Degree Project

Level: Bachelor’s

Where do Swedish Senior High School students learn most of the English that they know?

Swedish Senior High School students’ beliefs about learning English outside the classroom versus inside the classroom

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate Swedish senior high school students’ Extramural English (EE) activities and their beliefs about learning English inside and outside of the classroom. EE is defined as English language activities that learners are engaged in outside the classroom, and includes activities such as listening to music, reading, writing, speaking, surfing the Internet, playing computer games, watching TV, YouTube and movies (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 1). The study also investigated possible gender differences related to students’ reported EE activities, and their reported attitudes about English.

This study is based on questionnaire data. Twenty students participated in this study. 9 of 10 participants indicated that they believed that they are learning most of the English they know outside of school by daily contact with popular EE activities such as listening to music, followed by surfing the Internet, reading, watching YouTube, watching TV, playing computer games, writing, speaking and lastly watching movies. Boys reported a greater exposure to EE overall compared to the girls, more specifically, in their contact with music, computer games and writing and speaking in an EE context. Most of the students reported positive attitudes to English both inside and outside the classroom, but overall students reported more positive attitudes to the English that they use in their free time. The study has found no strong gender differences concerning students’ attitudes to learning English.

Keywords: Extramural English, second language acquisition, gender and language learning, out-of-school learning.
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1. Introduction

Despite the fact that Swedish is the official language in Sweden, almost everybody has the opportunity to come in contact with English daily, thanks to the widespread access to the Internet. 93 percent of all Swedes have access to the Internet at home (Statistics Sweden, 2016). 7 of 10 adolescents from 16-18 use the Internet for at least three hours a day in their free time to find things that they are interested in, such as amongst other things, listening to English music, reading web texts of different kinds, watching YouTube videos and playing computer games. 26 percent of boys play computer games for at least 3 hours a day compared to 4 percent of girls (Statistics Sweden, 2018).

The term Extramural English (henceforth EE), used by Sundqvist in her 2009 study “refers to the English learners come in contact with or are involved in outside the walls of the classroom” (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 1). Previous research has shown that there is a correlation between EE activities and high levels of English proficiency (Sundqvist, 2009; Olsson, 2012; Sylvén, 2010), and that the type of EE activity that learners engage in matters, as those activities which require students to be active or productive are more important for students’ oral proficiency and vocabulary than activities which allow learners to remain passive (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 203). As a result, the exposure to EE activities plays an important role in the acquisition of English as a second language (L2) in Sweden (Sundqvist, 2009; Olsson, 2012). EE includes the essential components needed for second language learning (L2): input, output, and/or interaction in English (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 7). EE will be
Students in Sweden have opportunities to learn English, not only outside of school by engaging in EE activities, but they also start their education in English, as early as the first year of school and do not end until they finish compulsory school or senior high school. An equivalent of English completed at senior high school level called English 6 is also an entry requirement for those who want to proceed with tertiary studies at a University in Sweden. At school, English is the only language apart from Swedish that is compulsory. The National Agency for Education in Sweden recognizes the importance of having English as a subject in schools in their policy document concerning the English curriculum for English teachers. They view the knowledge of English, as an essential tool for students, not only to be successful in understanding and communicating in Sweden and globally, but also to participate in different social and cultural contexts and to succeed in work (The National Agency for Education, 2017).

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that it is a combination of factors that have an impact on the acquisition of an L2, such as EE exposure, learner motivation, gender and socio-economic background (Olsson, 2012, pp. 130-131). Motivation, many scholars agree, is a necessity for any learning to take place, especially learning an L2. In terms of motivation, spare time activities are for the most part chosen by the individuals themselves, and therefore their motivation to do well in these activities is probably high (Dörneyi, 2001). Learner motivation will be discussed in more detail in 2.4.
1.1 Aim

In this study the following research questions will be posed:

1. What extramural activities do Swedish senior high school students report engaging in?
2. What do students report about their attitudes about learning English?
3. Are there any gender differences in terms of questions 1-2?

2. Theoretical Background

In the background section some theories about second language acquisition and English language teaching connected to EE will be discussed in 2.1 and 2.2. Some previous empirical studies connected to EE will be reviewed in 2.3 and 2.5. Section 2.4 discusses motivation and its relation to language learning.

2.1 Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a branch of applied linguistics and it refers to the learning of any other language after the acquisition of the mother tongue (Ellis, 2008, p. 6). In the SLA literature it is uncontested that both comprehensible input and scaffolding through interaction, as well as learner motivation are very important for L2 learning to take place (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012, p. 305).

There are many beliefs and theories about second language acquisition. The main theories relevant to this study will be discussed in the following. Firstly, we will look at the relevance of some of Krashen’s hypotheses to this study. Krashen,
influenced by Chomsky, created a five-hypothesis model. His acquisition/learning hypothesis is about distinguishing between learning, which is seen as a conscious choice, involving knowing rules and having explicit grammar knowledge, and acquisition, which is about implicit learning and acquiring knowledge subconsciously (Krashen, 1984, p. 10). These ideas are relevant to learning English outside of the classroom as language can be acquired subconsciously, in a process similar to the way that children develop language skills in their first language. Accordingly, thereby implying that language can also be learned outside of the classroom by engaging in EE activities (Österlund, 2014, p. 5).

Krashen’s Input hypothesis is also relevant to this study as it attempts to answer the question of how we acquire a second language. The main idea is that to acquire a language the learner needs to be exposed to input that is just above the learner’s current level of the target language. This has been explained as: $i + 1$, where $i$ stands for language that is on the learner’s current level, and $+1$ for language that is on the next level (Krashen, 1984, pp. 20-23). Previous research on EE has used Krashen’s Input hypothesis to suggest that a learner has to be exposed to comprehensible input in order for acquisition to occur (Olsson, 2012, p. 12; Sundqvist, 2009, pp. 13-14). If a learner is exposed to EE that is too far from the learner’s current language level, acquisition will not take place (Sundqvist, 2009, pp. 13-14). Consequently, any kind of EE will not promote learning (Österlund, 2014, p. 6). Krashen’s Affective filter hypothesis is about motivation and will be discussed in section 2.3.
Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012) state that, following Krashen, Long’s Interaction hypothesis (1981) suggested that interaction is a key element for L2 acquisition, as he viewed the interplay between comprehensible L2 input, learners’ output and the feedback that learners receive on their production as pivotal for L2 development. Consequently, in order to help students to master the target language at a higher level, opportunities must be provided for them to produce output in interaction, as this will help them to master the target language at a higher level than just a mere receptive understanding. Sylvén and Sundqvist furthermore indicate that Swain’s (2000) notion of the collaborative dialogue is one potential way of meeting that need, as she in her discussions of L2 acquisition, stresses the importance of forcing learners to produce output (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012, p. 305).

We can add to this that knowledge of vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of L2 proficiency. Vocabulary can be acquired intentionally or incidentally. In the case of the former, the learner’s explicit intent is to learn vocabulary such as by studying vocabulary from a text book in a classroom situation, whereas with the latter, the learner’s primary objective is to do something else, such as to read or to communicate e.g. by playing multiplayer computer games (Schmitt, 2012, pp. 146-150). Vocabulary learning in an EE setting is thus often a by-product of some other learning activity and includes both receptive, that is the ability to recognize and know the meaning of the word in its spoken and written modes, and productive use, which implies that the learner is able to say or write the word (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 59). Many strategies have been suggested to stimulate incidental vocabulary
learning both in the classroom and outside the classroom, such as reading (Nation, 1990, pp. 5-7; Schmitt, 2012, pp. 150-153).

In summary, engaging in EE activities in one’s free time is a possible way to gain the input required for learning vocabulary, especially given that it could stimulate producing output in interaction, even though learning English might not be the intent of the student.

2.2 English Language Teaching

The L2 English classroom has changed due to the emergence of Global English, or English as a lingua franca, and the digital era (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 31). Previously learners across the world, were more homogeneous as most learners had similar access to English input, output and interaction (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 31). At the same time, the teacher was often the main English language role model for the learners, and learner differences in these classrooms were due to different cognitive abilities and aptitudes for learning languages. Teachers have been trained pedagogically to work under these conditions. Nevertheless, the L2 English classroom in the 2010s constitutes a much more diverse place, due to learners’ varying experiences of involvement in EE activities (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 32). This diversity is the result of both the amount of EE exposure and, the type of EE activities that learners are engaged in and it has pedagogical implications. Even though learners’ EE exposure differs in terms of frequency and type of exposure in Sweden, it seems that a substantial part of senior high school learners’ spare time
is devoted to EE activities, in particular watching TV, listening to pop music, and playing video games (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 32).

The L2 English classroom may also be heterogeneous with regards to the types of EE activities learners choose to engage in. One example is that male students have been found to play more computer games than girls, and the type of games played seem to follow gender stereotypes (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012, p. 304). Consequently, the possible positive effects on L2 English learning will vary depending on game playing habits (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, pp. 33-34).

In summary, diversity in the L2 English classroom due to learners’ varying experiences of involvement of EE in terms of both type and frequency of EE exposure has pedagogical implications. Within the boundaries of the walls of the L2 English classroom, teaching strategies are required for assisting students with varying experiences of involvement in EE activities, as all should experience the teaching as meaningful and motivating. It is crucial that each student feels at ease in the classroom and is given the chance to optimally develop his or her individual level of L2 English competence (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, pp. 33-34). Furthermore, Dörneyi and Ushioda (as cited in Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p.92) claim that in order for L2 learning to be successful, the L2 classroom must provide sufficient inspiration to motivate learners and the instructional practices need to be cognitively adequate (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 92).
Sundqvist & Sylvén (2016, p.93) suggest that the pedagogical approach called the Bridging activity model, suggested by Thorne and Reinhardt, is a possible strategy for teachers to provide inspiration and motivation to learners in the classroom by using target awareness of Internet-specific genres in formal L2 instructions, that build on learners’ (rather than teachers’) selections of Internet or media literacy texts. This approach seems to enhance learner agency, and in turn L2 motivation (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 93).

2.3 Extramural English and its Effect on Learning English

Sundqvist (2009) defines the term Extramural English as “linguistic activities in English that learners do or are involved in outside the classroom in their spare time” (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 190). Extramural English may include the following activities: listening to music; watching TV, movies, YouTube; reading; writing; speaking and surfing the Internet. It is important to note that EE generally speaking includes the essential components needed for second language learning (L2): input, output, and/or interaction in English (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 7). The field of EE is relatively new and there is still much research to be done with regards to EE and its effect on learning English. Previous research carried out in Sweden has shown that there is a correlation between high levels of proficiency in English and frequent contact with EE, and that the type of EE activity that a learner engages in matters (Sylvén, 2010; Sundqvist, 2009; Olsson, 2012).
In 2004 Sylvén conducted a study on Content and Language Integrated Learning, (CLIL) and vocabulary acquisition in Sweden. Even though it was not the focus of her study, she found that students who received English input elsewhere, such as through EE by reading, listening to dialogue or music, movies or TV, and surfing the Internet, regardless if they were CLIL students or not, achieved higher scores on tests as they knew more vocabulary. The more vocabulary one knows, the bigger one’s ability to understand English and acquire new lexical items. She also mentioned that there is a quality/quantity relationship and that it is the quality of the input that is important, not just the amount of input (Sylvén, 2010, p. 219).

Oscarson and Apelgren (2003), observed tendencies toward a correlation between high levels of proficiency and high levels of EE activities in their 2003 study that included 6,700 ninth graders, a sample which was representative of Sweden. They also found that students who had above average final grades claimed that they learn as much English outside school as in school. In contrast, average and below average students claimed that they learn most of their English in school. Moreover, the above average group engaged in more spare time English activities than students in the other groups (Oscarson & Apelgren, B.M., 2003, p. 82).

Sundqvist’s (2009) study, which was also conducted in Sweden, showed that the amount of time that the ninth graders in her study spent on EE activities correlated positively with their oral proficiency (OP) and their vocabulary (VOC) size. However, the correlation between EE and their vocabulary size was stronger and more straightforward than the one between EE and their OP. Furthermore, the results
showed that some activities were more important than others for OP and VOC respectively. In other words, the type of EE activity mattered. EE activities that required learners to be more productive and to use their language skills such as playing video games, surfing the Internet and reading had a greater impact on OP and VOC in comparison to more passive activities such as TV, movies and films (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 203). She also looked at four background variables and concluded that EE is an independent variable and a possible path to progress in English for any learner regardless of socioeconomic background (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 218). It is beyond the scope of the present study to include socioeconomical background factors, so this finding cannot be tested here.

Another study set in Sweden (Olsson, 2012) focused on the impact of EE activities on writing proficiency. She compared ninth graders’ reported EE activities, two texts (an article and a letter) they had written and the students’ grades for the written part of the National Test. The results showed that there was a positive correlation between the students’ grades and the frequency of their EE activities. None of the students who reported low frequencies of EE received the highest grade MVG, but rather the lower grade G (pass). Olsson furthermore showed that EE has the greatest impact on written language used in informal contexts, which was represented by the letter sample in her study, as students most probably are exposed to informal text types in their EE activities (Olsson, 2012, pp. 125-128).

Sundqvist and Sylvén (2012) showed that playing English digital games such as massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) provided L2 English
learners with a linguistically rich and cognitively challenging virtual environment that is conducive to L2 learning; it provides learners with ample opportunities for L2 input and scaffolding interaction in the L2, as many tasks require collaboration. Moreover, the study provided empirical evidence that L2 English proficiency correlates with the frequency of gaming and types of games played (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012, p. 302). Research findings related to playing computer games and gender differences will be discussed in 2.5.

Despite the correlation shown by previous research between EE exposure and high levels of English proficiency, it is important to note that it is more complicated than that, as other factors also play a role, for example motivation, gender and socio-economic background (Österlund, 2014, p. 4).

2.4 Motivation in Language Learning

The word motivation has been used as a technical term in the field of psychology to answer the fundamental question of why people think and behave the way they do. “Accordingly, motivation concerns the direction and magnitude of human behavior, explaining the choice of a particular action, persistence in it, and the effort expended on it” (Dörnyei, 2018, p. 1). Human behavior is influenced by a wide variety of factors including both internal reasons, for example curiosity or a desire for knowledge, and external reasons such as rewards such as being accepted into a specific community of for example computer game players. Motivation is a broad
Motivation for language learning involves the reasons why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how they are going about pursuing it. Learning a second language can be a lengthy and tedious process and a lack of motivation will cause even the most talented individuals, with good teaching and appropriate curricula, to fail in accomplishing their long-term language-learning goals (Dörnyei, 2018, p. 1).

According to Dörneyi’s model (2001, p.48) truly motivated students possess three main factors: (i) motivational intensity, (ii) a desire to learn the language and (iii) a positive attitude to the target language. There are two types of motivation related to the goal of learning a second language: instrumental versus integrative (Dörneyi, 2001, p. 48). Instrumental motivational orientation for a learner entails “the potential pragmatic gains of L2 proficiency, such as getting a better job or a higher salary” (Dörneyi, 2001, p. 48). Instrumental orientation thus has to do with learning a language for immediate or practical goals (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 19). By contrast, integrative orientation is about learning for personal growth as it is a “positive disposition toward the L2 group and the desire to interact with and even become similar to valued members of the community” (Dörneyi, 2001, p. 48). Integrative motivational orientation seems to be the strongest factor in: “the level of effort the students intended to invest in the learning process” (Dörneyi, 2001, p. 51). Hence, this suggests that a positive attitude to English will contribute to students investing
more in their learning. Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis states that learners with high motivation, good self-confidence, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for L2 acquisition than those who have low motivation and low self-esteem. In the latter case, with the affective filter up so to speak, language acquisition is impeded (Krashen, 1984, pp. 31-32).

Motivation can, however, be increased by the deployment of certain strategies in the classroom to strengthen students’ visions of themselves and their English language proficiency. Dörnyei’s suggestions for pedagogical motivational strategies focusing on the individual learning experience includes techniques such as “whetting the students’ appetite by triggering their curiosity and attention, increasing their expectancy of success, making teaching material interesting and relevant, introducing a wide variety of engaging, interesting learning tasks and projects, giving regular encouragement to increase the learners self-confidence and to reduce anxiety and offering grades in a motivational manner by making the assessment system transparent (Dörnyei, 2018, pp. 3-4). Moreover, he also shares motivational strategies focusing on group experience, that is closely related to group-building techniques that mostly concern students group cohesiveness and group norms. Where the former is about the strength of the relationships of the group with each other, and with the group, and the latter about the rules of conduct in the classroom that regulate the life of the learner group and that makes learning possible (Dörnyei, 2018, pp. 4-5).
2.5 Gender and Language Learning

Important gender differences have been identified in previous EE research.

Even though extramural English was not the focus of Sylvén’s 2004 study, she arrived at interesting results about EE activities and gender. For instance, the boys in her study of senior high school students had a larger amount of English input from EE than the girls, and the boys also scored higher on vocabulary tests. The boys’ habits of involvement in computer games proved to be an important factor contributing to their better results (Sylvén, 2010, p. 220).

Boys spent significantly more time on productive EE activities than girls, which led to EE having a greater impact on OP and VOC for boys than for girls, since boys and girls engaged in different types of EE activities (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 218). Girls preferred to read while boys preferred to play computer games such as MMORPGs (e.g. World of Warcraft and Counterstrike). Girls opted for single-player games such as The Sims (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012, p. 311). As discussed in 2.3, playing MMORPGs may provide L2 English learners with a linguistically rich and cognitively challenging virtual environment that is conducive to L2 learning, as learners are required to use their language skills, and to produce output, otherwise these activities become pointless, whereas single-player game such as The Sims, did not afford the same gains as a potential L2 learning arena. Moreover, Sundqvist and Sylvén have presented empirical evidence that L2 English proficiency correlates with the frequency of gaming and types of games played (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012, p. 306).
3. Methodology and Data

3.1 Data

In the following section the ethical considerations and the method of data collection will be discussed.

3.1.1 Ethical Considerations

Consent was obtained from the headmaster at the school where the study was conducted. All the students who filled out the questionnaire were over 15, so no parental consent was required. The students could choose to participate in the study or not. All the participating students attended grade two of an industrial engineering program at a senior high school in Central Sweden. These students attend school from 8.00-17.00 every day and might therefore have less time to spend on EE activities compared to students that only go to school to attend classes.

3.1.2 Data Collection

A quantitative method in the form of a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was used to collect data to answer the research questions for this study. Quantitative research typically deals with counting how much or how many there is/are of a characteristic or item (Litosseliti, 2010, p. 52). Furthermore, quantitative research is useful for generalizing research findings (Litosseliti, 2010, p. 33). The questionnaire was carefully designed so that the answers would provide a maximally accurate picture of reality. Moreover, the questions were designed to be clear, unambiguous, neutral and easy to understand.
The advantage of quantitative research is that it gives the researcher the opportunity to compare relatively large numbers of things or people by using a comparatively easy index, as quantitative data can be analyzed by using statistical methods and mathematical tools. A general disadvantage of using a questionnaire is that questions such as closed and multiple question do not provide in-depth answers it is possible to obtain from qualitative research, although with the use of open-ended questions some degree of in-depth perspective can still be obtained.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to map out students’ EE activities, attitudes to English, and possible gender differences with regards to EE activities and attitudes. The design of the questionnaire used in this study is partly based on the questionnaires used in previous research (Sylvén, 2010; Sundqvist, 2009; Hlebnikovs, 2017; Österlund, 2014; Oscarson & Apelgren, B.M., 2003). However, some things were modified. For example, the item ‘watching YouTube’ was added as a possible EE activity.

The questionnaire was piloted with three seventeen-year-old students, who were also interviewed after they had completed the questionnaire to obtain their opinions about the questions, answers and some further background details to ensure the questionnaire’s validity that is, to ensure that it measures what it is supposed to measure. The questionnaire was adapted based on the feedback received. The frequency with which learners engage in EE activities seemed to be mostly daily, therefore a decision was made to include daily options with different hourly options, instead of just a daily, weekly, monthly and never option. Twenty students, 13 boys
and 7 girls, chose to complete the questionnaire through a URL sent to them by their English teachers.

The questionnaire gave students the opportunity to indicate if and how often they engage in the following EE activities: listening to music, watching TV, movies and YouTube, reading, writing, playing computer games, speaking English, and surfing the Internet. Even though there are three different daily options available for the students, all the daily responses were grouped together in the analysis of the data, as this provided a clearer picture of the degree of EE contact. Internet mediated writing and reading options were offered to a larger extent to the students compared to the questionnaires that were used in previous research, as the students that I interviewed mentioned these activities as part of their daily EE English activities.

The questionnaire, furthermore, asked about students’ attitudes and motivation about English, the strategies that they use when they do not know a word or a sentence in English, and if they use subtitles when they watch English-language films, programs or videos. Only 15% of the students engaged in watching movies as an EE activity; therefore, no analyses were done on the results about the question about whether they preferred to watch movies with or without English or Swedish subtitles.

Reliability and validity are important concepts in questionnaire-based research. Reliability refers to the measure repeatedly delivering the same (or near same) results and validity relates to if the measures measure what they are supposed to
measure (Litosseliti, 2010, p. 56). The questionnaire was partly based on questionnaires used in previous research on the same topics and also ended with a question to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, as it asked the students to add anything that they do in English that was not specifically asked in the questionnaire, thereby ensuring that all possible EE activities would be covered in the questionnaire. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire could be questioned if a student had reported exposure to many different EE activities.

3.2 Method of Analysis
Microsoft Excel was used to analyze and summarize the results of students’ reported contact with EE activities, and their beliefs about English, as well as the possible gender differences related to EE activities and their attitudes.

4. Results
The main aim of this study was to investigate the EE activities that Swedish senior High school students engage in, as well as their beliefs about learning English outside vs inside the classroom and if there are any gender differences related to these questions within the context of previous research done about this topic. The results of the study together with an analysis will now follow. This section will also relate the results to the research questions with the theoretical background and previous research done in the same field.
4.1 EE Activities Students Engage in Outside of School

Figure 1: Students’ reported daily contact with EE

Figure 1 illustrates the students’ reported daily contact with EE. 9 of 10 students reported that they listen to English music daily, while just over half of them reported that they almost always sing along. Listening to music was also found to be the most popular reported EE activity in the studies of Sundqvist (2009) and Österlund
(2012). 8 of 10 students reported that they read and surf the Internet on a daily basis, while 7 of 10 students reported that they watch YouTube, and 55% of the students watch TV, while 35% play computer games and write every day.

However, in Sundqvist’s (2009) study, learners reported playing video games as the second most popular EE activity, followed by watching TV, watching films, surfing the Internet and reading. In contrast to that, the students participating in this study reported EE reading, surfing the Internet, watching YouTube and TV as more popular daily activities rather than playing computer games. Sundqvist’s study did not include YouTube as a separate EE activity.

The results of the investigation show that students engage in a wide array of daily EE activities. This is not time wasted in terms of L2 learning, as Sundqvist (2009) found a correlation between students’ total time spent on EE and their vocabulary size, and their OP. However, the kind of EE that students engage in is also important, as playing computer games was an important activity for both OP and VOC (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 144). Previous research has shown that EE activities that required students to be active or productive, such as playing computer games, reading, writing, surfing the Internet, were more important than passive activities for language proficiency (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 203).
Reading is also an important productive EE activity, as Olsson (2012) found that reading was important for vocabulary size (and written proficiency) along with writing and watching TV or movies. 8 of 10 students reported that they read in English on a daily basis, which includes reading activities ranging from reading English messages or text on Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Messenger, Twitter, WhatsApp, followed by reading English music lyrics, and English websites (news, forums, blogs, e-magazines, articles), reading instructions or chat messages while playing computer games, and reading English books. Reading was also mentioned as one of the EE activities that helped the most to develop their English outside of school in Question 3 of the questionnaire.

The third and fourth most popular reported daily EE activities were surfing the Internet (80% of the students) and watching YouTube videos (70% of the students). Even though limited research is available about watching YouTube, students answered that they watch YouTube for anything and everything that they are
interested in, such as gaming, cooking, exercise, cars and many other topics. (See Appendix 2). Watching YouTube can thus also force a learner to use their language skills as they actively search and want to execute and follow the instructions they have seen on YouTube. Surfing the Internet is an extremely broad EE activity, which necessarily involves some amount of writing, reading and may entail activities such as watching and listening (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 119). Hence, a student’s language proficiency will also gain from these productive aspects of surfing the Internet.

Watching TV series was also a popular, daily EE activity. Grey’s Anatomy, How I met your mother, Game of Thrones, and The Office were mentioned as examples of what they are watching. (See Appendix 2). 80% of the participants also indicated that watching TV helps them to develop their English in the question related to their beliefs about what helps them the most to develop their English. However, even though the number of ecologically valid empirical studies that focus on listening to music, watching films, TV series/shows, playing videogames is still low, findings from existing studies indicate great potential for L2 gains (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016, p. 34).

4 of 10 students reported that they play computer games daily and around half of them also indicated that they speak English while playing multiplayer computer games. As discussed in 2.3, playing MMORPGs provide L2 English learners with a linguistically rich and cognitively challenging virtual environment that is conducive to L2 learning, as it provides learners with ample opportunities for L2 input and scaffolding interaction in the L2 as many tasks require collaboration. Moreover,
Sundqvist and Sylvén have presented empirical evidence that L2 English proficiency correlates with the frequency of gaming and types of games played (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012, p. 306). Computer games was mentioned by 40% of the students as the activity from which they have learned most of their English outside of school in question 3.

Figure 3. Students’ reported EE writing activities

35% of students also reported that they write daily in English. Writing is also deemed to be an important productive EE activity for L2 acquisition and proficiency (Olsson, 2012, pp. 125-128). Students engaged in a range of writing activities as illustrated in Figure 3. It seems that writing in English was of interest in terms of Internet mediated writing activities such as messages or text on Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Messenger, Twitter, WhatsApp, as well as writing chat messages while playing computer games.
4.2 Learners’ Attitudes to Learning English

Motivation is crucial for successful L2 acquisition. Eleven questions related to learners’ attitudes to learning English were included in the questionnaire.

4.2.1 Beliefs about where English is learned

9 of 10 students’ attending grade 2 of senior high school in this study reported that they learn most of the English they know outside of school. This is a significantly different response from the response that Sundqvist obtained in her study, where 69% of the 74 ninth graders who participated in her study answered that they learned most of the English in school and 31% that they learned most outside of school (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 181). Nevertheless, the results of my questionnaire is more in line with the findings from the National evaluation of 2003 (NU-03), where 82% of the 6,700 ninth graders who responded indicated that they had learned most of their English outside of school and 18% believed that they had learned most inside of school (Oscarson & Apelgren, B.M., 2003). Taking into consideration that Sundqvist’s 2009 study showed a statistically significant positive correlation between the time that students spent on EE and students’ results in school for both OP and VOC, it is reasonable to conclude that, based on students’ beliefs that they learn most of the English that they know outside of school, EE definitely plays a role in second language acquisition (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 181).

Question 3 was an open-ended question used to gain a more in-depth understanding of their beliefs about what helps them the most to develop their English. 80% of the
participants indicated that they develop their English by watching English-language movies and TV-shows, followed by 40% believing it was through playing computer games and 35% by reading in English. Students’ responses in terms of what they believed helped them the most include for example: “Watching movies and series, I think that you learn grammar at school, and you increase your vocabulary at home” or “School helped me to perfect my grammar and writing. Movies and videos made me understand the language and gave me a wider vocabulary”. Two students indicated that they learn most of the English they know at school, while only one student mentioned school as the place where he has learned most of the English that he knows.

4.2.2 Students’ attitudes to learning English

Questions 3-12 are all related to students’ attitudes to English in general, as a school subject and English out of school. In order to analyze the data, I dichotomized the four response categories, that is, the two response categories for agreement were collapsed into one, and the two response categories for disagreement into another, while the neutral responses formed a third category.
Figure 4. Students’ reported attitudes about English

Figure 4 shows that all the students reported that they view good knowledge of English as important regardless of what career they end up choosing, and that all of them view their knowledge of English as useful in their free time. Furthermore, 9 of 10 students indicated that they do not study English only to pass the tests in school, thus that they are learning English for other reasons as well. 9 of 10 students indicated that they enjoy using English, and that they find their knowledge of English useful in their free time. However, only 6 of 10 students reported they would use every out-of-school opportunity to use English. There are thus situations where they would choose not to use English. Moreover, more than half of the students felt
that English was not a difficult language to learn, while 15% felt that it was a
difficult language to learn, compared to Sundqvist’s (2009) and the NU-03 studies,
where around 40% of students indicated that English was a difficult language
(Sundqvist, 2009, p. 199). Around 6 of 10 students indicated that they always try to
learn as much English as possible, that they enjoy English classes at school and that
they usually get the opportunity to use all their English skills at school (speaking,
reading, writing and listening). In sum, most students, reported a positive attitude to
English. Even though their attitudes to English in an EE context seem to be more
positive, it is reasonable to say that students reported a positive attitude to the use of
English in general in an out-of-school context, as well as in the classroom.

However, as discussed, it does seem that their reported attitudes to English in an EE
context are more positive. It is reasonable to assume that this is probably a result of
their motivations, as the choice to engage in daily spare-time EE activities has to do
with motivation. Learners engage in EE activities in their spare time, by their own
choice, as they are most likely getting a reward, such as pleasure, out of the activity.
Hence, there is reason to believe that they are highly motivated and that the degree
of autonomy is high (Dörnyei, 2001. p.18). Accordingly, their motivational
orientation is probably of a more personal, integrative origin, as English proficiency
is contributing to their personal growth and to be accepted in a community. If a
learner for example gets pleasure from playing computer games with his or her
friends, his motivation is high to do what is required of him in terms of collaboration
with his team mates and if everybody is speaking English while playing the game,
he will also do that to fit in and to be part of the gaming community. In order to
excel as a gamer, for his own sake and the team sake, he would even engage in watching YouTube gaming videos in English to learn more about the game. It probably takes a great deal of effort to reach the level of English required in some computer games but, still, some pupils who would not normally consider doing their English homework value the achievement enough to work hard to learn the language necessary for the game (Olsson, 2012, p. 131).

Integrative motivational orientation seems to be the strongest factor in: “the level of effort the students intended to invest in the learning process” (Dörneyi, 2001, p. 51). Hence, suggesting that a positive attitude to English will contribute to students investing more in their learning. Most of the surveyed students reported that they actively deploy strategies, such as using Google translate, to gain an understanding of a word or sentence.

However, as the participants also reported that they are positive to English in the classroom, it is not only integrative motivational orientation that plays a role but also instrumental motivational orientation, as they realize the importance of English for other reasons than just to pass the tests in school. Consequently, there are also the potential pragmatic gains of English proficiency, such as for example to obtain high marks in English that will help them to get accepted to university.

Additionally, as these students reported to be positive and motivated with respect to English, Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis is also relevant as it states that learners with high motivation, good self-confidence, and a low level of anxiety are better
equipped for L2 acquisition than those who have low motivation and low self-esteem (Krashen, 1984, pp. 31-32).

4.3 Gender Differences

The results to the third research question regarding gender differences related to EE exposure and attitudes to English inside vs outside of the classroom within the context of previous research will now follow.

4.3.1 Gender Differences in relation to extramural English activities

![Gender differences in relation to extramural English activities](image)

Figure 5. Gender differences in terms of reported EE exposure

Based on Figure 5, we can draw the conclusion that boys overall engage in more EE activities than girls, which points in the same direction as previous research (Sundqvist, 2009; Olsson, 2012, p. 4). Furthermore, the girls reported that they engaged in watching TV to a greater extent than the boys. Some other obvious
gender differences concerning five of the extramural activities can be observed in Figure 5. Firstly, 86% of all girls who participated in this study watch TV programs daily, compared to 38% of the boys. Furthermore, more boys than girls engage in the following four EE activities daily: listening to music, playing computer games, writing and speaking. All the boys reported that they listen to music daily, compared to 71% of the girls. Moreover, 54% of the boys reported that they play computer games daily, while none of the girls engaged in playing computer games daily. In addition to that, 46% of boys write in English every day, compared to only 8% of girls. Lastly, 30% of the boys reported that they speak English daily, while none of the girls do that. Moreover, boys and girls engage to a similar extent in EE activities such as watching movies and YouTube, surfing that Internet and reading. It is, however, important to note that the result possibly could be due to the fact that only 7 girls participated in this study compared to 13 boys.

Sundqvist (2009) found in her study that, on average, boys spend more time than girls on EE activities, close to 21 hours per week opposed to 16.4 hours a week for girls, even though the difference was not statistically significant (Sundqvist, 2009, p. 192). The results of this study confirm this general picture. With regards to productive EE activities, more boys than girls engage daily in activities such as playing any type of computer games, writing and speaking. However, girls do report that they engage to a similar extent in reading as an EE activity as boys.
4.3.2 Gender Differences in beliefs about where English is learned

In Figure 6, we can see that 95% of the boys indicated that they are learning most of the English that they know outside of school compared to 85% of the girls reporting the same belief. As discussed previously boys also engage in EE activities to a greater extent than girls.
4.3.3 Gender Differences in relation to students’ attitudes to learning English

![Graph showing students' reported beliefs about English by gender](image)

Figure 7. Students’ reported beliefs about English by gender
In Figure 7, we can see that there are no major gender differences in students’ beliefs about English in terms of English in general and inside versus outside of the classroom. Both genders acknowledged that it is very important to know English as one will need it in the future, and they furthermore reported mostly positive attitudes to English both in and outside the classroom.

5. Conclusion

The small sample of 20 students, used in this study is not representative of the population as a whole, so we cannot draw any general conclusions. There are furthermore, many parts of the data collected for this study that can be analyzed further.

The analysis of students’ daily EE contact showed that the most popular EE activity was listening to music, followed by reading and surfng the Internet, then by watching YouTube and TV, playing computer games, writing, speaking and, lastly, watching movies. Thus, students have daily contact with a wide array of EE activities, which will all contribute to their English proficiency. However, research has shown that engaging in productive EE activities, such as reading, writing, speaking, surfing the Internet and playing computer games such as MMORPGs have a greater impact on learners’ proficiency and vocabulary learning compared to more passive activities such as listening to music, watching TV and films.
9 of 10 students reported that they believe that they have learned most of the English that they know outside of school, while all participants were positive about English both outside and inside the classroom. However, they do seem to be more positive about English in an EE context, since they engage in EE by their own choice as they probably get pleasure out of these activities, which contributes to them being motivated to sustain their learning of English not only outside, but also inside, the classroom. EE provide good conditions for language acquisition with regards to affective variables (Olsson, 2012, p. 131). Obviously, during lessons at school such conditions may also be fulfilled, but perhaps not as easily, since students do not have the same degree of autonomy at school, and certain activities, for instance writing essays and taking tests are required. English language teachers can, however, provide inspiration and motivation by implementing the Bridging model, as well as by implementing Dörneyi’s motivational strategies, as discussed in 4.2, in their classrooms.
The results of this study show that the boys overall reported to be engaged not only in more EE activities but also in more productive EE activities, such as playing computer games, writing and speaking English. However, both genders engage in reading, and surfing the Internet, another productive EE activity, to the same extent. Girls, on the other hand, reported that they watch TV to a larger extent than boys. This reported behavior is in line with previous research by Sundqvist (2009), which showed that boys spend significantly more time on active and productive EE activities than girls. However, this study did not investigate students’ grades, so no comparison can be done in terms of the effect of EE contact on language proficiency. No major differences related to students’ beliefs about English were found.

For future research, it could be interesting to investigate the effect of listening to music and watching YouTube on learners’ L2 proficiency and vocabulary, as both activities involve aspects of productivity such as singing along in terms of listening to music and following instructions in terms of watching YouTube. In terms of surfing the Internet, it might be valuable to investigate what students are doing while surfing the Internet to get a better understanding of how that possibly contributes to their language proficiency. I am also interested to know why girls engage in the EE activities that they report.
References


Appendix 1: The Questionnaire
See separate document

Appendix 2: Data Collected
See separate document