have changed, but he still has the same attitudes or opinions. Judith

writes that she has gained a new understanding of Trump and those who likes him. However, she adds that she is still happy Biden won the election. She also argues that she has "more respect for Trump, but not much". Furthermore, she expresses that "I did not know most Americans struggle, especially after what you see on Disney and Hollywood movies. It is easy to confuse these with reality".  Oliver reported that he thinks it was exciting to work with the presidential election but is concerned about how a president has so many "bad" opinions. This indicates that Oliver disagrees with Trump. Furthermore, he added that his perception has changed when it comes to his understanding of why Americans vote for Trump. Amy expresses that:

> I am happy with the result. I do not think the result will change. I think it is too bad Biden does not seem to get great impact. I think the debates were bad, at the same time it happens everywhere that politicians do not really answer the questions.

When it comes to her change of perception, she argued that she has become more "enlightened and understand why people vote as they do". In the end, Simon said that he thinks the presidential election was an exciting election. Moreover, he expressed his relief about Biden winning the election, as "he can make America great again". He also reported that he has gotten a new understanding of the life-worlds to different Americans and understand more why they vote as they do. Evan reports that the election was "messy but fun to watch". He thinks that the elector system needs a little "modernization", and answers that his perception of why Americans vote as they do has not changed.

The statements suggest that most of the students are satisfied with the result of the election. Some of the students also expressed a positive attitude and said that it was exciting to learn and follow the US election. At the same time, they still believe that the US election system could be modernized and that there are better ways to carry out the voting process. Furthermore, despite many states they have gained a new understanding of Trump and his supporters, other statements about these topics were still negative loaded.

In the second survey the students were again given the opportunity to check off who they think should have won the election (identical to survey 1):

Table  7: Students' choice of election result (Post-survey)

| Donald Trump | Nobody |
|---|---|
| Joe Biden | John, Judith, Oliver, Amy, Simon and Evan |
| Someone else | John |

### 4.4.3 Other findings from the surveys

This study investigates students' perceptions about Americans and the US election. Therefore, I believe it is important to examine their source of information. In survey 1, the students were given six options to check off where they collected information about the study's topics. These were *parents, friends, Norwegian news, social media* and *other.*

Table 8: Students' source of information

| John | Friends, other |
|------|----------------|
| Judith | Friends, social media, other |
| Oliver | Parents, Norwegian news, social media |
| Amy | Parents, friends, Norwegian news |
| Simon | Parents, Norwegian news, other |
| Evan | Parents, friends, Norwegian news |

These findings suggest that the students mostly rely on parents, friends, social media, and Norwegian news.

Another finding was how some of the students misinterpreted the questions. When being asked about similarities and differences between Americans and Norwegians, John wrote that "Norwegians talk another language. Americans also talk another language". Maybe it would make more sense for him if the questions were provided with examples, such as "cultural similarities/differences" and "political similarities/differences". Another example is how Judith might have misinterpreted the question "do you know anything about those who support Trump?". She expresses then that she "does not know anyone personally". In this case, the question could have been more descriptive.

# 5. Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the key findings that arose from the study's research questions. The main aim of this thesis was to explore students' perceptions of Americans and the US election as expressed in a school project in English lower secondary school (RQ1) and to examine the challenges related to fostering students' intercultural competence in English based on students' statements (RQ2).

## 5.1 Students' attitudes and beliefs about Americans and the US election

The findings from the students' attitudes and beliefs indicated that the students are focusing more about the differences rather than the similarities when discussing Americans, which is causing an us/them mentality. Another aspect of consideration is that the students did develop new cultural knowledge about the US election, however, their intercultural attitudes did not seem to change.

### 5.1.1 Us versus Them mentality

The students seem fairly capable of comparing and contrasting Americans and Norwegians, which is a core element in the curriculum. According to the curriculum, the students are supposed to be able to see their own identity and others' identities in a multicultural context, which I believe is about discussing similarities and differences (UDIR, 2020). The findings from the interviews and the surveys, however, revealed that they saw more of the differences than the similarities. Judith and Oliver expressed in the interview that they believed Americans have it much tougher and struggle more than Norwegians. Moreover, the surveys revealed that the students saw few clear similarities. In spite of that some of their comments are portraying Americans as tougher than Norwegians, it still seems obvious that their focus is about how much better they have it in Norway. This means that they are not being able to decentre, which is putting aside established descriptions, seeking the broader picture, and to look for the hidden and unexpressed (Holliday, 2011, p. 28). The problem is that the curriculum's focus on "our" and "their" culture is causing an Us versus Them mentality rather than a "we" mentality, which will cause distance instead of a new understanding. Amy argued in the interview that the similarity is that both are being in the Western part of the world, and therefore we might see the world in the same way. Despite that Amy's intention probably was to connect Norwegian culture to American culture, her comment might be based on the stereotypical belief that two people living in the "west" would have more in common than someone living in Norway and

Japan. She also mentions this in the survey, adding that both Norway and America want the best for each other. This could cause problems if she were to use this type of associations in a conversation with someone who were not from the "west".

**Implications of "Us versus Them mentality"**

What is certain here, is that the students are having difficulties with comparing American culture to Norwegian culture, and struggle with conceptualizing multiple perspective simultaneously (Fincher, 2012). What seems to be the case is that the students have not been taught to decentre, nor did I expect them to be able to do this, as this was not a part of the teaching for the school project, nor was it part of the learning objectives for the project. However, decentring is key to intercultural education. EFL teachers need to teach students how to decentre and to work with seeing other cultures from their perspective. Furthermore, an aim of the school project was to see if they were to put aside their previous views in order to understand Americans. A way forward might be to make the students aware about the "us" versus "them" mentality, and as Holliday expresses, make them understand that American and Norwegian values should not be allowed to represent uncrossable barriers (2018, p. 25).

### 5.1.2 New knowledge - same attitudes

When comparing the pre- and post-surveys (their self-reports), it seems like most, if not all, students have gained more knowledge about Americans and the US election. John and Judith went from reporting no knowledge in the first interview, to reporting knowledge about the result, the aftermath, and about American voters. The others seem to have gained deeper insight on how the election works. Some of the students also seem to have developed more cultural knowledge, in terms of more knowledge of social groups (Byram, 2008, p. 231), as they talk about the fact that many Americans are struggling and living in tough conditions. These were, however, thin descriptions (Holliday, 2011, p. 29). Nevertheless, there is a big difference between cultural knowledge and critical cultural awareness (CCA), and the findings suggest that the students struggle with the latter. Furthermore, they seem to show signs of having basic cultural awareness (level 1) rather than intercultural awareness (level 3). Their comments in the survey reveals that they are aware of how American culture carries different sets of shared behaviour, beliefs, and values (Baker, 2012, p. 66).

In the second survey, Amy argued that she has become more enlightened and understands more why people vote as they do. Simon reported that he has gotten an understanding of different American worldviews, in addition to a new understanding of American voters. Furthermore,

Judith reported that she gained more respect for Trump (but not much, she said). What seem to have happened here is that the students are reporting openness (attitudes) towards American voters and Trump, however, their statements from the interview revealed that this might not be how they really feel. This is in accordance with Dervin's critique of Byram's model, where he argues that it is possible to show without believing in what we are showing (2016, p. 76). One of the reasons I believe the students have not genuinely gotten a new understanding, or at least an honest understanding of American voters, is that their focus has been on limited aspects of why Americans might vote as they do. Furthermore, it seems like giving the students a lot of information about multiple perspectives is not enough. Without tools on how to process this knowledge, they might not be able to develop intercultural skills. When discussing Americans, the US election, and the provided pictures, they seem to focus on skin colour, the Black lives matter-campaign (BLM), and that Trump is being a racist. As these might be central reasons for some Americans, there were other factors that mattered much more for those who voted for Trump (education, income, religious beliefs). These perceptions might have derived from the *UXA* documentary they watched, where BLM and racism were central themes in one of the episodes, which indicates that the students are not being able to critically assess why Americans vote as they do.

**Implications of students' intercultural learning**

These findings indicate that that the school project promoted new knowledge about the US election, and to some extent cultural knowledge about Americans. The challenge here, is that even though many students acquired new knowledge of American culture, their attitudes did not change. This means that the students are not able critically assess American culture, and they do not know how to set their own values, beliefs, and behaviours aside, and through openness and curiosity be willing to see "others" through their perspective and set of values, beliefs and behaviours (Byram et al., 2001, p. 5). This school project is an example of how tasks that promote attitudes might not be enough. The issue here is that the students are not aware of the concept of IC, and without getting specific information about how to encounter other cultures, they might not be able to develop new attitudes. This suggest that without a specific IC/CCA framework, the students will not develop their intercultural attitudes. A way forward is to make EFL teachers aware of this, and in addition to providing different types of tasks that will promote openness and curiosity, teachers must make the students aware of their cultural standpoint.

## 5.2 Stereotypes – a black and white perspective?

A key finding on the challenges to meeting the aims of IC is that students easily resorted to stereotypes when describing Americans and American voters. The school project's aim was to make the students get a new understanding of why Americans vote as they do, which to some extent can be seen as decentring. According to Holliday is to put aside established descriptions, seeking the broader picture, and to look for the hidden and unexpressed (2011, p. 28). The findings from the interviews and surveys, however, suggested that the students carry "a set of beliefs about the characteristics of a social category of people" (Dervin, 2012, p. 186), in this case Americans.

### 5.2.1 Stereotyping Americans

Mapping out the students' perceptions from the interview and the survey left me with an interesting question: is it all a black and white perspective from the students' viewpoint? In accordance with Bar-Tal's study, it is important to locate the students' stereotypes and to discuss how and why they are formed (Dervin, 2012, p. 186). In the school project's task description, the students were asked to rely on what they have learned in class, news articles, and the *UXA* documentary. When being asked if the documentary was central in their project, all students answered yes. When John shares his perception on Americans, he expresses that he thinks of a person who maybe is doing drugs and sags his trousers. As he makes his peers laugh, it is unclear if this was just an intentional stereotype or if this is how he actually sees a typical American. Nevertheless, the question is where this stereotype derives from. I believe that whether John believes the typical American fits in this description, his easy use of a stereotype as a form of humour shows part of the problem: that stereotyping is a form of Othering. When discussing the provided pictures, Oliver stated the man looks like the ones from the movies. Furthermore, Judith argues in her second survey, that she previously thought Americans lived like the characters we see in Disney TV-shows. This indicates that the students are easily affected by media (internet, television, movies, etc.). This finding is in accordance with Jensen, Arnett & McKenzie, who argued that young adolescents are unconsciously receiving and processing cultural information through these media (2011, p. 287).

When Amy and Simon described Americans, they portrayed them as self-centred and egoistic. At first, this sounds like a negative assumption. However, they also added that they thought of the American dream and independence. The American dream is about achieving success and independence, and what the students seem to be aware of, is that this might lead to an egoistic and self-centred behaviour. Looking at their statements alone, they seem like normative

stereotypes (Dypedahl & Bøhn, 2017, p.240). It seems like the students would benefit to learn how to reflect and explain why they carry these assumptions. If they do not learn how, it might cause trouble if they were to discuss this matter with an American. Therefore, these stereotypes could be a great place to begin when teaching American culture. To make the students reflect on their stereotypes and to connect it to cultural learning.

According to Judith, Americans struggle more than Norwegians. In his second survey, Evan actually compares parts of America to a developing country. These assumptions seem to derive from the *UXA* documentary. In several episodes, Thomas Seltzer visits parts of America where poverty and natural catastrophes are dominating the living situation for many Americans. The point of the documentary was to show the darker side of America, and to make the students be aware of the fact that six out of ten Americans live just above the poverty line. Furthermore, the school's intention was to get the students developing a thick description, piecing together interconnected data to build a picture of what is going on (Holliday, 2011, p. 29). However, it seems like the interviewed students just developed a new stereotype: all Americans are struggling and lives in poverty.

### 5.2.2 Stereotyping American voters

The findings also revealed that students are stereotyping American voters. Similar to Dervin's definition, they are having a "set of beliefs about the characteristics of a social category of people" (2012, p. 186). During the interview, I showed the interviewed students four pictures of Americans. My intent was to see if any clear stereotypes occurred, but also to use the images to trigger a discussion on how they understand American voters. What is clear is that the students are having a negative attitude towards Trump supporters, while they are having a more positive attitude towards Biden supporters. When discussing the pictures, they constantly stereotyped Trump supporters as self-centred, rednecks, not educated, arrogant and unhappy. Biden supporters are on the other hand, described as young, black, compassionate, and happy. What is interesting here, is that even though they frequently state that they have a new understanding of Trump supporters, they still carry negative assumptions towards them. These comments are also made after they had finished the school project, which intended to help them gain a new understanding of both Trump and those who vote for him. The students do seem, however, to have gained an understanding of who votes for Biden and Trump, as they refer to young voters, black voters, etc. They are also comparing Biden and his political aims to Norwegian politics, and therefore constantly take his side.

In the interview and the surveys, the students did not have anything positive to say about Trump. Oliver claims, however, that he understands why Americans who struggle might vote for him. In accordance with Dypedahl & Bøhn's definition of prejudice, they are reacting with emotions when describing him as racist, arrogant and uncapable to be president (2017, p. 47). During the school project the students were asked to create a role card, where they could choose to portray either a Biden supporter or a Trump supporter. Five out of six students chose to portray a Trump supporter in their TED-talk to convince the viewer to vote for Trump. Nevertheless, it seems like their compassion with Biden and their prejudice towards Trump blocked openness and curiosity to understand Republicans. Based on the data I collected, I believe that the students' prejudice towards Trump is the main reason they reduce Trump supporters to a negative stereotype, which unconsciously leads to Othering (Holliday, p. 2018, p. 17). In accordance with Thornbury's definition, most of the students seem to look down on Trump supporters and portray them as ignorant and unwilling to see the real "truth" about what is going on (2012). Another example is John's description of the US election, where he stated that he thinks it is "a bit weird", which can be seen as a basic level of Othering. My intention is not to judge the students for thinking this way, but rather to point to areas where explicit teaching in IC could be beneficial. The students have not been taught how to decentre, but more importantly, it seems like they do not know where to critically look for information. In the surveys, the students checked off that they gathered their information from social media and Norwegian news. These sources of information usually portray Trump in a negative light, which gives the interviewed students only one side of the story. One of the aims of using the *UXA* documentary in class was to make the students get a new understanding of Trump supporters, however, it may have made them more certain of their stereotypes. Despite that the students might have more sympathy for why many Americans vote for Trump, it seems like they still slip into generalizations about Americans as ignorant and struggling to pay rent.

**Implications of students' stereotypes**

A possible solution is to educate the students about how normal it is to carry stereotypes about others. It is important that they are aware that it is a natural process to want to categorize everything we meet (Dypedahl & Bøhn, 2017, p. 40). Many EFL teachers may try to get rid of their students' stereotypes, but this might cause the students to feel anxious and nervous about making the same "mistakes" the next time they encounter a new culture. In this project, the interviewed students demonstrated that they held as "black and white perspective", where they gained new stereotypes when learning about American culture and American voters. If we

normalize the natural process of stereotyping, it will be easier for EFL teachers to map out and examine how their students' stereotypes are formed, and the factors that cause the creation of them (Dervin, 2012, p. 186). In this case, the students need to be aware of their new stereotypes and that this might not be exactly how Americans see themselves.

## 5.3 Struggle of ambivalence

Another finding related to the challenges to meeting the aims of IC is the students' struggle of ambivalence. During the interview, the students explored each other's underlying processes and seemed to find themselves struggling to make sense of their previous understanding and the new knowledge that they acquired through the school project. This is in accordance with Holliday 2018, Kramsch 1993 and Kramsch, 2009 who state that students struggle to make sense between their prejudice and their understanding. Furthermore, there a third space of ambivalence can let our cultural mindset change as it allows room for interpretation. The figure below is my revision of Holliday's model of *ambivalence and the struggle* (2018, p. 158) which I have created to better fit with the data I collected.
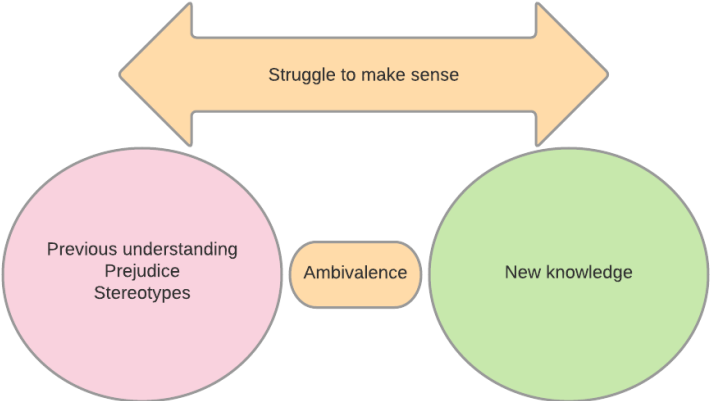


Figure 4: Interviewed students' struggle of ambivalence

In the interview, Simon described Americans several times as "rich" and people who want the best for themselves, which seems to relate to his previous understanding. However, he also argued that Americans who struggle to pay rent and have it difficult, which might be related to what he learned from the *UXA* documentary (new knowledge). As these comments were made during the interview, it seems like Simon struggles to make sense of how he perceives Americans. The findings also indicate that the students have difficulties with understanding the reasons for why some voters support Trump. Judith expressed in the interview that Trump

supporters are white Americans with low education etc., who do not want to see the "truth" about what is happening in America (previous understanding/stereotype). Nevertheless, she also argued in the survey that she has gained a new respect and understanding of those who vote for Trump as they might not have many other options related to their living situation (new knowledge). In the interviews and the surveys, she goes back and forth between her previous understanding and her new knowledge struggling to make sense. This is in accordance with Holliday's ambivalence and the struggle, where the ambivalence enables them to report seemingly contradictory information (2018, p. 158).

**Implications of the struggle of ambivalence**

A way forward is to use this space of ambivalence and turn it into something positive. In accordance with Kramsch, this can be seen as a *third space*, where third perspectives can help the students develop a new understanding (2009, p. 237). What seems to be the challenge here, is that the students are not aware of their ambivalence and how to make sense of it. In the EFL classroom, teachers can encourage students to talk about their perceptions and discuss if there are any ambivalence. This will help them find a way of learning and living with cultural ambivalence (Kramsch, 2009, p. 240). Students should also be taught explicitly that the space of ambivalence will let our cultural mindset change as it allows room for interpretation. This could be of great value when promoting intercultural competence.

## 5.4 Paths of students' intercultural learning process

After analysing and presenting the findings, it became clear that the students think differently when learning about each topic. Some of the students seem to start off the conversation with a stereotype about a topic, while others talk about the new knowledge they have gained after the school project. I see this as a major finding, as it is important to be aware of how students receive and process new information about other cultures. The findings from the students' perceptions suggest that they take several "paths when learning about new topics". These are presented and exemplified in Figure 5, which is a self-created model based on my observations from the interviews and surveys. Byram's model is in my opinion seen as a ladder to achieve intercultural communicative competence, as the goal is to achieve all components (1997). Nevertheless, it does not show the struggle students might have in between each component. This struggle involves of the ambivalence mentioned in section 5.3; however, students' cultural

learning process might also be relevant. If educators are aware of that students encounter cultural topics differently, it might be of help when teaching about stereotypes, putting established perceptions aside and gaining new understanding.
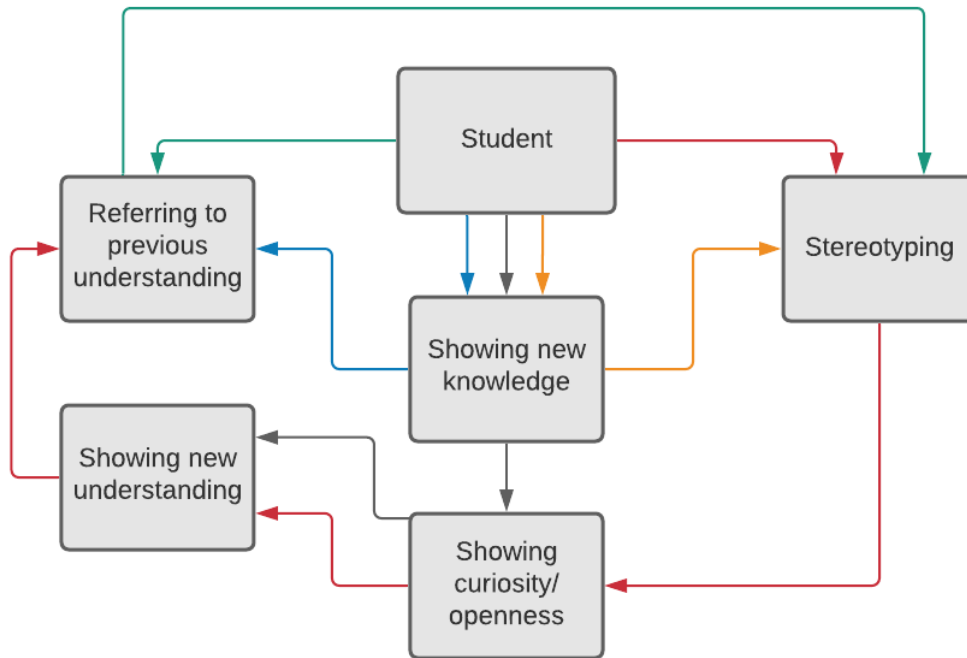


Figure 5: Students' paths of learning about the study's topics

It is important to stress that this self-created model (Figure 5) does not aim to be conclusive, its purpose is to show how I the researcher experienced the students' perceptions of the study's cultural topics. The figure contains five different paths, marked by five colours and arrows for direction. The black path demonstrates how I initially thought the "perfect" path would be to developing a new cultural understanding and intercultural competence, based on how I interpreted Byram's model (1997). It would start off with the students talking about how they received or found new information (knowledge) about a certain topic (Americans, American voters, the US election, etc.), then move on to expressions of curiosity or openness about viewing this matter within a different perspective (putting their assumptions aside). This would then eventually lead to them talking about how they now perceive the matter differently (new understanding). However, several other paths were identified when analysing the students' perceptions from the interviews and surveys.

A common finding is that the students usually start off with a stereotype. However, this could also be related to their previous understanding (green path), or it may have occurred during the

school project (yellow path). For instance, Oliver states in the beginning of the interview that he understands that many Republicans vote for Trump in order to achieve the American dream (new knowledge). However, he later agrees with Judith's stereotype, describing them as 50-year-old white people who do not know what to do with their lives. Surprising to me is that even though some of the students stick with their stereotype, others show curiosity and openness about the topic later (in the interview or post-survey), and then argue that they see the matter differently from before (red path). Even so, it is interesting that most students still revealed at the end of the project that they kept their previous understandings, which is why the red path also returns to "previous understanding". Furthermore, some of the students showed signs that they had received new knowledge about a topic but do not show any other competences than an ability to relate to their previous understanding (blue path). The point about this finding is that every student takes different directions on different topics, and they rarely stick with one path. Identifying and breaking down the students' paths may be useful for EFL teachers, as it gives us insight on how our students think about different cultural topics. Furthermore, it can provide us information about what competences the students have developed.

## 5.5 General reflections

After conducting this study, several challenges to IC have been identified. In addition to those mentioned above, I find the EFL teachers' role in teaching intercultural competence explicitly as perhaps more important than any cultural content they hope to teach in opening students' perspectives. According to the English subject curriculum the "[students] shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society. Thus the [students] will develop intercultural competence enabling them to deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns" (UDIR, 2020). Despite the positive fact that the new curriculum now focuses on promoting intercultural competence, EFL teachers are given too little information on how this can be achieved. It would be easy to assume from the wording of the curriculum that simply teaching students about American culture will automatically develop intercultural competence ("Thus the [students] will develop"). As having deep knowledge about intercultural competence is not a requirement to become a teacher, teachers are left to lean on the competence aims, which say that the students should be able to "explore and describe lifestyles, mindsets, communication patterns and diversity in the English-speaking world" (UDIR, 2020). In this school project the students learned about American culture, and they were asked to describe Americans and American lifestyles and mindsets. Hence, according to curriculum aims, they

should have developed intercultural competence. I think it is fair to say that the students did not develop intercultural competence through this project, however, they did learn a lot about the US election and American voters.

Briefly put, the problem is that EFL teachers who are not educated in intercultural competence, may think that asking the students to describe other cultures is enough to reach the competence aims. However, as this research has shown, if students only learn about other cultures from textbooks, documentaries, etc., they might only be able to develop cultural knowledge. In accordance with Byram et al., it is important that we help the students develop attitudes, knowledge, and skills, in order for them to fully develop intercultural competence (2001, p. 5).

**Implications of developing intercultural competence**

A way forward is that EFL teachers needs to conduct cultural dialogues with their students, that focus on reflections on their own cultures, which can lead to a "mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other's lives" (UNESCO, 2006, in Dasli, 2019, p. 222). What seems to be a key challenge in developing intercultural competence, is students' potential for openness and their ability to put assumptions aside. Therefore, EFL teachers must take Byram's concept of attitudes to heart, when teaching students to become "interest[ed] in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices" (2008, p. 230). This will also impact students' ability to develop skills of discovery and interaction, which is important to fully communicate with people from other cultures (Byram, 1997, p. 34 & 35). Furthermore, a clear focus on critical cultural awareness is also important, as decentring will help the students to understand the discipline of thick description (Holliday, 2011, p. 29).

# 6. Conclusions, reflections, and suggestion for further research

The main goal of this thesis was to investigate the extent to which students demonstrate intercultural competences, and reports on a school project carried out in English teaching in lower secondary school. My research questions were: "What are students' perceptions of Americans and the US election as expressed in a school project in English lower secondary school?" (RQ1) and "What are challenges related to fostering students' intercultural competence in English based on students' statements on Americans and the US election?" (RQ2). In this chapter, I will first address the thesis' research questions. Furthermore, I will present the two major conclusions of this thesis. Next, my reflections and what I have learned from this study and the school project will be discussed. Lastly, I will argue for what needs to be further researched in relation to this thesis' findings.

## 6.1 Conclusions

The first research question asks about the students' perceptions of Americans and the US election and is answered in the presentation of the thesis' findings in chapter 4. The students share different descriptions about how they perceive Americans, where some are superficial and without depth (stereotypes), and others are connected to cultural topics such as the American dream, work ethic, and economic issues. Furthermore, the students have gained an understanding of how the US election works in terms of the political parties, the presidential candidates, and the American voters. In the end, however, their prejudices towards Trump hinder them from putting their assumptions aside, a central goal in IC. This might be a reason for why their perceptions of Republican supporters were by and large negative.

Research question two asks about the challenges related to intercultural competence (Byram, 1997), based on the students' statements. Five key challenges to IC were identified: an "*us vs them mentality", a new knowledge – same attitudes tendency, stereotyping, the struggle of ambivalence,* and *paths to students' intercultural learning process*. EFL teachers must be aware that some of the competence aims may cause an "us vs them" mentality due to their emphasis on describing other cultures' lifestyles and mindsets, rather than focusing on students' own attitudes and skills when encountering other cultures. Furthermore, we must be aware of students' stereotypes and the natural process of categorizing (Dypedahl & Bøhn), and to map out and examine how their stereotypes are formed and the factors that cause the creation of them (Dervin, 2012).

Out of the challenges mentioned above, there are two major conclusions which I believe deserve attention. First, the interview and the pre- and post-surveys revealed that the students gained a lot of new knowledge from the school project. It seems like the *UXA* documentary and the school lessons were important learning resources, as it taught students about the US election and why Americans vote as they do. Furthermore, it gave them insight into the darker side of how many Americans live and the constant struggle in their daily lives. However, despite the fact many of the interviewed students reported that they gained a new understanding of why Americans vote for Trump, their attitudes showed signs that they did not. This means that even though the school project did in fact teach the students new knowledge, their attitudes remained the same. In order to teach students about attitudes (as well as other components in Byram's model), there must be explicit classroom instruction of IC. Secondly, my research pointed to the importance of the students' struggle of ambivalence when teaching IC. When students encounter other cultures, ambivalence will most likely occur as they try to make sense of the new information in light of their previous understandings. This ambivalence can go in two directions: one is prejudice, stereotyping, and previous understanding, where the other is new understanding. In this case, teachers' guidance might be of vital importance, to make sure students to not stick with their prejudices (Holliday, 2018).

## 6.2 Reflections and suggestion for further research

What is certain, is that teaching culture in the EFL classroom is not a simple matter. This research experience has given me new knowledge of how students perceive Americans and the US election, as well as what challenges might occur when teaching culture. Furthermore, I have become more aware of how little focus there is on teaching students about attitudes (in Byram's model). The "Relevance and Central Values" section of the English subject curriculum asks teachers to develop students' intercultural competence through different competence aims and core elements. However, as the information on how to develop their attitudes is inadequate, and not explicitly linked to the specific competence aims that the students is expected to achieve for the year, EFL teachers may choose projects and lessons that primarily develop knowledge. Hopefully, this thesis contributes to making teachers aware of how focusing on attitudes and the struggle of ambivalence can be crucial for the development of IC.

As developing students' intercultural competence is becoming increasingly important, so is the need for more research. This thesis investigated six student's perceptions and is to my

knowledge one of few to examine the student point of view related to intercultural competence. A larger study would therefore be appealing to the field of research, as it would be interesting to see if the findings are relevant on a greater scale. Furthermore, to investigate students' perceptions after conducting research projects with explicit classroom instruction of IC would be of great value.

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# Appendix A: Receipt from NSD

## NSD NORSK SENTER FOR FORSKNINGSDATA

### NSD sin vurdering

**Prosjekttittel**

Fostering students' democratic competence: An investigation of intercultural bracketing in a US election project

**Referansenummer**

653071

**Registrert**

04.09.2020 av Johan Langberg Vattøy - 180837@stud.hvl.no

**Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon**

Høgskulen på Vestlandet / Fakultet for lærerutdanning, kultur og idrett / Institutt for språk, litteratur, matematikk og tolkning

**Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)**

Jena Lee Habegger-Conti, Jena.Lee.Habegger-Conti@hvl.no, tlf: 55585735

**Type prosjekt**

Studentprosjekt, masterstudium

**Kontaktinformasjon, student**

Johan Langberg Vattøy, johan-lv@hotmail.com, tlf: 93899940

**Prosjektperiode**

07.09.2020 - 18.05.2021

**Status**

24.09.2020 - Vurdert

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### Vurdering (1)

#### 24.09.2020 - Vurdert

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet 24.09.2020 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD.

Behandlingen kan starte.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER
Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å

melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde:
https://nsd.no/personvernombud/meld_prosjekt/meld_endringer.html
Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET
Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger om politisk oppfatningog alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 18.05.2021.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG
Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra foresatte til behandlingen av personopplysninger om barna/elevene. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som foresatte kan trekke tilbake. Barna/elevene vil også samtykke til deltakelse.


Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være foresattes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a, jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER
NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER
Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER
NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET
NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

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Kontaktperson hos NSD: Gry Henriksen
Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

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## Forespørsel om å delta i forskningsprosjektet

### «Fostering students' democratic competence: An investigation of intercultural bracketing in a US election project»

**Dette er et spørsmål om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt. Formålet med forskningen er å utforske elevenes evne i å sette seg inn i og forstå en annen kultur gjennom et skoleprosjekt om presidentvalget i USA. Skoleprosjektet vil foregå i normal undervisning, og vil ledes av lærer Terje Pedersen. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære.**

### Formål

Jeg er en masterstudent i undervisningsvitenskap med fordypning i engelsk, ved Høgskolen på Vestlandet avdeling Bergen. I forbindelse med min masteroppgave ønsker jeg å gjennomføre en klasseromsstudie på ungdomsskolen. Ettersom barnet ditt er en elev på ungdomsskolen blir barnet, sammen med andre barn i klassen sin, spurt om å delta i prosjektet.

### Hvorfor blir barnet ditt spurt om å delta?

I mitt prosjekt ser jeg på problemstillingen: «hvordan utvikle demokratisk kompetanse i en åttendeklasse?». Hensikten med forskningen er å undersøke hvordan elever gjennom et skoleprosjekt om det amerikanske presidentvalget kan utvikle interkulturell kompetanse. Fokuset vil være å se på elevenes meninger og holdninger i forhold til hvordan og hvorfor amerikanske borgere stemmer på Biden eller Trump, og hva de synes om å gå inn i et rollen til disse.

### Hva innebærer det for barnet ditt å delta?

Hvis du velger at barnet ditt kan delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at barnet fyller ut to spørreundersøkelser: et skjema i tidlig fase av prosjektet, og et i slutten av prosjektet. Spørsmålene omhandler barnas kunnskap og holdninger til det amerikanske valget, i tillegg til deres opplevelse av skoleprosjektet. Dersom ønskelig kan foreldre få se spørreskjemaene i forkant ved å ta kontakt. Se kontaktopplysninger nederst i skrivet.

I tillegg til spørreskjema, vil barna delta i et fokusgruppeintervju. Kort fortalt er dette en samtale, hvor flere av barna får snakke ut og diskutere meningene sine med hverandre. Det vil bli gjort lydopptak av

fokusgruppeintervjuet. Både lydopptak og svarene fra spørreskjemaene vil bli anonymisert, og informasjonen vil ikke kunne spores tilbake til den enkelte.

**Det er frivillig å delta**

Hvis du og barnet ditt velger å delta, kan barnet når som helst trekke samtykke tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Barnet ditt kan også velge å ikke delta selv om du har gitt ditt samtykke, og det vil ikke påvirke barnets forhold til læreren eller skolen. Det vil heller ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for barnet hvis hen senere velger å trekke seg.

**Ditt barns personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker ditt barns opplysninger**

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om ditt barn til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket. Det er kun jeg, Johan L. Vattøy, og veileder, Jena Habegger-Conti, som vil ha tilgang til opplysningene. Barnets navn vil erstattes med en kode som lagres på en egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data på en forskningsserver. Informasjonen slettes når prosjektet avsluttes våren 2021. Barnet vil ikke bli gjenkjent i publikasjon da opplysningene fra barnet blir anonymisert.

**Dine rettigheter**

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:
- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg, og
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

**Hva gir oss rett til å behandle dine opplysninger om ditt barn?**

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Høgskulen på Vestlandet har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

**Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?**

Høgskulen på Vestlandet er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

**Hvor kan vi finne ut mer?**

Hvis dere har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte dere av rettigheter, ta kontakt med:
Høgskulen på Vestlandet ved Johan Langberg Vattøy
Epost: 180837@stud.hvl.no
Telefon: 938 99 940

Høgskulen på Vestlandet ved Jena Habegger-Conti

Epost: Jena.Lee.Habegger-Conti@hvl.no

Telefon: 55 58 57 35


Personvernombudet kan du ta kontakt med på e-post personvernombod@hvl.no.


Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til NSD sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:

- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller på telefon: 55 58 21 17.


Med vennlig hilsen

Jena Habegger-Conti                                    Johan Langberg Vattøy

Veileder                                                         Student


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## Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til at mitt barn får:


☐  å delta i spørreskjema

☐  å delta i et fokusgruppeintervju med lydopptak

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet våren 2021

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)


Barnets navn:

# Appendix C: Interview Guide

**Introduksjon:**

- Hvilken rolle/karakter hadde dere i TED talk-prosjektet? (hvem var rollen din tilhenger av? Fortell litt om hvem dere var)
- Hvordan vil dere beskrive en typisk amerikaner?
- Hvordan vil dere beskrive en typisk nordmann?
- Hva vet dere om presidentvalget i USA?
- Har det dere kunne fra før forandret seg gjennom dette prosjektet? Hvordan?

**Presidentvalget:**

- Hvordan vil dere beskrive Donald Trump, hvem er han?
- Hva vet dere om de personene som stemmer på han? Kan dere prøve å beskrive dem?
- Hvorfor velger de å stemme på Trump tror dere?
- Hvordan vil dere beskrive Joe Biden, hvem er han?
- Hva vet dere om de personene som stemmer på han? Kan dere prøve å beskrive dem?
- Hvorfor velger de å stemme på Biden tror dere?
- Legg frem fire bilder av valgtilhengere: hvem tror dere støtter hvem og hvorfor? Hva ser dere på bildene?

**TED talk:**

- Fortell litt om hvordan det var å jobbe med dette prosjektet (hva var gøy, hva var krevende?)
- Fortell litt om hvordan det var å sette seg inn i rollen som Trump- eller Biden-tilhenger
- Hvordan lærte du deg å forstå disse personene? Hvor fant du informasjonen?
- Følte du deg enig eller uenig i meningene til rollen din? Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?

**Avslutningsvis:**

- Hva har dere lært om det amerikanske presidentvalget gjennom dette prosjektet?
- Hva synes du om denne måten å lære på?
- Har du forandret mening om Trump/Biden eller tilhengerne deres gjennom dette prosjektet?

**Spørreundersøkelse**

Heisann! Mitt navn er Johan, og jeg er interessert i hva du vet om presidentvalget i USA. Svarene dine vil anonymiseres, så ingen andre enn jeg og min veileder vil vite at det er du som har svart det du har svart. Svar så utfyllende som du klarer.

Navn:

1. **Har du noen gang vært i USA? Hvis du har, hvor?**

2. **Har du noen gang møtt en amerikaner? Hvis du har, beskriv kort hvem de er og hvordan de er.**

3. **Hva tror du er likhetene og forskjellene mellom nordmenn og amerikanere?**

4. **Vet du noe om det kommende presidentvalget i USA?**

   **Hvis ikke, hopp til spørsmål 8.**

   **Om du vet, skriv hva du kan.**

5. **Kan du noe om det demokratiske partiet i USA? Skriv det du vet.**

6. **Kan du noe om det republikanske partiet i USA? Skriv det du vet.**

7. **Hvor får du informasjon om det amerikanske valget? Du kan huke av flere av boksene nedenfor:**

| | Foreldrene dine | | Amerikanske nyheter |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Venner | | Sosiale medier |
| | Norske nyheter | | Annet |

8. **Hva vet du om Donald Trump? Skriv det du vet.**

9. **Vet du noe om de som støtter Donald Trump? Om så, hva?**

**10. Hva vet du om Joe Biden?**

**11. Vet du noe om de som støtter Joe Biden? Om så, hva?**

**12. Hvem synes du burde vinne det amerikanske presidentvalget?**

|  | Donald Trump |
|--|--------------|
|  | Joe Biden |
|  | Noen andre |

**Takk for at du svarte på denne spørreundersøkelsen!**

# Appendix E: Post-survey

**Spørreundersøkelse**

Hei igjen! Denne spørreundersøkelsen er ganske lik den første, men jeg er igjen ute etter hva du vet om det amerikanske presidentvalget. Svarene dine vil anonymiseres, så ingen andre enn jeg og min veileder vil vite at det er du som har svart det du har svart. Svar så utfyllende som du klarer.

Navn:

1. **Hva tror du er likhetene og forskjellene mellom nordmenn og amerikanere er?**

2. **Hva vet du om presidentvalget i USA?**

3. **Hva synes du om valget i USA? (din personlige mening)**

4. **Vet du om en vinner er kåret? Eventuelt, hvem?**

5. **Hva synes du om at det var 78 millioner amerikanere som stemte på Biden, men 73 millioner stemte på Trump?**

6. **Hva tror du er grunnene til at amerikanerne er så splittet akkurat nå?**

7. **Hvordan tror du karakteren din (fra TED-talken) hadde følt det nå etter valget?**

8. **Hvem synes du burde ha vunnet det amerikanske presidentvalget?**

| | |
|---|---|
| | Donald Trump |
| | Joe Biden |
| | Noen andre |

9. **Har oppfatningen din av det amerikanske valget forandret seg i løpet av dette prosjektet? Om så, hvordan?**

10. **Har oppfatningen din av amerikanere forandret seg i løpet av dette prosjektet? Om så, hvordan?**

**Takk for at du svarte på denne spørreundersøkelsen!**