In pursuit of intercultural competence: Exploring self-awareness of EFL pupils in a lower-secondary school in Norway

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Abstract

This paper focuses on self-awareness as an integral component of intercultural competence (IC) in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context. For the purposes of this study, an EPortfolio of Intercultural Competence (EPIC) was developed by the researcher and employed during an intervention as a series of tasks and reflection prompts through various forms of media (written texts, drawings etc.). Triangulated qualitative data (in the form of EPIC entries and focus group interviews) were gathered from 56 participants, aged 14-15. The findings indicate that supporting pupils in raising their self-awareness may lead to deeper reflection on the Self as being multiple, which in turn may lead to the recognition of "multiple selves" of others (Rivers & Houghton, 2013, p. 2). The study contributes to the pool of research studying IC and grants insights into how an eportfolio approach might be integrated into EFL secondary teaching by encouraging learners to enrich their understanding of the Self through their reflections on EPIC tasks and classroom activities.

Keywords: intercultural competence, self-awareness, EFL education, eportfolio, case study

Introduction

Due to intensive international exchanges and shifts within business and education, pupils in Norway have increased opportunities to interact and form relationships with peers from diverse social and cultural contexts. English as a first foreign language (FL), taught from the first year in primary school, is a particularly important context for the development of these relationships (Rindal & Brevik, 2019). This has come to be recognized in the revised National Curriculum in Norway (LK20), which places an emphasis on acknowledging diversity and promoting intercultural values in the classroom (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019).

This paper reports on findings from an intervention-based case study that focuses on the development of self-awareness as an integral component of intercultural competence (IC) in a Norwegian lower

secondary EFL classroom. The intervention aimed to stimulate pupils' reflective processes about the Self and Others through a number of intercultural activities and eportfolio entries. This study employed eportfolio as a medium to collect the data and a digital platform for IC instruction. Improving learners' digital skills across all subjects is a significant part of the educational context in Norway, as also stated in the English subject curriculum. Indeed, in secondary school English classes, digital devices and the Internet are continuously integrated into classroom practices. The e-portfolio is thus uniquely suited for 21st century learning, an age when learning takes place anywhere and anytime, both inside and outside formal education (Jenson & Treuer, 2014).

For this study, IC is viewed as "an integral whole of cognitive, affective and behavioural factors that influence the understanding of, and interaction with, diversity in a broad sense, and which can be developed through education and/or experience" (Borghetti, 2011, p. 143). As can be seen in this definition, interaction, understanding, and diversity are the core underlying notions for the conceptualization of IC and its components. "Intercultural" does not exist without complex interrelations between the Self and the Other, and it is often understood as "a reflexive awareness of Self and Other" (Holliday, 2018, p. 6), in which the focus should be on self among others (ibid., p.4).

In the context of EFL, learners do not meet cultures, but they are "complex subjects who 'do' identity and culture with each other" (Holmes & Dervin, 2016, p. 9). Thus, it is beneficial to facilitate pupils' awareness of their own Self and explore how this awareness can lead to a better understanding of others in an increasingly multicultural world (Dervin, 2016; Schwarzenthal *et al.*, 2017). Although a considerable body of research reveals a link between self-awareness and IC (e.g., Fantini, 2009), less is known about how to foster pupils' self-awareness and to enhance their understanding of, and interaction with diversity (Borghetti, 2011). The more we learn about the learners' experiences, the better equipped we will be to address their needs with appropriate teaching methods. Thus, this study explores the following research question:

> *In what ways do the pupils demonstrate self-awareness through the eportfolio of intercultural competence (EPIC)?*

The theoretical framework and design of the study which highlight diversity and self-awareness as a constituent of IC are grounded in the concept of "culture" as "internal heterogeneity, complexity, change, struggle, and individual agency" (Zotzmann, 2015, p. 193). Culture as "multiplicity" (as opposed to the meaning of "difference" or "oneness") (Dervin, 2016, p. 28) emphasizes that behind every individual lie complex experiences, stories, and origins which include gender, social class, race, etc. (Dervin, 2016, p. 33). Importantly, this perspective reflects an understanding of culture as the "multiplicity of voices reflecting a whole array of conflicting and competing discourses" (Crawford & McLaren, 2003, p. 131). The use of eportfolio as a tool to envision learners' "voices" and "choices" (Barrett, 2007) can help to promote this understanding of culture in the English classroom.

Literature review
Theoretical underpinnings

The common tendency in the literature on IC is to focus on knowledge, skills, and attitudes (e.g., Byram, 1997; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009), whereas awareness, and especially self-awareness is not always included in the frameworks of IC. If included, it is not detached from the knowledge component (see Barrett, 2018; Byram, 1997). As argued in this paper, knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness are interrelated and indispensable for IC, since the first three components enhance awareness, "while enhanced awareness, in turn, stimulates development of the other three" (Fantini, 2009, p. 199). Awareness is here regarded as "in and of the self, and it is always about the self in relation to someone

or something else" (Fantini, 2000, p. 29). Self-awareness refers to a perspective of oneself regarding beliefs, performance, behaviours, and evaluation. As argued, self-awareness entails sensitivity to how one behaves in relation to others and consciousness that one's own behaviour may be strange and/or difficult for others to understand or accept (Spencer-Oatey & Stadler, 2009, p. 32). Overall, the levels of awareness and perceptiveness are important indicators for someone's overall capacity to be open to other cultures (Spencer-Oatey & Stadler, 2009). Self-awareness is at the heart of IC and, according to Kupka *et al*. (2007), it has a regulating effect on other components of IC. It is a significant part of the process of activating other aspects of IC because it helps an individual push forward and articulate an understanding of others through constant mirroring and reflecting on what he/she sees in the Self.

A distinction needs to be made between cultural awareness (CA) and intercultural awareness (ICA), which will be important to the issues raised below. The concept of ICA emphasises a conceptual shift from a specific focus on the home culture and the target culture (CA) to an awareness of the greater complexity of cultures (Fenner, 2017). ICA implies both a "window" on the other culture/cultures and a "mirror" where we discover ourselves in the process of discovering oneself and others (Huber-Kriegler *et al*., 2003, p. 8).

Empirical research on self-awareness

As widely acknowledged in the literature (e.g., Fantini, 2009; Kupka *et al*., 2007), self-awareness within IC is a necessary prerequisite for an enhanced understanding of the Self and Others. This section presents key research with respect to self-awareness in the EFL context worldwide as well as in the Nordic and Norwegian settings.

A study by Rigamonti and Scott-Monkhouse (2016) focused on raising self-awareness among a diverse group of adult learners, Austrians learning Italian and Italian EFL learners, through in-class activities. The findings showed that raising awareness of oneself as well as the differences and similarities existing between individuals in the class prompted reflections on sensitivity to differences, appreciation and respect of diversity, openness to novelty, and flexibility (Rigamonti & Scott-Monkhouse, 2016).

Focusing on "writing the self," a study by Holmes and O'Neil (2010) obtained the data through students' self-reflections on their intercultural encounters in order to show that discovery of the Self is closely connected to the discovery of the cultural Other. The university students taking an intercultural communication course in New Zealand were each paired with a student from another culture and utilized a specifically designed model (the PEER model) which consisted of the following steps: a) Prepare, b) Engage, c) Evaluate, d) Reflect in their meetings. By seeing themselves through others and autoethnographic writing, the participants reflected on Self and Other, cultural and religious relativity, and their ability to accept difference (Holmes & O'Neil, 2010).

Houghton (2011; 2013) has shown that identification of within-self diversity is a key mechanism for developing IC in FL classrooms. Data collected through questionnaires, interviews, student work and diaries from Japanese student participants have demonstrated that the identity development of learners occurred through five sequential phases which involve Analysis of Self; Analysis of Other; Critical Analysis; Evaluation; and Identity-Development (Houghton, 2013, p. 2). Houghton (2011, p. 476) emphasizes the importance of self-awareness (or "analysis of Self" in her terms) in intercultural education and stresses the need to understand individuals as having complex and dynamic views of the self.

As for the Norwegian context, research has been done on exploring awareness of the Self and the Other

through the use of literature in an EFL classroom in lower (Fenner, 2001) and upper (Hoff, 2013) secondary EFL classrooms. Both studies found that fiction can be a beneficial medium for EFL learners in their process of understanding Other as well as the development of their Self. There is a considerable number of studies investigating the construction of self (in particular, the ethnic domain) among immigrant youths in Norway (e.g., Rysst, 2016; Solbue, Helleve & Smith, 2017; Steen-Olsen, 2013) as opposed to a rather limited pool of research on young secondary EFL learners in Norway (e.g., Krulatz *et al.*, 2018; Lippe, 2011).

Overall, the reviewed studies (Holmes & O'Neil 2019; Houghton, 2011, Rigamonti & Scott-Monkhouse; 2016) have shown that undergraduate students benefit from various forms of interventions aimed at self-awareness. The present study broadens horizons of empirical research by investigating younger learners' voices in real English classrooms in relation to the Self. This study adds to the limited understanding of how this group of participants chooses to express themselves. Furthermore, previous research (e.g., Méndez García, 2017; Rigamonti & Scott-Monkhouse, 2016; Stadler, 2014) has pointed to the importance of a detailed analysis of learners' self- and other-perception, and perception in general. This study adds to what is known about what role perception plays in pupils' self-awareness and how they perceive and relate to others. Finally, the current study seeks to contribute to further understanding of how substituting "the nation as the primary unit of analysis" (Rivers & Houghton, 2013) with an alternative concept of (multiple) Self allows this group of learners to experience the variety of facets of diversity.

Eportfolios

Previous studies examined portfolio (or eportfolio) as a tool for IC development as it is based on personal reflection, self-evaluation, and self-perception of the learner, qualities considered as essential components in intercultural development (Abrams *et al.*, 2006; Byram *et al.*, 2002; Pearson, 2004). As a means for fostering and promoting IC, portfolios have been used to some extent in the Nordic context in, for example, pre-service teacher education (see Dervin & Hahl, 2015). Lund (2008) reviewed the Language Portfolio (as part of Language Opens Doors project) as being a key resource for teaching. One part of the Portfolio encouraged undergraduate students to make notes of their intercultural observations and to reflect on them. While research demonstrates the potential of using portfolios for the development of IC, there is less evidence of the potential this tool may have for young learners' enrichment of self-awareness as an integral part of IC.

An eportfolio is a digitized collection of artefacts which combines different forms of media when documenting intercultural learning and experiences. The use of eportfolios as a collection of multimodal texts, tasks, and learners' reflections can supplement the textbooks, which still are dominant in the English classroom in Norway (Gilje *et al.*, 2016). By including alternative formats and digital platforms, we can invite language learners to critically reflect on, for example, what they see on the images in their textbooks (Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2017). Eportfolio is thus a valuable learning tool which is flexible and can be designed to accommodate the level and interests of different learners. This study employs an eportfolio intervention in which self-awareness as part of IC is intensified in an under-researched setting, namely, lower secondary school in Norway.

Methodology

Setting and participants

An exploratory case study design was used in order to develop an in-depth description and analysis of a case (Creswell, 2013), namely, five lower secondary classes. A convenience sample of fifty-six pupils

(20 males and 36 females, mean age 14.22) participated in the intervention. They were sampled from all five Year 9 classes (second year of lower secondary school) at a secondary school situated in an urban area on the west coast of Norway. Three teachers (one female and two males) were involved in the study. Their experience of teaching English varied from 2 to 18 years. The majority of the pupils (87%) said that they spoke Norwegian as their first language. Other native languages spoken in the pupils' homes were English, Danish, Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese. The vast majority of the pupils (96%) reported that they had first begun to learn English either in their first year of schooling or in the pre-school. Approval from the Norwegian Data Protection Authority (NSD), as well as informed consent from the participants' legal guardians, were obtained prior to the data collection.

The participants had regularly used iPads, G-Suite for Education, and the Google Classroom management tool, where teachers could share homework and lesson plans with the pupils. Therefore, the EPIC was integrated into the instruction via the Google Classroom tool, to make communication between the teachers, participants and the researcher more effective.

Intervention and data collection procedures

Prior to the intervention, which lasted eight weeks, the eportfolio of intercultural competence (EPIC), was developed by the researcher and collaboratively co-created with the teachers. The EPIC was designed in accordance with the selected construct of IC (self-awareness) and introduced gradually to the pupils in the form of eportfolio entries. There was no single frame of reference or a template for the EPIC structure and content. The researcher adapted a number of learning tasks from different sources (e.g., Branders *et al.*, 2016; Berardo & Deardorff, 2012). Self-awareness was promoted by utilizing three central metaphors: Mirror (the Self), Window (Self and Other), and Coloured glasses (Awareness of different 'lenses' through which we see things). The overview of the EPIC as used in this study is given in Appendix 1.

In total, the EPIC included 17 multimodal entries. For the purpose of the current study, the focus is narrowed down to three EPIC entries (T1, T2, and T3). For a detailed description of these three EPIC entries, see Appendix 3. In sum, the EPIC followed three main steps (see Table 1).

English was chosen as the main language in the EPIC entries and interviews in order to address IC through EFL and to support the competence aims of the English subject in Year 9. The expected English level of the pupils was around A2/B1 (Council of Europe, 2018) but individual variations were observed within the group which is why they were given an option to use either English or Norwegian in the focus group interviews when they felt that would help them to express themselves better. The choice of language may have influenced how they expressed the Self in the EPIC; however, it was considered it would not immensely influence the results since the pupils could use Norwegian when necessary. Several pupils did so during the interviews.

Overall, the data collection included several stages. The first stage concentrated on the implementation of the EPIC. Twice per week all the classes were given a new EPIC entry or in-class activity, which was uploaded to the platform by either the researcher or teachers. After eight weeks of instruction, five focus group interviews with 33 pupils were conducted. Based on the discussion with the teachers and practical considerations, it was decided to conduct one focus group interview per class and invite approximately six pupils per group. In two classes, the number of pupils who participated in the project as a whole was seven per class; therefore, it was decided that all of the pupils would take part in the focus groups. As for the other three classes, it was decided to invite those who submitted a substantial number of the EPIC entries and represented both Norwegian and non-Norwegian population as well as both genders. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the participants' understanding

concerning the following key topics: (a) self-awareness and awareness of "many selves" by applying imagery and metaphor approaches; (b) awareness of the Self and the Other. A semi-structured interview guide was used, consisting mainly of open-ended questions (see Appendix 4). The interviews were audio recorded at the school premises during regular school hours. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Table 1 *Steps, descriptions and aims of the EPIC entries.*

Step	Learning aims	The EPIC entries	Metaphorical description
1 Self **Self-awareness**	Facilitate reflection and self-awareness; Raise awareness of multiple selves	*Onion of identities (T1)*	*Mirror* One first looks in the mirror of the self and one's own culture
		Seven identities game (T2)	
2 Self and Other **Awareness of others**	Reflect on one's own self in relation to those of others; Reflect on issues related to labelling other people with only one identity	*Seven identities game (T2)*	*Window* One looks out of the window at other people
3 Self and Other **Awareness of how we see things;** **intercultural awareness**	Reflect upon the notion of "lenses" or "glasses" and diverse perspectives and how we each see the world through "our diverse lenses"	*Sunglasses story (T3)*	*Coloured glasses* One looks through one's own diverse lenses and considers how the other does the same

Datasets

The following two datasets were collected: a) pupil texts; b) the focus group interview data. The first dataset (the pupil texts) consisted of 169 entries in total. The exact number of entries in relation to the three EPIC tasks is shown in Table 2. In reflection entries, pupils were given up to 4 open-ended questions. The main purpose of reflection entries was to prompt the pupils to describe their experiences and perceptions on EPIC entries. In T1, called 'Onion of identities', the pupils constructed a model of their Self as an Onion by placing elements which make them who they are to five layers of the model. T2, which is a classroom activity called 'Seven Identities Game', presupposed that the pupils do the activity in class and write their responses in the reflection entries only. In T3, the Sunglasses story was provided, and pupils were given three questions to answer about the story, they are considered as EPIC entries (see also Appendix 2 for details about the entries).

Table 2 *Number of texts collected in all three EPIC tasks.*

	T1	T2	T3	Total
EPIC entry	37	-	50	87
Reflection entry	31	51	-	82
Total	68	51	50	169

As for the focus group interviews, this paper includes only the parts of discussions which focus on the

self-awareness component in the pupils' answers. Thus, this study draws on 53 minutes of audio recordings.

All data were anonymized and transferred to the qualitative analysis software NVIVO. The pupils' names were replaced with codes (e.g., *P01b*, where *b* indicates the task code). All files had been stored on a password-protected computer. The interview data and the pupils' text samples were coded systematically using the same software.

Data analysis

The data analysis methods were guided by the research question. As a general reference, Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations for the six main steps of thematic analysis were utilized. Since the analysis used an initial concept of self-awareness and was guided by an explorative research question, the approach to data analysis was both deductive and inductive. Overall, the process of coding involved two cycles, open (or initial) coding, and axial coding (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The first stage (open coding) consisted in identifying patterns which might act as the codes and categories in order to answer the research question ("In what ways do the pupils demonstrate self-awareness through the EPIC?"). The second stage (axial coding) entailed a set of procedures to put data back together in different ways after open coding by making connections between categories.

First, the EPIC entries were examined for evidence of the pupils' self-awareness. For example, to capture the core aspects of participants' self-awareness, I created codes according to what the participants wrote in their performance entries (for example, family, friends, hobbies). The topics listed by pupils in T1 and T2 were categorized according to commonality, for instance, "brave," "shy," or "sensitive" were grouped under the "Psychological attributes" theme.

As for the reflection entries, I first examined the data for patterns to generate initial codes for all emergent instances of self-awareness or any other themes linked to self-awareness. Some text units (of various length) were tagged for more than one code. Codes which shared some characteristic were grouped into categories. An example of themes, categories, and codes developed can be seen in Table 3. In the transcripts of the interviews, emerging codes, categories and themes were identified following the same procedures as for the reflection entries described above.

Table 3 *Example of themes, categories, and codes of reflection entries.*

Theme	Category	Code	Example quote
Awareness	Of self	Recognition of multiple selves	"I deem every part of my identity an important piece of me and I'd like to put all on the 'most important' layer" (P02b)
		Deepening self-awareness	"I felt more complex, and i got to know myself better" (P21b)

During the second cycle of coding, the data was reviewed, and some of the codes were relabelled and revised. Due to the multiplicity of datasets and difference in the design of the guiding prompts for the tasks, the codes for different datasets were kept separate.

Findings

The findings will be presented based on the three datasets: the pupils' EPIC entries, reflections, and the focus group interviews.

EPIC entries

During the qualitative analysis of the participants' three EPIC entries included in the present article (Onion of identities - T1; Seven identities game - T2; Sunglasses Story - T3) three major perspectives related to self-awareness were identified: (1) understanding the core aspects of the self (T1); (2) exploring the process of reflection on "many selves" (T2); and (3) reflecting on how we see things differently through our diverse "lens" (T3).

When answering the question of "Who am I?" in T1, the pupils located the most important aspects of selves in five layers of their model of "onion." The recurring aspects of "the Self" which formed two "layers" of the model of onion (the innermost, i.e., "core," and the outermost, i.e., "outer") were quantified and displayed in Figure 3. The three layers in the middle were disregarded for this analysis.

Figure 1 *Number of aspects of self, related to core layer and outer layers in T1.*
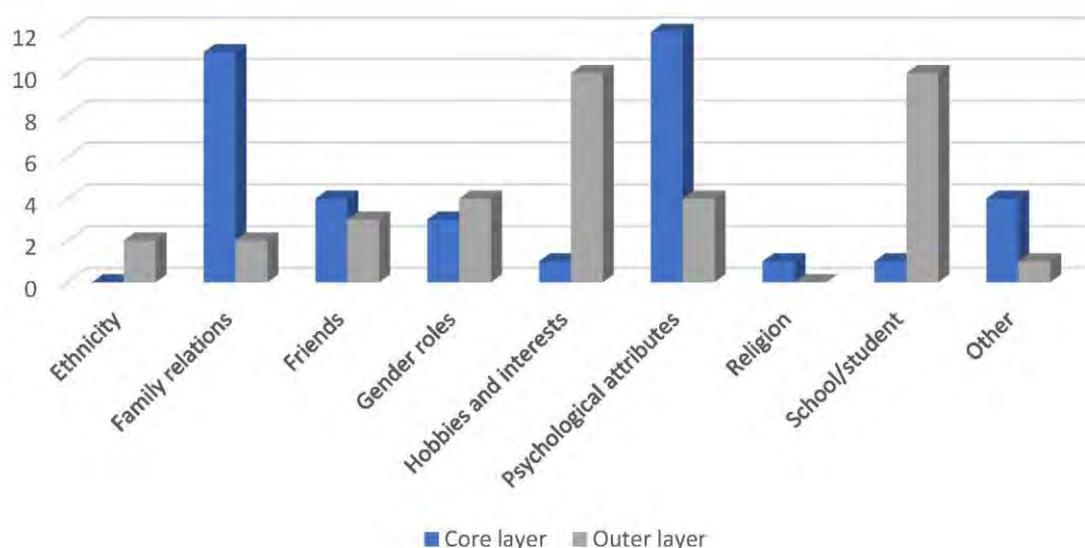
As seen from Figure 1 above, two of the most frequently mentioned aspects for the "core layer" domain were "Psychological attributes" (such as "being nice," "caring," "kind and helpful" etc.) and "Family relations," for example, "family" and "daughter." For the latter one, 11 items were found in the core layer domain, whereas there were only two in the outer layer domain. The two most frequent aspects in the outer layer domain were "School/student" and "Hobbies and interests" (e.g., "handball," "gaming," "dog owner").

These results very much correlate to what is found for the most recurring themes in T2 (Seven Identities Game). In this in-class activity, the pupils reflected upon and discussed with others in class whether it was difficult for them to choose one element of their "identity." The pupils were provided with reflection prompts consisting of four questions (see Appendix 3). The analysis of the responses to question 3 ("What was your last element of identity that remained?") shows for the majority of the pupils (59%) the most valuable element for their identity was family and family relations. The following aspects were also mentioned: "friends" (11%), "interests and preferences" (11%), "ethnicity" (6.5%) and "religion" (6.5%), "others" (6%). The following extract provides an illustration of a pupil's reflection through this exercise: "Handball player. I think this activity may be useful for me in many years, and I think I would be a different person without being a handball player" (P28c).

In the comparison matrix displaying summarized results from T1 and T2 (see Table 4), the core themes representing the importance of the family for their sense of self is evident (27 items under the "last

identity element").

Table 4 *A comparison matrix showing numbers of responses of the categories found in T1 and T2.*

Task	T1 - Onion of identities		T2 - Seven identities game
	Core layer	*Outer layer*	*Last identity element*
Family relations	11	2	27
Friends (being a friend or valuing friends)	4	3	4
Psychological attributes	12	4	2
Gender	3	4	1
School/student	1	10	0
Ethnicity	0	2	3
Religion	1	0	3
Hobbies and interests	1	10	6
Physical description	0	0	1
Other (languages, place etc.)	4	1	0
Total	*37*	*36*	*47*

Note: As for T1, one pupil's EPIC entry for T1 was missing one "outer" layer response. As for T2, 50 entries were submitted in total, but 3 out of 50 were missing responses for this particular question.

In order to correlate the summarized results from the two tasks, all the responses from T1 and T2 (including responses from all five "layers" in the Onion Model) were grouped in accordance to broader categories, namely, "Personality," "Roles," "Ethnicity," "Religion," and "Gender" (Table 5). The two most frequent categories are related to "Personality" (i.e., psychological attributes, hobbies, physical description) and "Roles" (including family, friends, school), whereas the less frequent ones are "Ethnicity," "Religion," and "Gender."

Table 5 *Number of items related to the aspects of self in two tasks.*

Category	Personality	Roles	Gender	Ethnicity	Religion
	"Gaming," "Dog owner," "Handball player," "To be successful"	"Sister," "I am a good friend," "Student"	"Girl," "Male," "Boy"	"Norwegian," "Lithuanian"	"Atheist," "Christian"
T1	93	65	10	6	5
T2	9	31	1	3	3
Total	**102**	**96**	**11**	**9**	**8**

Many reflections deriving from the Sunglasses story (T3) were linked to both self-awareness and awareness of similarities and differences among people, which is an important aspect of intercultural

awareness (Carter, 2008). This story was aimed to support awareness of how we see ourselves and how others see us (i.e., not just knowing oneself and understanding one's "home" culture, but more importantly, how this influences one's behaviour, values and ways of looking at the world (Pusch, 2009)). The key themes are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6 *An overview of themes and categories emerged in T3.*

Theme	Category	Code	Example quote
Awareness	Of Self	Mutual understanding Importance to consider other's perspective	1. "It made me think about how we can understand each other better" (P24f) 2. "I often realize that I need to give things a second look and try to understand to actually understand someone's point of view" (P22f)
	Of Self and Others	How we see others	3. "It is about how we see other peoples. We are the same, but we think different of others" (P23f)
	Of Others	Similarities and/or differences between people	4. "…but one day they meet and find out that they have a lot in common" (P41f)
		Making connections	5. "I recognized the story, because that's what humans do" (P23f)
		Curiosity about others	6. "It made me think of people on the other side of the world and that I want to know them" (P14f)

*Note: G*rammatical and vocabulary mistakes in the pupils' texts are remained unchanged. Spelling mistakes are corrected in order to aid in reading the data.

Through reading this story, the majority of the pupils reflected on our tendency to see the world and people around through our own pair of lenses. In discussing the main topic of the story, one pupil (P30) showed evidence of having transformed her understanding from reflection on the story itself to the reflection on how she tended to "look at others":

> This story is about how different people see things in different ways. I felt confused after I read the story, because I didn't understand it. The story made me think of how I look at others (P30f)

Interestingly, the quote above and Example 3 in Table 6 mirror to a large extent a response made by a student participating in another study described above by Holmes & O'Neill (2010): "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are" (p. 175). The pupil's (P30) insight accords with Stadler (2014) in the sense that self-awareness and perception of self and others are closely linked. The pupil's (P30) awareness was supported when she reflected on her own experiences and behaviours since awareness. Even though the girl said that she did not understand the story, it enabled her to consider her way of "looking at others," which seems to be a building block of both CA and ICA (e.g., Rigamonti & Scott-Monkhouse, 2016).

Another pupil emphasized that "people is not very different just because we have another skin color or come from another place" (P51f)). When writing about the story, one pupil seemed to gain some insights into how "scared people are… scared of difference" (P39f). It seems that this awareness of how we see things differently led the participants to recognize that most people tend to look at people from other cultures as different from the Self. A pupil (P31) stated:

> I felt like the people on the other side of the earth [sic] may be a lot more like us than we think. They can really look different on the outside but on the inside it may be something else. (P31f)

Even though P31 still refers to "the other" versus "us" and "we" in his reflection entry, he recognizes that at the core people share a lot more than it looks on the outside and "it may be something else," which has caught his attention and is revealed linguistically here by the expression such as "really." According to Dervin (2016, p.37), in order to create practices that respect individuality, we need to accept that those who might look, sound, and behave differently might share many commonalities with us.

Other pupils summarized the story in the following way: "I recognized the story, because that's what humans do" (P23f) and "The story made me think of humanity. How different humans can be but also alike"' (P31f). These two comments indicate making connections between the meaning of the story and prior knowledge. The pupils display awareness of the Self, first, by stating a personal perception of the meaning of the story, and second, by making connections that this behaviour is viewed as typical.

Reflection entries

When looking for patterns and recurring themes (T1 and T2 combined) in the reflection entries, one major theme (Awareness) and three central categories emerged (see Table 7).

Under the category of Awareness of Self, most responses (16 responses) were about how pupils thought in more depth about themselves and what enabled them to do so. Many participants remarked that they were able to understand more of who they really were. One student commented: "I felt more complex, and i got to know myself better" (P21c). An example of a quote showing a pupil's awareness of multiple selves is the following: "I learned that I have more sides to my identity that I knew. I discovered how much different things meant to me, and a deeper part of myself" (P21b).

Many pupils gained insights about the perception of their characteristics, both negative (Example 4) and positive (Example 5). Another pupil wrote: "I learned that I am a very closed person and that i don't like to be so open about myself"' (P26c). Commenting on both increased self-awareness and a particular psychological attribute, which is displeasure about talking openly about oneself, this pupil became more cognizant or aware of one's own performance, beliefs, and behaviour.

As for comments about Awareness of Others which stem from T2, 11 students mentioned that the task on Seven identities enabled them to learn about their peers' families and personal interests and hobbies, whereas six students learned that they have a lot in common with others by stating that, for example, "people are not that different from me" (P15c). However, two pupils noted that this task showed them that "we all are different" (P46c) and "that everybody has a personality and likes different stuff" (P32c). Three students recognised similarities among pupils in a class by, for example, pointing to personal characteristics: […] most of the class is just as closed up as me" (P23c). The pupils' quotes illustrate that they reflected on their classmates' heterogeneity as well as similarities. They seemed to realize that all of them are diverse; more importantly, the pupils displayed their appreciation of how many integral diverse parts they and their classmates "are made of."

Despite recognizing improved awareness of the Self, a few pupils mentioned some challenges when reflecting on this issue (as shown in Table 7, under the category "Of challenges"), in particular, discomfort regarding reducing one's self to one aspect ("I personally I would not rank them at all,

Table 7 *Recurring themes and categories in the EPIC reflection entries.*

Theme	Category	Code	Example quote
Awareness	**Of self**	Recognition of multiple selves	1. "I deem every part of my identity an important piece of me and I'd like to put all on the 'most important' layer" (P02b)
		Deepening self-awareness	2. "I felt more complex, and i got to know myself better" (P21b)
		Family value	3. "Family was the hardest one to take away because i love them and they are the reason why i live" (P08c)
		Perception of one's characteristics	4. "That I am a more closed up person than I thought" (P23c) 5. "I am very talentfull [sic], i can get good at things really fast if i try, or don't try at all" (P09c)
	Of others	Deeper understanding	6. "I get to know them more as a person […] but you get to know each other on a different way" (P27c)
		Recognition of diversities	7. "…learn that every's onion is different" (P04b)
		Recognition of similarities	8. "That the most of the class is just as closed up as me" (P23c)
	Of challenges	Addressing a particular topic	9. "I was not prepared for those kinds of questions" (P53b) 10. "I don't like to talk about feelings" (P25b)
		Reducing one's self to one aspect	11. "…they [aspects of the Self] all are a really big part of my personality" (P27c)
		Describing oneself	12. "It was hard and weird to define myself in a couple of words and phrases. That is, there are some characteristics that are hard to admit are a part of you" (P01c)

because they make my entire personality I guess" (P23b). Such remarks show that discomforting feelings are part of the process of becoming more self-aware, in particular, when individuals undergo a shift in their awareness of one's complexity (see Holmes & O'Neill, 2010; Houghton, 2011).

Focus group interviews

In what follows, the analysis of the pupils' self-awareness demonstrated in focus group interviews following the instruction is presented. Table 8 shows distribution of the coded statements related to the theme of what the pupils considered as important part of who they were or how they saw themselves.

One of the most frequent themes that emerged from this dataset is referred to as "Choice." The pupils highlighted the importance of choice in relation to their self and identity (e.g., *things you choose to do"* (P11, FG1), *"because that is something you choose. So it's not something you were born with," "you have lots of choices" (P42, FG4)*. Quotes displaying the recognition of the complex and hybrid nature of the self were: *"so many things can describe what you are"* (P53, FG5); *"you are everything, not just one thing"* (P54, FG5)*. These comments add to the findings from the pupils' reflection entries on "Recognition of multiple selves" (see Table 7).

Table 8 *Comparison matrix showing categories within the Self-awareness theme in five group interviews.*

	Focus group interviews				
Theme	**FG1**	**FG2**	**FG3**	**FG4**	**FG5**
Personality (Psychological attributes, Hobbies, Clothes)	✓	-	-	✓	-
Sense of self, self-perception	✓	-	-	-	-
Roles (Family, Friends, Social roles)	✓	-	✓	✓	-
Ethnicity	-	✓	-	-	-
Religion	-	-	-	✓	-
Gender	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Choice	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
Recognition of multiple selves	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: ✓ **-** indicates a specific topic as discussed by the group.

In addition, the pupils' responses during the focus group interviews mediated by visual representations (or imageries) of the Self are presented. Articulating their reflections on visual prompts helped them to enter into dialogue about the Self, and to expand their views on themselves. The participants had been asked if there were any other visual representations or associations of self (apart from 'the onion' model given to them in T1) they could think of (see Table 9). Three out of the categories emerging from the pupils' responses reflect the categories identified in the EPIC tasks (namely, categories A, B, and C).

Table 9 *Categories derived from group interviews.*

Category	Example quote	Imagery
A. Recognition of multiple selves	"There are many layers"	*onion*
B. Awareness of how we see things	"The way you see, changes the way you are"	*coloured glasses*
C. Recognition of diversities and similarities	"We all have our own, like, patterns. You know they all like similar. But everyone has like different patterns"	*hand*
D. Life-long process of developing self-awareness	"You start of completely oblivious and you only see the cover"	*book*
	"The longer time your life goes on, the more branches grow out and the more friends you get"	*tree*

Representation of the Self as "coloured glasses" was identified in FG1 and FG2. It should be noted here that the imagery of glasses given to the students in the Sunglasses story could have influenced their choice. The pupils, however, elaborated on this image quite differently. A pupil from FG1 expanded the idea of how we can use coloured glasses as a way to hide ourselves: "It [glasses] [sic] does not really show who you are" (FG1, P07).

The following example provides an illustration of a pupil's understanding of how the way people see things influences their behaviour and perception in general:

> I like the glasses idea because... uhm... like the way you see things change the way you are, right? I mean, if you, if you only see bad things, you are going to turn it to bad person, right? (FG2, P27)

This understanding is enhanced by the use of the analogy of the Self as "lenses" or "glasses." P27 constructed her awareness of the Self by engaging with how her perception of things and other people is constructed. Here, the link between the perspective of oneself (self-awareness) and the way we perceive things is made visible (e.g., Stadler, 2014).

The next quote from FG2 provides an insight into how a pupil constructs her self-awareness and awareness of others. The pupil responds to the question about why she thought it was important to consider who she was:

> Yeah, I think it is important to remember your own identity, and also acknowledge that other people might not have the same priorities as you… [sic] (P25)

In the comment above, she made a point that it was essential to acknowledge that other people might not have the same "priorities," i.e. interests, values. The girl's understanding resulted from her in-depth reflection of oneself throughout the project. This quote exemplifies a discovery of "within-group diversity" through an awareness of the Self (see Houghton (2011). The pupil's comment accords in a way with the view expressed by Houghton (ibid.) that highlighting the existence of in-group diversity may diminish the perceiver's ability to make sweeping generalizations about groups more generally (p. 470).

Discussion

The main purpose of this paper was to describe the ways that the lower secondary school pupils demonstrated their self-awareness through the EPIC. The first finding is that the pupils tended to discuss the self by exploring their values related to their families, friends and hobbies. This theme is dominant, and, overall, the attachment to family and family values is evident across the pupil text data gathered form the EPIC tasks. These results very much correlate with earlier findings from a study in Norwegian lower secondary schools among pupils of different ethnic backgrounds by Krulatz *et al.* (2018), who identified family and friends as important markers of their participants' identities. The findings thus indicate that family plays a significant role in their perspective on the Self.

Second, the analysis revealed that pupils are likely to describe themselves more in terms of their family composition and circle of friends, psychological traits, interests and hobbies, than with regard to ethnic, gender or national characteristics. This is shown in the analysis from T1 and T2 and group interviews. The findings indicated that the pupils reflected on what made them who they were in terms of their personal preferences, interests and choices. In accordance with earlier research on children in Norwegian primary schools and kindergartens, "ethnic" is not an important "label" to the participants (Lund, 1998, as cited in Wikan, 2002, p. 85). The study by Lund (1998) was conducted in a different time and context; today the make-up and numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse pupils have arguably changed. It is therefore interesting that the correlations to the present study are still evident. The findings presented above indicate that the pupils' ethnic, racial, religious or gender "selves" are given limited attention in their portfolios (as expressed by a pupil, commenting on his religion: "I was not prepared for those kinds of question" (P53)). The reason why the pupil responded in such a way might be that religious characteristics can be a contested concept for this age group (e.g., Holmes & O'Neill, 2010). Another interpretation regarding small frequencies of comments on ethnic, religious or national backgrounds might be that at this developmental stage school pupils are not inclined to

think about themselves in terms of "ticking a box" of ethnic or religious labels. This finding might indicate their openness to diverse ways of reflecting on what makes them who they are. Consequently, an alternative view on the Self through reflecting on many selves and not only through "the nation as the primary unit of analysis" (Rivers & Houghton, 2013) may actually be better suited to this age group and fostering their IC. This finding, in turn, may point to some practical implications for FL teaching, since a lack of coverage of these issues in pupils' classrooms may cause so-called taken-for-granted assumptions among pupils when they face intercultural encounters. Lippe (2011) found that the way young Norwegian pupils talk about religion and diversity might be to a large extent influenced by dominant discourses in Norwegian society which they meet, e.g., through the media (p. 138). Therefore, because of the complexities of engaging with the issues of ethnicity, race, religion etc., coming out of the material, it seems that these issues have to be explicitly addressed in EFL classrooms.

Another important insight stemming from the participants' reflections was that they became cognizant of their own classmates, particularly their families, interests and hobbies, thus realizing that it is not only in other countries life and people's interests can be explored but also in their own circles of friends. While being members of one particular group (ninth grade classes in Norway), the pupils acknowledged internal diversities among group members, and heterogeneous cultures become visible, which seems to be a sign of enhanced ICA. It seems important to demystify the culturally homogeneous classroom and make the students realise this heterogeneity (Matos, 2011). In the same vein, the pupils also recognized some similarities, which are of paramount importance for their intercultural experiences (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2012). Dervin (2016, p. 36) asserts that if we examine the other through the lens of similarities, too, we might start finding things, ideas, and thoughts that we share, which seems to be a promising way to support understanding others.

Furthermore, a few pupils were able to reflect upon the complex nature of the self which is, correspondingly, tied to the awareness of the diversities within other people. Consequently, this awareness may lead to ICA as it presupposes the process of becoming initially more aware of one's own culture and subsequently of different cultures through comparison and emphasis of both similarities and differences (Carter, 2008). For instance, during FG2, one pupil (P25) commented that by being aware of one's own complexities she was able to make connections between herself and the diverse priorities of others. This comment may indicate a higher level of awareness of the Self which in turn may serve as "a fundamental building block" (Kupka et. al., 2007, p. 23) of awareness of others and hence intercultural awareness. As convincingly argued by Dervin (2017), if a person is ready to accept one's own diversities, one can start noticing and accepting them in the other as well (p. 90). Another important highlight in the findings from pupil texts was that considering multiple "priorities" of the Self and other people and reducing them to a limited number may cause discomfort and feelings of confusion. The pupils engaged with critical reflection processes and moved away from their "comfort zone" (Giorgis, 2018, p. 26), since gaining self-awareness is not always straightforward and positive (Holmes & O'Neill, 2010, p.176) and discomforting feelings are fundamental to transformation (Zembylas, 2015).

The focus group interviews and the Sunglasses story (T3) seemed to have created a favourable environment for the participants to reflect on how people perceive things differently, and how this may influence the way we see other people and other people see us (Giorgis, 2018). As shown by Bresciani (2014) and Stadler (2014), self-awareness, self-perception and other-perception are closely interconnected. In the EPIC, the imageries of windows and mirrors as well as coloured glasses seemed to provide a springboard for a discussion about self-perception and perception of others which might be further investigated in future studies.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine self-awareness as an integral part of IC through the use of the EPIC. The findings indicate that the lower secondary school pupils' performance and reflection on the tasks prompted them to display many insightful comments related to self-awareness. The pupils gained a deeper self-awareness, often related to a greater understanding of one's own self by a) noticing the complexity of their own self, or "within-self diversity" (Houghton, 2011); b) acknowledging how people see things differently; c) recognizing how diverse and, at the same time, similar they are with the other pupils in class; d) reflecting on feelings of discomfort and disorientation when become more conscious of themselves. The participants' concerns about their ethnic, national, gender etc. backgrounds were rarely displayed in their EPIC entries and focus group discussions. This can be explained that adolescents very often experience "a more pronounced openness to diverse cultural beliefs and behaviours" (Jensen, 2003, p.191). Despite the views that school, friends, and social media play an increasingly more important role for this age group (e.g., Jensen, 2003), the findings from this study showed that personal characteristics, interests and family composition remain important for the pupils' identities. This finding might also suggest further research within and beyond the formal school context and influences of family and other external factors on their awareness of self. As stated by Davidson (2019, p. 96), teachers also need to remain conscious of the cultural backgrounds of their students; moreover, involving families in activities might inspire other ways for teachers to support self-awareness of their students.

Furthermore, future research might examine how other student groups in more longitudinal intervention studies respond to this type of tasks and reflection entries. In addition, the EPIC could be extended or modified for use in future studies by including additional portfolio entries, such as writing creative stories or experiences with intercultural encounters (Guerrero Moya *et al.*, 2016; López, 2014).

As for the limitations, since the study employed the principles of case study and a relatively small sample, the findings are not generalizable. In addition, video recordings of focus group interviews or systematic field notes would have added more in-depth data about the teachers' and pupils' talk during the project and these could provide the researcher with deeper understandings of the pupils' self-awareness.

Summing up, the present study offered a qualitative exploration of how the lower secondary school EFL learners demonstrated their self-awareness. This project has shown one possible way of integrating this component of IC into the EFL classroom practices. Previous studies have found that enhancing awareness of others might lead to the awareness of self (Holmes & O'Neill, 2010). This particular study went the other direction (from the Self to the Other) and provided some empirical evidence that, first, self-awareness can be explicitly addressed in EFL settings and, second, by building self-awareness, understanding of others and thereby IC could be supported. Thus, the study adds to the current pool of research focusing on self-awareness as a building block of IC and how it can be explored among EFL lower secondary school pupils mediated by the eportfolio approach.

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Appendix 1 – The overview of the EPIC

Appendix 2 – Description of EPIC entries
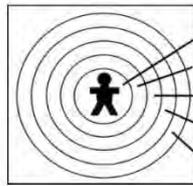
T1

Pupils answer 'Who am I?' and construct a model of their Self as an Onion by placing their 'selves' to five layers of their identities. The core layer is formed by self-descriptions of pupils placed in the middle of a model of onion. The less important 'identities' are placed on the outer layer of it.

Adapted from Branders et al. (2016)

T2

Pupils made a list of top seven core 'elements' of their identity and then they narrowed it down to one last element they consider the most important for them.

Adapted version from Berardo and Deardorff (2012, p. 151) and inspired by the researcher's supervisor

T3

A metaphorical story prompted the participants to reflect upon the notion of different 'lenses' or 'glasses' and different cultural perspectives and how we each see the world through 'our culturally conditioned lens'. Students explored that when trying to understand others, it is like wearing a pair of sunglasses, and it is important to understand and see the world from others' perspectives

Inspired by Berardo and Deardorff (2012, p.153)

Appendix 3 – The EPIC entries

T1 – Onion of identities

Who am I? What am I?

One way of looking at yourself could be to imagine yourself as an onion (even if you don't like to eat them). Like an onion, people are shaped by **many layers**: national culture, regional culture, gender, religion, family, etc.) Each layer corresponds to a different part of your identity.

Often, we may catch ourselves thinking about someone as only layer, for example, a French person or a woman. When we think of or see only one layer of a person, we are not seeing that person for the complex individual he or she is. We want to be recognised as being complex individuals shaped by a number of layers, and we need to do the same for others.

Watch this short video on YouTube on Shrek talking about 'Ogres are like onions': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bMcXVe8zIs

Or you can read it from here:

Shrek explains at a certain moment in the film the concept of identity by using the metaphor of the onion with multiple layers.

- Shrek: For your information, there's a lot more to ogres than people think.
- Donkey: Example?
- Shrek: Example? Okay, er …. Ogres are like onions.

- Donkey: They stink?
- Shrek: Yes. No.
- Donkey: Oh, they make you cry.
- Shrek: No.
- Donkey: Oh, you leave'em out in the sun, they get all brown, start sproutin' little white hairs.
- Shrek: No. Layers. Onions have layers. Ogres have layers. Onions have layers. You get it? We both have layers.
- Donkey: Oh, you both have layers. Oh. You know, not everybody like onions.

After watching the video and thinking about your identities, write an example of a model of your Self (in the table) as **being an onion** and list the different layers which are important for you: the most important one inside (1-3), the less important ones outside (4-5).

T2 – Seven Identities Game

Answer the following questions in your portfolios in Google Classroom.

You can type in/audio/video record your answers (you can find Voice Memos on your iPad or go online and record via:

https://voice-memos.appspot.com/. Instructions on how to use it: https://support.apple.com/en-vn/HT206775).

Then you save it on your iPad and add to this document on Google Classroom.

1. How did you feel when you were asked to narrow down yourself to (throw away one by one) one identity element?
2. Which card was it the most difficult to throw away? Why?
3. What was your last element of identity that remained?
4. What do you think this activity may be useful for?

- Write your answers here:
- Or just paste your audio or video file:

T3 – Sunglasses story

Read this story (or the teacher reads it aloud for you):

Imagine two groups of people who are born with sunglasses.

These two groups of people live on either side of a river, and on this side of the river (point to the group on your left) are the yellow sunglasses people.

You all were born with yellow sunglasses. And you know there is another group of people living on the other side of the river, but you've never met them and you really don't know anything about them.

So one day, you decide to send a delegation across the river to meet these other folks. So, you go across the river and you're pleasantly surprised to find that these folks on the other side of the river seem a lot like you.

Why? They're even born with sunglasses like you. As you talk longer with them, though, you realize that something is a little different about these folks.

And then you take a closer look at their sunglasses and you ask them if you can put on a pair of their sunglasses.

Now those are the blue sunglasses people, so what colour do the yellow sunglasses people see?
(pause a moment).

They see . . . *green.*

Answer the questions:

•   *What is this story about?*
•   *What did you feel when you read it?*
•   *What this story made you think of?*

Appendix 4 – Guide for semi-structured focus group interviews with students

Background questions (used as an icebreaker):

To start this focus group, I want you to have a quick round of telling me your name.

   A.   Awareness of Self and Metaphorical (Imagery) representation of 'Self'

   1)   We all sometimes think of who we are.
        What is your identity for you? How do you see yourself? What is important for you? What have you learned
        about yourself during this project?
   2)   The pupils are provided with the list of different aspects.

    Think about yourself.
        •   the roles you play in life (a daughter/a son, a friend, a school student); family
        •   hobby, sports or style of clothes; things you choose – idols, style of music etc.
        •   your abilities, talents, or disabilities;
        •   where you were born, or where you now live;
        •   your gender;
        •   your religion;
        •   your race or ethnicity;
        •   socio-economic status;
        •   and, what you are not or don't want to be: not a woman, not French etc.

If I ask you to choose one aspect from this list, what would you choose? Which one is the most important to you? Is
it easy for you to choose one element of your identity?
e.g., what about a person who speaks two languages in his family?

   3)   The pupils are shown an image depicting an onion. Do you remember this model from your portfolio, which
        we used as a visual representation of who you are? What does it mean to you?

   4)   Can you suggest any other metaphors depicting who you are?
        (If participants can't suggest any, show them some options (images of a tree, a book, a hand, etc.))

   B.   Awareness (Self and Others)

   Key question:
   1)   Have you learned anything about other pupils in your class during this semester? If so, what? If not, why?