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Perceptions of extramural English and English in the classroom: Swedish upper secondary students’ writing, reading, listening and speaking skills

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Abstract

This study examines, through the use of a quantitative questionnaire, to what extent Swedish upper secondary students are involved in receptive and productive extramural English activities and what their perceptions are of learning English inside and outside of school. Extramural English (EE) is a term referring to the English students encounter outside school as *extra* means ‘outside’ and *mural* means ‘walls’. This study also investigates if the students perceive that the extramural English activities facilitate their classroom learning of English, and more specifically in relation to the language proficiencies reading, listening, writing and speaking. The results showed that the students reported being involved in mostly receptive EE activities as the most common activities they reported being involved in daily were related to listening and reading. The listening activities involved watching English-language TV-programs, TV-series and movies with and without Swedish subtitles and reading English texts. 98% of the students perceived that they do learn English outside of school while 68.6% of the students perceived that the English that they learned outside school facilitated classroom learning. The language proficiency the students perceived they developed most outside school was listening as 39% reported they “developed very much”. The majority of students also reported to be more comfortable speaking and writing in English outside of school, and 57% indicated that they have learned most of their English knowledge outside of the school environment.

*Keywords*: Extramural English, second language acquisition, english as a second language, language proficiencies, out-of-school learning.
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1. Introduction

In Sweden, the tradition of learning English goes back to 1962, when it was introduced as an obligatory subject in the first curriculum for Swedish elementary school (Malmberg, 2000, p. 8). Today, it is generally expected of people in Sweden to have developed an understanding of the English language in order to participate in and access different social and cultural contexts, as well as in global studies and working life (Skolverket\(^1\), 2011, p. 1). Since the introduction of English in Swedish schools, the contexts of learning English have changed as English is no longer exclusively encountered in school as was the case for a long time. Developments in business and the advent of the Internet, computer games and television, among others, have contributed to regular exposure to English in the everyday lives of Swedes. It is no longer uncommon to learn and develop English outside school. The term extramural English (EE) refers to the English that learners come in contact with or are involved in outside the walls of the classroom (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 6). Studies have found that some students spend several hours per week in extramural activities involving English, which provides many opportunities for consciously learning and practising English, but also for learning subconsciously while unaware of the learning situation (Börjesson, 2012, p. 9).

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate to what extent Swedish students in upper secondary schools are involved in extramural English activities and what possible effects they perceive that it has on their speaking, writing, reading and listening skills. The aim is also to investigate whether students find their extramural activities facilitate their classroom learning.

\(^1\) Skolverket is the Swedish National Agency for Education, which is “the central administrative authority for the public school system, publicly organised preschooling, school-age childcare and for adult education”. Retrieved January 3, 2019 from https://www.skolverket.se/andra-sprak-other-languages/english-engelska.
in terms of speaking, writing, reading and/or listening. The research questions for the study are:

- What extramural English activities, if any, do upper secondary students report being involved in?
- To what extent do students’ reported EE activities involve speaking, listening, writing and/or reading?
- To what extent do students believe that extramural English facilitates classroom learning in general and, more specifically, in speaking, writing, listening or reading?

2. Theoretical Background

Since the study will focus on students’ extramural English activities and its potential effects on classroom learning, this section will include key terms such as second language acquisition, extramural English, curriculum for English courses in Swedish schools and previous findings on extramural English in the Swedish context.

2.1 Second Language Acquisition and Learning

Sometimes, a distinction is made between learning a foreign language, which means learning a language that is generally not spoken in the surrounding community, and second language, referring to a context where the language is spoken in the surrounding community. For example, Japanese students learning English in Japan would be considered to be learning English as a foreign language (EFL), while the same students learning English in the USA would be considered learning English as a second language (ESL) (Yule, 2010, p. 187). In both cases, the students are learning a language and the term second language learning is generally used in both contexts (e.g. Yule, 2010, p. 187). The question about English being a
foreign or second language in Sweden has been discussed for a long time and some linguists, such as Hyltenstam (2004), describe English as becoming a language that all inhabitants need to understand and be able to use in order to take part in communicative situations in work and daily life (p. 52). In Sweden, English is increasingly taking on a role as a second language for many students as it has become common in everyday life and students are becoming multilingual as they use English almost every day in addition to Swedish (Viberg, 2000, p. 30). The term English as a second language (ESL) will be used in this essay instead of English as a foreign language (EFL) because of these developments and views on English as a foreign or second language in a Swedish context and because of the similarity of the process of learning a language and because ESL is more generally used when discussing English language learning in Sweden.

Second language acquisition (SLA) is an established area of research which “emerged in the 1970s as a discipline in its own right” and which encompasses many theories and ideas about how a second language is learned (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012, p. 77). Although a distinction is often made between acquisition and learning, the general term used in this study for learning a second language will be SLA as it is generally used to refer to both learning and acquisition (Wray & Bloomer, 2013, p. 46). Furthermore, Spada and Lightbrown (2010) use SLA to refer to research focusing on developing knowledge and use of language of people who already know at least one other language, which typically incorporates both learning and acquisition. The focus here will be on those theories and concepts that are especially relevant when studying extramural English activities among upper secondary students in relation to classroom learning.
2.1.1 Input

Krashen’s significant input hypothesis is based on the learner’s acquisition as learners receive comprehensible input of a language that is both understandable and just above their current language knowledge (Hedge, 2000, p. 10). A formula for comprehensible input that is often cited is “i +1”, where i marks the current stage of the learner’s linguistic competence and +1 meaning one step beyond (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 13). The hypothesis makes a distinction between acquiring a language, being exposed to and picking up language, on the one hand, and learning a language, on the other, by consciously studying the language (Hedge, 2000, pp. 10-11). The acquisition process is similar to learning a first language; the learner pays attention to the language and formulates hypotheses based on input and then tests them when producing language. This is often called a creative construction process (Hedge, 2000, pp. 10-11). Faerch and Kasper (as cited in Hedge, 2000, p. 11) suggest that the hypothesis can be tested in different ways once it is made. It can be tested by waiting for more examples in language input and then checking whether the hypothesis works or not, by looking for answers in a dictionary or grammar book or through other reliable sources such as a native speaker or teacher.

2.1.2 Intake

Regardless of the amount of input the learner is exposed to, not all of it will be processed by the learner as some of it might not be understood and some of it will receive less or no attention (Hedge, 2000, p. 12). Intake is the stage where the input is, or is not, processed by the learner. With intake in mind, the input can be controlled and shaped in classroom teaching to try to make the connection between input and intake as profitable as possible for language learning.
2.1.3 Informal and formal learning

When discussing language learning in general and second language learning in particular, it is necessary to mention informal and formal learning. When learning a first language, the process is regarded as informal, or implicit, as the language is learned through being in the environment of people speaking that language in everyday situations. There is typically no teaching of the language regarding grammar rules and learning a language informally usually happens unconsciously. If the informal learning is conscious and is learned through setting up goals, it is done by the learner itself (Lundahl, 2009, p. 40).

Formal learning, or explicit learning, is the learning of a language as it is typically taught in schools, which involves a teacher, learners and specified goals of language development. The language is learned through the teacher’s selections of texts and exercises and it is learned in the framework and in a context determined by the school, involving a curriculum, grades and performing the language in a way that is required by the school and the teacher. Formal learning does not necessarily need to take place in an environment where the target language is spoken (Lundahl, 2009, p. 40).

2.1.4 Motivation

Learning a second language does not only rely on input, intake, the teacher and material, but also on the learner in terms of motivation. There is most likely a reason for learning a second language and research in the area has provided different theories.

Early theories regarding learners’ attitudes were provided by Gardner and Lambert in 1959, who proposed the idea that learners’ attitudes toward the target language and the target language community affected the learners’ behavior and success in learning the new language.
They also developed the terms *integrative orientation*, the learner wanting to be like valued members of the target language community, and *instrumental orientation*, the enhancing effects learning the target language may have on the learners’ chances on, for example, the job market (p. 89). Furthermore, Deci and Ryan presented self-determination theory (SDT) concerning to what extent an individual’s behavior is self-motivated and self-determined, which resulted in the terms *intrinsic motivation* and *extrinsic motivation*. Intrinsic motivation is described as “the joy of doing a specific activity, or satisfying one’s curiosity” while extrinsic motivation is described as “individuals performing a behavior as a means to a specific end” (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012, p. 89). Intrinsic motivation is shown to qualitatively improve learning outcomes as learners with an intrinsic motivation find learning fun and meaningful. A common example of extrinsic motivation is getting a good grade or passing an exam (ibid).

More recent research by Ryan and Mercer, done in 2011, investigates the theory of *mindset* in relation to second language learning by a connection between mindsets and behavior and the relative naturalness of the second language learning process. They suggest that a naturalness mindset is likely to evolve in countries where Internet access is high and the settings for involvement in extramural English activities are ideal, which may cause many learners to feel they learn English more easily outside of school in a naturalistic setting. By that, they are likely to find this way of learning more effective than learning in school (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012, pp. 90-91).

Lastly, Dörnyei’s research on second language motivation is presented through *the L2 Motivational Self System*, which incorporates three dimensions. The first called *Ideal L2 Self* is related to the idea of integrativeness as the learner has a will to become the type of person
who speaks a second language, and therefore functions as a motivation. *Ought-to L2 Self* relates to the motivation of doing well on language tests in order to meet social expectations. The L2 Learning Experience relates to “executive motives related to the immediate learning environment” (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012, p. 91-92), which is generally the classroom. Dörnyei mentions that the L2 Motivational Self System model is to be viewed as changeable and dynamic as motivation may change for learners along the learning process (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012, p. 92).

### 2.2 English Proficiencies – Speaking, Writing, Reading and Listening

Traditionally, it has been argued that there are two overall types of proficiencies, namely reception and production. Reading and listening are receptive proficiencies while speaking and writing are productive and interactive proficiencies (Tornberg, 2015, p. 99). Although it is difficult to categorize reading and listening as being the same receptive proficiency, there are some elements that make them similar which can be important when investigating second language acquisition.

#### 2.2.1 English proficiencies in the curriculum

The division into receptive and productive types of proficiency is also mentioned in the curriculum for English in Swedish upper secondary school by listing the core content of English 5, the first course taken in English in Swedish upper secondary school, under three headings: (1) content of communication, (2) reception and (3) production and interaction (Skolverket, 2011, p. 3-4). Under reception, understanding spoken language and different texts are mentioned, as are strategies for listening and reading.

When reading a text, the reader is expected to understand the content of the text and a good reader is able to decode quickly and accurately, by recognizing grammatical structures and
words (Hedge, 2000, p. 192). For this, the reader must have acquired a certain level of knowledge of the language in question. Second language learners will have difficulties following the same process as a first language reader as there might be problems understanding, for example, cohesive devices, vocabulary or the relationship between sentences. Hedge (2000) describes that encouraging students to develop strategies for guessing what the words mean by the use of context and background knowledge is preferable (p. 193). According to Hedge, students are capable of guessing 60-80 per cent of unknown words in a text if the density of new words is not too high. With a certain language knowledge, second language students are able to read and understand texts that are slightly above their current level of the target language as their knowledge of the context in which the word occurs might reveal the meaning of the word. The assumption is that students in Swedish upper secondary schools will have reached a relatively high level of reading proficiency in English as they have studied English from at least fourth grade, and in many cases earlier.

The knowledge requirements regarding reception for getting the grade E in English 5, which is the lowest passing grade in the first course taken in English in Swedish upper secondary school, is:

Pupils can understand the main content and basic details of English spoken at a varying speed and in clearly expressed written English in various genres. Students show their understanding by in basic terms giving an account of, discussing and commenting on content and details, and with acceptable results act on the basis of the message and instructions in the content. Students can choose and with some certainty use strategies to assimilate and evaluate the content of spoken and written English.
Students choose texts and spoken language from different media and in a relevant way use the material selected in their own production and interaction.

(Skolverket, 2011, p. 4)

Students are expected to understand the main content and show their understanding in basic terms, which means they need certain knowledge of the language in order to decode the text. They are also expected to “use strategies to assimilate and evaluate the content of spoken and written English”.

For getting the lowest passing grade regarding production and interaction in English 5, the following is required:

In oral and written communications of various genres, students can express themselves in relatively varied ways, relatively clearly and relatively coherently. Students can express themselves with some fluency and to some extent adapted to purpose, recipient and situation. Students work on and make improvements to their own communications.

In oral and written interaction in various, and more formal contexts, students can express themselves clearly and with some fluency and some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation. In addition, students can choose and use essentially functional strategies which to some extent solve problems and improve their interaction.

(Skolverket, 2011, p. 4)

Although writing and speaking in many cases differ, they have one important thing in common: they are both interactive (Tornberg, 2015, p. 167). When writing, there is always one possible reader and potentially more, and they are mostly indirectly addressed while they are mostly directly addressed in speaking. There are different kinds of interactions when
talking about writing and speaking. Writing can also be direct in chatting and speaking can be indirect when, for example, recording a speech or giving an online lecture. Hedge (2000) provides five criteria in a speaking test which the students should be able to achieve. The five criteria are: **accuracy** (pronunciation, high grammatical accuracy), **appropriacy** (use of language in relation to function and context, clear intention and unambiguous), **range** (any items causing difficulties can be substituted or avoided), **flexibility** (ability to ‘turn-take’ and adapt in conversation) and **size** (expand and develop ideas with minimal help) (p. 260). These criteria require practice through language use and strategies for production and interaction.

Developing receptive and productive language skills outside school, by engaging in extramural English activities is possible if the language knowledge and receptive and productive strategies are developed. Depending on the learners’ environment and interest in extramural English activities, the possibilities for developing these skills may vary. Commonly, extramural English activities are mostly receptive as listening to music, watching TV or movies and reading are activities that students report being involved in (Sundqvist, 2009, pp. 144-145). Playing video games can be both receptive and productive as some video games incorporate communication. Sundqvist (2009, pp. 144-146) found that there is a correlation between students’ total time spent on EE and their oral proficiency, without the EE activity having to be interactive or productive. It seems that being involved in reading and listening EE activities does not explicitly develop the language skills themselves, but may also develop writing and speaking in, for example, vocabulary and sentence structure because of the amount of input that is typically received in EE activities.

**2.3 Students’ Beliefs about Learning English**

As mentioned earlier, a second language has traditionally been learned in a classroom and taught by a teacher. Since there are many different methods for learning a language, research
has been done on the subject of students’ perceptions and beliefs about learning English. Regarding the question about the role of school and out of school learning in a Swedish context, findings have been rather mixed.

Sundqvist (2009) discusses the answers to a questionnaire on students’ beliefs about learning English by comparing her results to those of the NU-03, which was a national evaluation of Swedish schools carried out in 2003. Sundqvist notes that the two studies point in different directions (pp. 180-181). The students were asked where they believe they have learned English and they were given four possible answers to select from. Sundqvist separated these into two categories: in school versus outside school. In Sundqvist’s study, 69% said they had learned most of their English in school and 31% said they had learned most of their English outside school (2009, p. 181). In NU-03, however, the results were the opposite. 18% said they had learned their English in school and 82% responded outside school. The reason for these results being contradictory can vary and can be discussed from the perspective of several different variables.

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (2011) has also researched this question. They found that learning English through school was the predominant belief (p. 19). The responses to the question about where students have learned most of their English were distributed as follows: all/nearly all through work in school (11%), most through work in school (32%), about as much outside as through work in school (34%), most outside of work in school (11%), all/nearly all outside work in school (5%) while 7% did not answer. Using Sundqvist’s categorization, the overall totals are: 43% through work in school and 16% outside school. In Sundqvist’s study, there was no alternative for the middle ground, which suggests that
students learn about as much both in school and outside school, while that alternative received 34% of the answers in The Swedish Schools Inspectorate’s study.

2.4 Extramural English

The term extramural English (EE) is of Latin origin with *extra* meaning ‘outside’ and *mural* meaning ‘wall’ and refers to the English that students encounter outside the walls of the school (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 24). Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) discuss the choice of using extramural English rather than other terms that have been used in previous research (for example Benson’s *out-of-class learning* [of English]). They find that alternative terms do not describe the concept of extramural English accurately as *learning* is typically included (pp. 7-8). The activities the students are involved in outside school might not be specifically aimed at learning as the term extramural English involves all activities, both with and without the purpose of learning, which they prefer to be involved in as the activities can be initiated by the student without the explicit intention of learning (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 25).

In the traditional L2 classroom, students only study the target language a few hours a week and rarely meet a first language speaker of that target language. The learning process is directed by a teacher who has selected what exercises and what texts that the students will read and learn from (Lundahl, 2012, pp. 46-47). Though this might to some extent still be the case, research has shed light on the probable effects of extramural English and to what extent students report being involved in extramural English activities.

3. Material and Method

The primary material for this study is data retrieved from a questionnaire answered by upper secondary students in Swedish schools (see Appendix 2, p. 43). Through the questionnaire,
the students’ extramural English activities and their beliefs about learning English are investigated. The data was then analyzed based on previous research, what the curriculum says about learning English and by reference to language learning theories.

3.1 Data Collection

The method for the study is a quantitative questionnaire, which was chosen because the study needs data to be collected from several students in a relatively short amount of time. Alternatives to collecting questionnaire data could be to arrange interviews or have a focus group to test hypotheses on, but these would be too time-consuming if the same amount of data were to be collected. The advantage of interviewing students would be to go further than to just collect their attitudes and views by investigating how their extramural English activities really take place and what the processes look like (Wray & Bloomer, 2013, p. 170). The questionnaire contains questions that can be answered through yes or no, to assess how frequently they are involved in an activity, through Likert scales and grading in the case of how much they have developed a certain knowledge from “nothing or almost nothing” to “very much” (Litoselliti, 2010, p. 68).

The questionnaire was mostly based on Sundqvist’s (2009) and Hlebnikovs’ (2018) questionnaires. Sundqvist’s study spans over a year and the questionnaire is not the only method for collecting data. Sundqvist aimed to collect background knowledge about the students regarding, for example, where they live, information about their parents and so on, which is excluded in the questionnaire for this study. The questions regarding the students’ perception of and involvement in different extramural English activities have been included and, to some extent, rephrased to narrow the research down to what this study will investigate. Hlebnikovs’ questionnaire aims to answer many questions which this study also aims to
answer, but with some differences and a few additions. The questionnaire was not piloted, but revised in order to avoid ambiguous questions, loaded questions with an underlying assumption, leading questions where the wording suggests a ‘right’ answer, questions that cause students to feel they cannot truly speak their mind and answer and, lastly, to avoid asking questions not relevant to the study (Wray & Bloomer, 2013, p. 171).

3.2 Process of Data Collection
To recruit participants for the study, two upper secondary schools that I have had previous contact with were contacted and one of them answered they were willing to participate. The principal was contacted and asked to recruit English teachers willing to give the questionnaire to their students. In order to secure a reasonable number of participants, a summary of the study, method and setting for answering the questionnaire were presented to an English teacher. Participating in the study was voluntary and participants under the age of 18 were asked to return a consent form signed by their legal guardian, giving their permission for the students to voluntarily participate. As a questionnaire sent to people via e-mail or regular mail is expected to have a low response rate, perhaps around 20-30%, the aim of the setting for answering the questionnaire was to send the questionnaire to students who have agreed to participate and preferably have them answer it during an English lesson (Wray & Bloomer, 2013, p. 170). The questionnaire would then not be sent without asking beforehand and therefore, hopefully, making the participants more likely to participate. For questionnaires, large numbers of respondents are preferred which will be more representative for the study (Wray & Bloomer, 2013, p. 166). The aim of this study was to have at least 30 respondents but with an expectation of 40-70 respondents. In the end, 51 respondents participated.
All of the participating students attend university preparatory programs at a public upper secondary school in the middle of Sweden and there were students from different programs both from an English 6 course, the second course at Swedish upper secondary school, and an English 7 course, the third and most advanced English course at Swedish upper secondary school.

A link to the questionnaire was sent to a teacher who was willing to forward the questionnaire to students, who then answered the questionnaire online. As the questionnaire was online and a link was sent via e-mail, the response rate can be expected to be low and there are risks involved in handing out a questionnaire via someone else as the setting in which the questionnaire is answered is not completely known (Wray & Bloomer, 2013 p. 170-171). With this in mind, some notes were sent to the responsible teacher with preferred approaches: The questionnaire was to be answered, preferably, during an English lesson if time was available and the students would participate. By dedicating time to answer a questionnaire, the likelihood for it to be answered increases and the setting will be similar for the respondents.

3.3 Reliability and Validity

When carrying out quantitative research, it is important to consider reliability and validity. Litosseliti (2010, p. 55) describes reliability as the “measure repeatedly delivering the same (or near same) results”. According to Bryman (2012, p. 46), the results of a study should be repeatable and there should be faith in the consistency of the results of the study. Validity “refers to our measure actually measuring what it is supposed to measure” (Litosseliti, 2010, p. 56). Furthermore, Litosseliti describes validity as being problematic and can be an important issue when using a questionnaire measuring abstract concepts such as attitudes. A good starting point for ensuring validity, but only to some extent reliable, is to use common
sense. If the results in the study to a large extent differ from previous research with very similar circumstances, the method might need to be revisited and reworked (ibid.).

Bryman (2012, p. 169) describes three prominent factors when answering the question of what reliability is, which are stability, internal reliability and inter-observer consistency. Stability refers to a measure being stable over time so that a measure to a group is readministrated, there will be little variation over time in the results obtained. Bryman (ibid.) gives an example where Chris Grayling in 2010, who was the Shadow Home Secretary in the U.K at the time, was criticized for suggesting that there had been a big increase in violent crimes since Labour took office in 1997, as the definition of violent crime had changed which caused an immediate increase in the statistics. In that case, the measure was not reliable as there were changes over time. The questionnaire for this study was, as mentioned in 3.1, based on Sundqvist’s (2009) and Hlebnikovs’ (2018) questionnaires and reviewed in order to include relevant terms, information and questions.

Internal reliability is described as the reliability of multiple-indicator measures (Bryman, 2012, p. 170). When having a multiple-item measure in which each answer forms an overall score, there is a possibility that the indicators do not relate to the same thing, they lack coherence. To avoid that, the indicators must be related to each other and to the subject of measure. There are ways of testing internal reliability, for example, the split-half method and Cronbach’s alpha (Bryman, 2012, p. 170). Although this study does not include an overall score from the answers, it is important to investigate the coherence of the questions as there are some sections that ask about certain narrow areas within the subject in which the questions need to be coherent and the answers processable.
Inter-observer consistency refers to reliability in subjective judgement of the observer or in cases with more than one observer. It is possible that there is a lack of consistency in the decisions of the observer when categorizing media items, or when classifying subjects’ behaviour which may cause doubts for the reliability (Bryman, 2012, p. 169). For this study, there are no observations as it is a quantitative research. The responses are categorized beforehand because of the format of the questionnaire, which can cause subjective judgement if the researcher subjectively analyses the data or makes subjective decisions that affect the data or the analysis.

Regarding validity, Bryman (2012, p. 47) describes four main types of validity when examining the validity of research. Firstly, Bryman explains measurement validity as applied to quantitative research and search for “measures of social scientific concepts” (2012, p. 47). The question for measurement reliability is if the measures represent the concepts they are supposed to measure. For this study, several other studies were investigated to view the relevance of the aim, method and result for each study compared this study in order to secure a questionnaire that would measure the aim of this study. Questions in the questionnaires of other studies that measured the concepts were included and evaluated to ensure the measurement validity.

Bryman describes internal validity as “if we suggest that $x$ causes $y$, can we be sure that it is $x$ that is responsible for variation in $y$ and not something else that is producing an apparent causal relationship?” (2012, p. 47). By constructing the research questions with dependent and independent variables in mind to explicitly answer one question, the data collection can be narrowed down having certain variables already considered. Internal validity can be problematic to make completely accurate as the respondents may incorporate other variables
or interpret questions differently. In this study, the research questions have been peer-reviewed and revised to increase the internal validity and the method for data collection has been revised.

The third aspect Bryman explains is the external validity, which “is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study can be generalized beyond the specific research context” (2012, p. 47). The size of this study does not allow one to make generalization regarding the results but as it is merely an example contributing to empirical findings in the areas of SLA and EE. This study can be used for reference and comparisons, but not to draw generalized conclusions from. There are 51 respondents from a Swedish upper secondary school, which cannot reflect the frequencies and perceptions of a large number of Swedish students but may suggest what tendencies there are among Swedish students.

The fourth and final aspect of validity is ecological validity (Bryman, 2012, p. 48). Ecological validity concerns the question whether “social scientific findings are applicable to people’s everyday, natural social settings” (p. 48). Furthermore, Bryman explains findings using a questionnaire may have measurement validity, internal validity and external validity, but the unnaturalness of answering a questionnaire may mean the findings have limited ecological validity (ibid.). The questionnaire for this study is aimed at the everyday life of the students as it deals with their exposure to the English language outside school, which previous studies have shown is part of many students’ everyday life, and it is answered during a lesson in school, which is also part of the everyday life of a student. However, ecological validity is difficult to measure but the setting for the questionnaire is aimed at being applicable to people’s everyday life.
4. Results

This section will be divided into three subsections answering the three research questions for this study. The collected data will be presented and analyzed in the different subsections and also compared with previous research.

The first subsection focuses on the extramural English activities the students report being involved in. The second section will build on the first as the activities will be analyzed from the perspective of language proficiencies, namely reception (reading and listening) and production and interaction (writing and speaking). The section will discuss the reported extramural English activities according to which language proficiency is involved, how the activities relate to second language acquisition theories and how the results relate to the knowledge requirements in the school curriculum. In the third section, the students’ beliefs about and perceptions of language learning will be presented. The results include both their perception of learning English in total, their own perceived connections between learning outside of and in school as well as what language proficiencies they perceive they develop outside of school that may facilitate their classroom learning. Students’ perceptions of using productive and interactive skills outside and inside the classroom will also be presented.

4.1 Reported Extramural English Activities

Due to the limitations of creating and answering a questionnaire in terms of not being able to ask further questions and for the respondents to develop their thoughts, the answers received in this questionnaire for reported English extramural activities only contain what was asked for. Questions regarding extramural English activities have, as previously mentioned, been developed by the strengths and weaknesses of previous research which has included the most common activities, though some may be missing.
The results of the reported extramural English activities show that reading a common activity, with 88.2% answering they read English texts outside school (see Appendix A, Figure A1) and 44% answering they read English texts daily (Figure 1). 40% answered they read sometimes or a couple of times a week. 58.8% reported watching English TV programs, TV series or movies with Swedish subtitles daily, which was the activity that had the highest reported percentage of daily activities. The activity with the lowest daily frequency was speaking English outside school and, on the follow-up question, 53.3% answered they speak English with friends and family while 33.3% answered they speak with other people over the Internet (Figure A14, Appendix A). The activity with the highest frequency of the answer “never or almost never” was playing computer or role-playing games in English with 41.7% (Figure 1). 58.8% reported not being involved in that activity (Figure A7, Appendix A). The question for the result in Figure 1 is a follow-up to the question for the result in Figure A7.
(see Appendix A), as the question for the answers regarding the frequency for computer or role-playing games were based on the respondents answering yes in the first question about playing computer or role-playing games, which 21 (of 51) did. It seems that playing computer or role-playing games was the least popular extramural English activity. On the other hand, watching English-language TV programs, TV series or movies with Swedish subtitles is a popular extramural English activity and the most frequent in this group, with 30 students reporting being involved in it daily (Figure 1). Watching English-language TV programs, TV series or movies without Swedish subtitles is also common, as 24 students reported being involved in it daily. 32 of 51 reported that they write in English outside school and, if we consider the detailed responses, they show that 76.5% report writing in English in chats and 14.7% writing in forums (see Appendix A, Figure A9 and A11).

Although the frequency for the extramural English activities varies regarding the individual responses, the exposure to extramural English activities is widespread as no one reports not being involved in any. From the 51 respondents, there were 112 answers in total reporting about daily involvement in an extramural English activity. Not all reported being involved in an activity daily, but some reported being involved in up to six daily activities. If the 112 answers were to be spread out on all responding students, they would average 2.2 daily extramural English activities.

4.2 Activities Involving Language Proficiencies

As seen in Figure A1 (Appendix A), 45 students report reading English texts outside school and only 6 report not reading English texts outside school. Furthermore, Figure 1 shows that 22 students report reading English texts daily and 20 reading a couple of times or sometimes a week, which means that a majority of the students receive written English input very often during a week. Figure 1 shows that watching English-language TV programs, TV series or
movies both with and without Swedish subtitles, is very common. 30 students report watching with Swedish subtitles daily and 15 report watching a couple of times or sometimes a week. 24 students report watching without Swedish subtitles daily and 19 report watching a couple of times or sometimes a week. Regarding listening to or reading news in English, 12 reported doing so daily, 18 a couple of times or sometimes a week, and 17 a couple of times or sometimes a month.

All the above activities are categorized as receptive in terms of second language learning, as reading is a receptive skill and when watching English-speaking TV program, TV series or movies the students are listening. Taking part of news in English is not specified as either reading or listening but it is categorized as a receptive activity. Although the frequency for watching with Swedish subtitles is higher, there is still input in the English language, but with an immediate translation. One question had the students assess to what extent they agree with a specific statement, which was “when I watch English-language TV programs, TV series or movies, I need Swedish subtitles to understand the content”. The result shows that most of the students perceive that they do not need Swedish subtitles to understand the content (see Appendix A, Figure A6). When reading or listening outside school, the students have presumably chosen the activity with the aim of focusing on the content of the chosen activity rather than for the purpose of learning. The input provided to the students is frequent and the level of the language in the input may vary, which possibly contributes to the realisation of Krashen’s i+1 formula, giving the students comprehensible input as they understand the spoken or written language and possibly receives input just above their current knowledge (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 13). It seems that a majority of students receive input from the various receptive extramural English activities which increases the likelihood of the process of intake as the input may be processed and result in language learning (Hedge, 2000, p. 12). In these
situations, the process of informal learning takes place as, if the students are developing their English language skills, they are doing so without the influence of the school or a teacher (Lundahl, 2009, p. 40).

In terms of production and interaction, the results are more evenly distributed as 32 students report writing in English outside school while 19 report not doing so. Of these, 8 reported writing daily, 9 a couple of times or sometimes a week and 14 a couple of times or sometimes a month. As previously mentioned, a majority reported writing in chats. 33 students reported speaking English outside school while 18 reported not speaking English outside school. 8 reported doing it daily, 18 a couple of times or sometimes a week and 14 a couple of times or sometimes a month (Figure 2). When asked about in what context they speak English, 24 answered they speak English with friends and family and 16 answered they speak over the Internet with other people. A majority of the students report being involved in productive and interactive language activities, but to different extents.

Hedge (2000) describes comprehensible output as a process; something learners need to practice as they use the input and the language knowledge they have in order to communicate and interact (p. 13). As second language learners sometimes live in an environment where the access to first language speakers of the target language is limited, communicative pair work and group work have become more common in classrooms for language learning as interaction forces students to produce language that is appropriate and accurate (Hedge, 2000, p. 13). The results for speaking English outside school suggest that students speak English with people over the Internet, but whether English serves as a lingua franca\(^2\) or is the first language of the people that students communicate with is unknown.

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\(^2\) A language that is used to facilitate communication between two communities which have different first languages. (Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert & Leap, 2009, p. 489).
4.3 Students’ Perception of Language Learning

Students in upper secondary schools in Sweden are expected to have a high level of proficiency in the English language and will have been exposed to different methods and strategies for learning English, and possibly other languages as well. Through the years, they have probably developed a perception of which learning strategies suit them and working strategies for how they tend to structure the language learning process. The results in this section will provide subjective views on language learning and the students’ own perceptions of learning English.

![Graph showing students' perception of development of language skills in extramural English activities.](image)

**Figure 2: Students’ perception of development of language skills in extramural English activities. Y-axis = number of responses.**

The first question in the questionnaire that addresses the students’ perception of learning English is “do you perceive that you learn English outside school?”, to which 50 answered yes and 1 no (Figure A15). In that single case, the respondent reported not writing in English outside school, not playing any computer or role-playing games, or being involved in any
extramural English activities daily (though involved in some activities a couple of times or
sometimes a week or month), which may correlate with the response of not learning English
outside school. The follow-up question asked whether they perceived that the acquired
knowledge helped them in learning English in school, to which 35 answered yes, 5 no, and 11
do not know (Figure A16). There is another follow-up question where the students are asked
which language skills they perceive that their extramural English activities develop. The
answer that stands out is the perception of listening being developed very much as 20 students
have selected this option (Figure 2). The language skill in second place in terms of being
developed very much is speaking with 14 respondents marking this. The student’s perception
of developing listening may correlate to the high frequency of watching English-speaking TV
programs, TV series or movies as many students reported being involved in these activities
daily. Although speaking was not reported being as common as other EE activities, the
students perceive they develop speaking in EE activities. This was also the case of Sundqvist
(2009, pp. 144-146) as mentioned in section 2.2.1 as she found that there is a correlation
between students’ total time spent on EE and their oral proficiency, without the EE activity
having to be interactive or productive. By looking at the results in Figure 2 and comparing
them to Sundqvist’s results, it seems that students perceive, and in that case actually, develop
their speaking skills/oral proficiency in EE activities. The perception of not developing
writing as much as the other proficiencies can be linked to the results in Figure A9 (Appendix
A) and Figure 1 as not many students report being involved in EE activities involving writing.

In the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (2011) report regarding English in elementary school,
students reported that there was a difference between the English language they encounter
inside and outside school and that they felt more confident speaking English outside school
(pp. 19-20). Since the elementary students perceived a difference in the English language they
encounter, it is interesting to look at the perception among upper secondary students regarding production and interaction inside and outside school, which is seen in Figure 3. These results show that students report that they are more comfortable both speaking and writing in English outside school. The reasons for this possibly vary for each student but speaking and writing are commonly expected to be done in a certain way following specific language rules and such activities are in many cases assessed and used as a basis for a grade by the teacher in the classroom context.

![Figure 3: Students' perception of production and interaction in and outside the classroom](image)

Figure 3: In this figure, the Likert-scale is used to see whether students agree with the statement or not. 1 means disagreeing, 5 means agreeing. Y-axis = number of responses.

The students’ perception of where they have learned most of the English that they know is distributed as follows: everything or almost everything through work in school (0%), mostly through work in school (43.1%), mostly outside work in school (39.2%) and everything or almost everything outside work in school (17.6%) (Figure A19). Sundqvist (2009) also had four possible answers but categorized them into two: most outside school and most in school
If we do the same here, the distribution is 43% in school and 57% outside school. Compared to Sundqvist (2009) where 69% said they had learned most of their English in school and 31% said they had learned most of their English outside school, the results point in a different direction, as the students in Sundqvist’s study generally reported that they learned most of their English in school (pp. 180-181). Sundqvist also refers to the national evaluation NU-03 which obtained a different result, with 18% saying they had learned their English in school and 82% outside school. The results in NU-03 and in this study differ in degrees, although the majority in both studies responded that they learned outside of school, reaching 82% in NU-03 and, 57% in this study.

5. Conclusion
To conclude, this study has investigated to what extent Swedish students in upper secondary schools are involved in extramural English activities and what possible effects they perceive it has on their speaking, writing, reading and listening skills. The aim was also to investigate the extent to which students find their extramural activities facilitating their classroom learning in terms of speaking, writing, reading and/or listening. The first research question asked what, if any, extramural English activities students report being involved in. The result showed that the students were involved in different activities, but the two most common activities were watching English-language TV programs, TV series and movies with and without Swedish subtitles. The third most common activity was reading English texts, which included mostly blogs and texts through social media. What they have in common is that both are receptive activities as they involve reading and listening (watching). The questionnaire presented the limited alternatives for answering this question, as the students may not have been able to report on the exact extramural English activities they are involved in. The
questionnaire was designed to cover the most common activities based on previous research, but some may still have been excluded.

The second research question asked to what extent students’ reported EE activities involve speaking, listening, writing and/or reading, which is a follow up and possibly related to the first research question. The questionnaire did not include other listening activities such as listening to English-speaking podcasts and listening to music with English lyrics. The only listening activity represented was watching English-speaking TV programs, TV series and movies, but the study could have been more extensive if more options were included regarding listening. However, it was clear that the two most common language proficiencies that the students encountered in EE were listening and reading, which are both receptive proficiencies.

The third research question asked to what extent students believe that extramural English facilitates classroom learning in general and, more specifically, in speaking, writing, listening or reading. Along with this question, responses were collected regarding learning English outside school in general and addressing how students perceive they have learned most of their English. 98% perceived they learned English outside school and when asked where they think they had learned most of their English 43% answered in school and 57% answered outside school. 68.6% of the students perceived that their EE learning facilitated classroom learning, 9.8% perceived it did not and 21.6% did not know. The language proficiency that received most responses for “develops very much” was listening and the general perception of development of listening through EE activities was high.
When investigating students’ perception of learning English, it is not to be seen as facts or something to draw greater linguistic or didactic conclusions from as perceptions are the learners’ views on language learning. If they perceive they have learned most of their English outside school, that might not be scientifically correct as that kind of study would be extensive, span over a reasonable amount of time and it would difficult to carry out. When discussing the perception of second language learners learning English in Sweden, we find what the current views are, what access learners have to extramural English activities and to what extent they are involved in them. In this study, perceptions of extramural English activities have been connected to perceived developments of language proficiencies to receive more details on students’ views on language knowledge development outside school. As there were 51 respondents in this study, it is merely an example of how the distribution for extramural English activities and their perception of extramural English can be. To deepen the knowledge in the subject, more respondents should be involved, interviews can be added to the method to develop answers from the questionnaire and it would be interesting to carry out a research method involving a test group regarding extramural English activities.
References


Appendix A: Results

**Figure A1**

Do you read English-language texts in your leisure time (apart from school work)?

- Yes
- No

**Figure A2**

If yes, how often?

- Daily
- Sometime or a couple of times a week
- Sometime or a couple of times a month
- Never or almost never
If yes, what kind of texts do you read?

- Fiction (detective story, novels etc.)
- Non-fiction (instruction books, manuals etc.)
- Weekly magazines (including web magazines)
- Daily newspaper (including web newspapers)
- Internet texts (forums, blogs, e-journals)

![Bar chart showing the types of texts read.]

**Figure A3**

How often do you watch English-language TV programs, TV series or movies NOT subtitled in Swedish?

- Daily
- Sometime or a couple of times a week
- Sometime or a couple of times a month
- Never or almost never

![Pie chart showing the frequency of watching English-language TV.]

**Figure A4**
How often do you watch English-language TV programs, TV series or movies subtitled in Swedish?

- Daily
- Sometime or a couple of times a week
- Sometimes or a couple of times a month
- Never or almost never

Figure A5

When I watch English-language TV programs, TV series or movies, I need Swedish subtitles to understand the content

- 1 - Disagree
- 10 - Agree

Figure A6
Do you play any English language computer or role playing games?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how often?

- Daily
- A couple of times or sometimes a week
- A couple of times or sometimes a month
- Never or almost never

Figure A7

Figure A8
Do you write in English (apart from school work)?

[Graph showing the distribution of responses: Yes vs. No]

Figure A9

If yes, how often?

[Graph showing the distribution of frequency: Daily, A couple of times or sometimes a week, A couple of times or sometimes a month, Never or almost never]

Figure A10

If yes, in what context?

[Graph showing the distribution of context: Chat, Forum, Games]

Figure A11
How often do you take part of news in English?

- Daily
- A couple of times or sometimes a week
- A couple of times or sometimes a month
- Never or almost never

Figure A12

How often do you speak English outside school?

- Daily
- A couple of times or sometimes a week
- A couple of times or sometimes a month
- Never or almost never

Figure A13
In what contexts do you speak English outside school?

- With people on the Internet
- In daily situations with people not speaking Swedish
- With friends and family

Yes

Figure A14

Do you perceive you learn English outside school?

Yes

Figure A15
If yes, does that learning help you in the English education in school?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Figure A16

If yes, grade the proficiencies you perceive the English you learn outside school develops.

- Nothing or almost nothing
- Develops to some extent
- Develops moderately
- Develops much
- Develops very much

Figure A17
Students' perception of production and interaction in and outside the classroom

How do you believe you have learned most of your knowledge in English?

Figure A18

Figure A19
Appendix B: The Questionnaire

Frågeformulär - Engelska i och utanför skolan

1. Läser du engelskspråkiga texter på din fritid (utöver skolarbete)?
   - Ja
   - Nej

2. Om ja, hur ofta?
   - Dagligen
   - Någon eller några gånger i veckan
   - Någon eller några gånger i månaden
   - Aldrig eller nästan aldrig

3. Om ja, vilken typ av texter läser du?
   - Skönlitteratur (deckare, romaner etc.)
   - Facklitteratur (instruktionsböcker, manualer etc.)
   - Veckotidningar (inklusiv webbtidningar)
   - Webbtexter (forum, bloggar, e-tidskrifter, artiklar, etc.)
   - Annat:

4. Hur ofta ser du på engelskspråkiga tv-program, tv-serier eller filmer som INTE är textade på svenska?
   - Dagligen
   - Någon eller några gånger i veckan
   - Någon eller några gånger i månaden
   - Aldrig eller nästan aldrig

5. Hur ofta ser du på engelskspråkiga tv-program, tv-serier eller filmer som är textade på svenska?
   - Dagligen
   - Någon eller några gånger i veckan
   - Någon eller några gånger i månaden
   - Aldrig eller nästan aldrig

   - Håller inte med – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 – Håller helt med

7. Spelar du någon form av engelskspråkiga data- eller rollspel?
   - Ja
   - Nej
8. Om ja, i vilken omfattning?

Dagligen
Någon eller några gånger i veckan
Någon eller några gånger i månaden
Aldrig eller nästan aldrig

9. Om ja, vilka typer av spel?

______________________________

10. Skriver du på engelska utöver skolarbete?

Ja
Nej

11. Om ja, i vilken omfattning?

Dagligen
Någon eller några gånger i veckan
Någon eller några gånger i månaden
Aldrig eller nästan aldrig

12. Om ja, i vilket sammanhang?

Brev
E-mail
Chat
Forum
Annat:

13. Hur ofta tar du del av nyheter som är på engelska?

Dagligen
Någon eller några gånger i veckan
Någon eller några gånger i månaden
Aldrig eller nästan aldrig

14. Hur ofta talar du engelska utanför skolan?

Dagligen
Någon eller några gånger i veckan
Någon eller några gånger i månaden
Aldrig eller nästan aldrig

15. I vilka sammanhang talar du engelska utanför skolan?

Med andra människor över internet
I vardagssituationer med människor som inte kan svenska
16. Upplever du att du lär dig engelska utanför skolan?

Ja
Nej

17. Om ja, hjälper de kunskaperna dig i engelskundervisningen i skolan?

Ja
Nej
Vet inte


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Håller inte med – 1 2 3 4 5 - Håller helt med

20. Jag känner mig bekväm med att tala engelska i klassrummet.

Håller inte med – 1 2 3 4 5 - Håller helt med


Håller inte med – 1 2 3 4 5 - Håller helt med

22. Jag känner mig bekväm med att skriva på engelska i klassrummet.

Håller inte med – 1 2 3 4 5 - Håller helt med

23. Hur tror du att du har lärt dig det mesta du kan i engelska?

Allt eller nästan allt genom skolarbetet
Det mesta genom skolarbetet
Det mesta vid sidan av skolarbetet
Allt eller nästan allt vid sidan av skolarbetet
Questionnaire - English inside and outside the classroom

1. Do you read English-language texts in your leisure time (apart from school work)?
   Yes
   No

2. If yes, how often?
   Daily
   Sometime or a couple of times a week
   Sometime or a couple of times a month
   Never or almost never

3. If yes, what kind of texts do you read?
   Fiction (detective story, novels etc.)
   Non-fiction (instruction books, manuals etc.)
   Weekly magazines (including web magazines)
   Daily newspapers (including web newspapers)
   Internet texts (forums, blogs, e-journals)

4. How often do you watch English-language TV-programs, TV series or movies
   NOT subtitled in Swedish?
   Daily
   Sometime or a couple of times a week
   Sometime or a couple of times a month
   Never or almost never

5. How often do you watch English-language TV programs, TV series or movies
   subtitled in Swedish?
   Daily
   Sometime or a couple of times a week
   Sometime or a couple of times a month
   Never or almost never

6. When I watch English-language TV programs, TV series or movies, I need
   Swedish subtitles to understand the content.
   Disagree – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 - Agree

7. Do you play any English language computer or role playing games?
   Yes
   No

8. If yes, how often?
Daily
Sometime or a couple of times a week
Sometime or a couple of times a month
Never or almost never

9. If yes, what kind of games?
______________________________

10. Do you write in English apart from school work?
  Yes
  No

11. If yes, how often?

Daily
Sometime or a couple of times a week
Sometime or a couple of times a month
Never or almost never

12. If yes, in what context?

Letter
E-mail
Chat
Forum
Other:

13. How often do you take part of new in English?

Daily
Sometime or a couple of times a week
Sometime or a couple of times a month
Never or almost never

14. How often do you speak English outside school?

Daily
Sometime or a couple of times a week
Sometime or a couple of times a month
Never or almost never

15. In what contexts do you speak English outside school?

With other people on the internet
In daily situations with people not speaking Swedish
With friends and family
16. Do you perceive you learn English outside school?

   Yes
   No

17. If yes, does that learning help you in the English education in school?

   Yes
   No
   Do not know

18. If yes, grade the proficiencies you perceive the English you learn outside school develops.

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19. I feel comfortable speaking in English outside the classroom.

   Disagree – 1   2   3   4   5  -  Agree

20. I feel comfortable speaking in English inside the classroom.

   Disagree – 1   2   3   4   5  -  Agree

21. I feel comfortable writing in English outside the classroom.

   Disagree – 1   2   3   4   5  -  Agree

22. I feel comfortable writing in English inside the classroom

   Disagree – 1   2   3   4   5  -  Agree

23. How, do you believe, you have learned most of your knowledge in English?

   Everything or almost everything through work in school
   Most through work in school
   Most outside school
   Everything or almost everything outside school