

Learn to Listen – Listen to Learn

Teachers' views on and use of listening activities to improve pupils' English in their early school years

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Abstract

In the early years of primary school, learning English as a foreign language mainly occurs through listening. Therefore, providing listening activities seems essential, yet little research has been conducted on them in Swedish schools. The aim of this study is to examine how grades one through three teachers describe listening activities in their classroom, their perceptions of the effects on listening comprehension, and their views on providing listening activities for young learners. To answer the research questions, a qualitative interview study was chosen in which eleven teachers were interviewed. The results show that, according to the teachers, listening activities are part of every English lesson, are included in the educational materials they use, and largely involve the teacher speaking. Several teachers indicate that they need better teaching materials, including digital resources. Most teachers feel that their pupils enjoy listening activities and that they develop vocabulary and other skills through them when addressed at the right level, with meaningful content and a focus on communication. The beliefs of many teachers seem coherent with research on early childhood education. In summary, listening activities are considered the key to early English language learning, and regular exposure to the language, combined with flexible teaching methods, appears to support the development of both listening comprehension and vocabulary in young learners.

Keywords

Listening comprehension; Young learners; Teacher views; English as a foreign language; Listening activities;

Sammanfattning

I lågstadiet sker elevers inläring av engelska som främmande språk i stor utsträckning genom lyssnande. Av den anledningen är hörförståelseaktiviteter en viktig del av undervisningen, men forskning om dessa aktiviteter i en svensk skolkontext, särskilt i lågstadiet, är begränsad. Syftet med denna studie är därför att undersöka hur lärare i årskurs ett till tre beskriver sitt arbete med hörförståelseaktiviteter, hur de uppfattar att dessa påverkar elevernas hörförståelse, samt deras syn på att erbjuda hörförståelseaktiviteter för yngre elever. För att besvara studiens forskningsfrågor valdes en kvalitativ intervjustudie där elva lärare intervjuades. Resultaten visar att hörförståelseaktiviteter är en del av varje engelsklektion, enligt lärarna. De är vanligtvis integrerade i de läromedel som används i undervisningen och i många fall står även läraren själv för det muntliga språket, vilket gör lärarens roll central. Flera lärare lyfter behovet av mer ändamålsenliga läromedel. Särskilt efterfrågas digitala resurser som kan variera och komplettera undervisningen inom hörförståelse. De flesta lärare anser att deras elever tycker om hörförståelseaktiviteter och att de utvecklar ordförråd och andra språkliga färdigheter genom dem när de har ett meningsfullt innehåll, är anpassade till elevernas nivå och fokuserar på kommunikation. Lärarnas beskrivningar ligger i stor utsträckning i linje med tidigare forskning om yngre elevers lärande. Sammanfattningsvis pekar resultaten på att hörförståelseaktiviteter spelar en central roll i den tidiga engelskundervisningen och regelbunden exponering för språket, i kombination med flexibla undervisningsmetoder, tycks skapa goda förutsättningar för att utveckla både hörförståelse och ordförråd hos yngre elever.

Nyckelord

Hörförståelse; Yngre elever; Lärares synsätt; engelska som ett främmande språk; hörförståelse aktiviteter;

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1. Introduction

For the vast majority of humanity, the process of learning a new language begins with listening (Smith & Conti, 2023, p. 14). Listening constitutes a fundamental component of language learning, particularly for children who have not yet developed reading skills. An individual's capacity to interact effectively in various contexts is, to a significant extent, dependent on their listening skills. Conti and Smith (2019, p. 1) emphasise that listening represents a critical skill to master when learning - and ultimately becoming proficient in - an additional language. The authors explain that the human brain is wired to acquire language by listening throughout our lives, beginning at birth. It is no coincidence that we learn our native language by listening to the people around us when we are still too young to speak. However, language learners frequently experience considerable difficulty with listening assignments (Conti & Smith, 2019, p. 1).

In Sweden, Swedish is the most commonly spoken language and typically occupies the central position in schools and the curriculum. However, also developing English language skills significantly increases the ability to participate in and engage with culture and international studies, and even to participate in social activities (Curriculum for Compulsory School, Preschool Class and School-Age Educare [Lgr22], 2024, pp. 44-47). For this reason, English as a foreign language (EFL) is included as a compulsory subject throughout primary education.

The Swedish compulsory school curriculum (Lgr22, 2024, pp. 44-47) states that schools should provide pupils in grades one to three (lower primary education, where pupils are aged 6 to 9) the opportunity to develop their comprehension of English and their ability to communicate in English. According to Skolverket (2024), during compulsory school in Sweden, pupils should receive a total of 480 hours of English lessons. Only 60 of these 480 hours fall within the lower primary education. These 60 hours are divided over the first three years, meaning that English language education amounts to approximately 3% of the total 1882 hours of education during those years. (Skolverket, 2024). Lgr22 (2024, pp. 44-47) states that in these early stages, pupils are expected to encounter linguistic input that is closely connected to their immediate surroundings. The curriculum specifies that education should address these three skill areas: *reception* (listening and reading), *production* (speaking and writing), and *interaction* (conversation) (Lgr22, 2024, pp. 44-47).

Conti and Smith (2019, p. 4) indicate that the different skill areas highlighted in the curriculum are strongly interconnected. However, they emphasise the central role of listening in the process of language learning. According to these authors, a current challenge is that teachers often avoid listening activities and instead focus mainly on the production aspects of

English. Similarly, Hue (2019, p. 268) indicates that the teaching of listening skills is frequently neglected in EFL contexts. This tendency is understandable, as “[t]oo often, listening exercises feel like tests” (Conti & Smith, 2019, p. 5). Both Conti and Smith (2019, p. 5) and Hue (2019, p. 268) argue, however, that listening should be the core of educational practice. They advocate assigning greater priority to the systematic development of learners’ listening skills.

Lundahl (2023, p. 261) notes that relatively little research has been conducted on the extent to which listening skills are emphasised in Swedish schools; however, even in Sweden, listening practice is the least frequently trained of the language skills in the higher grades of compulsory education. Far less is known about how this tendency manifests in the lower grades. Given that listening skills are the most commonly used of all language skills, including during people’s spare time, especially in English, as Lundahl (2023, pp. 260-262) points out, it is essential to receive systematic training in this.

1.1. Aim and research questions

This study aims to examine teachers’ views on developing young learners’ English listening comprehension. In addition to their opinions and ideas, this study will also investigate how these teachers explain their experiences of their practices. This has led to the following research questions:

- How do English teachers of young learners in grades one through three describe how they organise listening activities in their classroom?
- What are these teachers’ perceptions of the effects of these listening activities on young learners’ listening comprehension?
- What are these teachers’ views on providing listening activities for young learners?

2. Background

The next section discusses the background of this study. First, the concepts to be defined in this study will be discussed; second, the link to the steering document will be addressed.

2.1. Listening comprehension

There are mainly two different perspectives on listening skills. Ricards (2016, Teaching Listening #6) describes one of them as listening as comprehension. The other perspective is described as listening as acquisition. Richards convincingly argues that listening is the basis for acquiring proficiency in a foreign language. Although it may be possible to take a position on whether listening skills should be primarily an end in themselves or primarily a means of mastering the language, in this phase of the study, the primary choice is to define what it means.

Unlike hearing, listening is an active process. According to Nunan (1998, as cited in Hue, 2019, p. 268), listening is an active act of deciphering and constructing meaning from both verbal and non-verbal cues.

Listening skills consist of bottom-up processing skills (like identifying phonemes, recognising syllable structure, identifying words that are not in their standard form, dealing with unknown words, and recognising chunks of language) on the one hand, and on the other hand, top-down processing skills (like checking your understanding, selecting what is relevant, and connecting ideas) (Smith & Conti, 2023, pp. 16-17). Bottom-up processing proceeds from language to meaning, and top-down processing proceeds from meaning to language, Richards adds (Richard, 2016, Teaching listening #3).

Anderson and Lynch (1993, pp. 3-4) explain what is special about listening by claiming that one can try to overcome limited proficiency in speaking a foreign language by rehearsing what one intends to say, but this is impossible in listening to a foreign language. They highlight that listening can be non-reciprocal, such as listening to the radio or sometimes to instructions from a teacher, or reciprocal, such as alternately listening and speaking in a conversation. Listening is often a reciprocal skill, meaning that one cannot practise it in the same way as one practise pronunciation or spelling. This is because the listening parts of a conversation are usually unpredictable and somewhat spontaneous. To be efficient in listening comprehension, one needs to master several skills, including the identification of spoken signals in a noisy environment, the recognition of speech and its translation into words, an understanding of syntax and the speaker's meaning, and linguistic knowledge to formulate an appropriate response (Anderson & Lynch, 1993, pp. 4-5). The authors imply that these skills must be mastered and used simultaneously, suggesting that listening comprehension is difficult in a language that is not your mother tongue (Anderson & Lynch, 1993, p. 4). Even Safa and Rozetti (2016, p. 1), whose research is discussed later in this study under the chapter Previous Research, emphasise that listening comprehension is a complicated, active process in which the listener needs to distinguish between sounds, comprehend new words, understand the grammatical structure, interpret intonation and stress, keep all collected information in the mind and also connect the meaning to the sociocultural context in which the message is delivered.

Inspired by Ricards (2016, Teaching listening #6), Hue (2019, p. 269), Anderson and Lynch (1993, p. 4), Safa and Rozetti (2016, p. 1), and Conti and Smith (2019, p. 5), this study defines listening comprehension as the use of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge, and listening skills which actively process patterns to interpret spoken language to make meaning in its sociocultural context. It is not entirely clear in all literature whether a difference is made

between listening skills and listening comprehension. For this reason, and to facilitate reading, it has been decided to use these terms as synonyms, unless indicated otherwise.

2.2. Young learners

Although “young learners” sounds like a catch-all term for students who are not yet adults, in practice it is almost always used in the context of language learning; thus, the term *young learners* refers to children in the process of acquiring a foreign language, most often English. Some English language teaching professionals use this term for all language learners under the age of 18, but, as Ellis (2014, pp. 75-77) emphasises, they do not form a homogeneous group in terms of linguistic readiness and physical, social, and psychological development.

According to Lundberg (2020, p. 227), the motivation for learning English changes significantly from six and seven-year-olds to eleven and twelve-year-olds, from being particularly interested and eager to learn to being much less motivated. That is why Keaveney and Lundberg (2019, pp. 28-29) describe the importance of age-appropriate learning goals for language learners. According to Keaveney and Lundberg (2019, pp. 20-21), today’s young learners have already acquired many language learning skills through their surroundings and their free time activities. The authors stress that the challenge is to help these young learners transfer their skills to the classroom. They need to experience a non-threatening learning atmosphere in which errors are welcomed and seen as natural steps towards learning a language. In a playful way, they must undergo an inspiring language awakening (Keaveney & Lundberg, 2019, p. 22). According to Lundberg (2020, p. 30), there is debate over the critical period hypothesis, which posits that children are more capable of learning a language during a period up to about age twelve than afterward. Lundberg (2020, p. 30) explains that some researchers claim such a period exists, while others claim the opposite. In any case, it is essential to distinguish among age groups and specify which group this study focuses on. In the research discussed in this study, the term *young learners* refers to children aged six to twelve, unless otherwise specified. However, this study focuses on ages six to nine and will therefore typically use the term *young learners* to refer to children in the process of acquiring English in this age range.

2.3. Steering documents

The Swedish curriculum (Lgr22, 2024, p. 43) states that English language teaching aims to develop pupils’ knowledge of the English language and of the contexts in which English is used. Pupils must be given the opportunity to build confidence in their ability to use the language for a variety of purposes and in different situations. According to this curriculum (Lgr22, 2024, pp. 44-47), schools should provide pupils in grades one to three the opportunity to develop their comprehension and their ability to communicate in English. The curriculum specifies that education should address three skill areas: reception, production, and interaction

(Lgr22, 2024, pp. 44-47). Since this study focuses on listening skills, only reception and interaction will be discussed in more detail here. The Commentary Material for the English Curriculum (CMEC) (2025, p. 15) states that language learners in the lower grades should primarily encounter English through spoken language. The document states that this position is based on research findings showing that the methodological principles of *hearing-doing* and *listening-understanding-imitating-speaking* are most effective in building young learners' confidence in their ability to use the language. This is particularly important for pupils with reading and writing difficulties (CMEC, 2025, p. 15). The document states that listening and guessing strategies should be taught in higher grades, but teachers may choose to provide simple, age-appropriate strategies to pupils aged six to nine. (CMEC, 2025, p. 16).

Lgr22 (2024) and CMEC (2025) do not describe any knowledge requirements or grading criteria for English in the early years of compulsory school. At the end of sixth grade, however, the pupils must be assessed on listening comprehension and interaction, among other things (Lgr22, 2024, pp. 47-48; CMEC, 2025, p. 22). The assessment must determine the pupils' ability to understand and interpret spoken English. The CMEC (2025, pp. 22-23) states that Lgr22's (2024, p. 47) formulation shows that the steering document holds that understanding the language involves both grasping the literal meaning and analysing it. For beginners, the emphasis should be on understanding the literal meaning, according to the CMEC (2025, p. 23). Although teachers in the lower grades may need to consider the requirements at the end of the middle grades, it seems plausible that the CMEC indicates that it recommends focusing primarily on literal meanings in the lower grades.

CMEC (2025) states that interaction in English is characterised by alternating between listening and speaking, and thus reception and production, when communicating with another person. However, the grading of this skill is based solely on the production aspect of the interaction, as the curriculum stipulates that assessments must be made of how a pupil reacts and expresses themselves.

3. Previous research

This chapter discusses selected articles across different themes that represent previous research on the topics of this study.

A combination of methods was used during the literature search. The reference lists of literature already important to this study were searched. In addition, systematic searches of digital databases have been conducted. Before the systematic database search, a plan was developed specifying the search terms to be used. To prevent the research from being outdated, studies older than ten years have been excluded. What was striking was that a

relatively large amount of research was done on listening, listening skills, and training listening comprehension at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Also striking was the extent to which research was focused on the impact of listening to form versus listening to content on vocabulary acquisition, on listening as a goal versus a tool for language acquisition, and on listening skills in the mother tongue. Since even Swedish research was written in English, it was quickly decided to use only English keywords. However, because only English articles were found, an important concept was overlooked, namely EFL (English as a Foreign Language). Only relatively late in the search for prior research did it become clear to us that all research on remedial teaching/special pedagogy was unsuitable for this study, which must explicitly fall within the field of EFL didactic research. This resulted in the development of the following keywords: Listen*, EFL, young learners, teacher*. This means that research focusing on listening as a tool for language learning, but not specifically for English as a foreign language, was excluded from this study.

When the keywords “EFL” and “young learners” were added, it became apparent that relatively little suitable research is available. Very little research exists on young learners’ foreign language education, and even less on teachers’ views on listening activities.

The final list of literature discussed contains articles on a range of different topics, so that research on young children who cannot yet read and are just becoming acquainted with the language is covered, as well as research on the views of teachers, research with a strong focus on listening comprehension, and research on classroom practices. The articles described are clustered around receptive skills, very young learners, and classroom strategies.

3.1. Receptive skills in English

This part discusses three articles that examine pupils’ listening skills. The pupils in these studies are slightly older than the target group that the teachers in our study teach, except for the pupils in the first study, who are substantially older: from 12 to 20 years old.

3.1.1. Scaffolding and listening comprehension development

Listening comprehension was long neglected in language teaching and language learning; it only gained recognition during the communicative language teaching era (Safa & Rozati, 2016, p. 1). Listening comprehension is now considered essential for language learning and oral proficiency. Listening involves active mental processes such as understanding vocabulary and grammar, interpreting intonation, and distinguishing and connecting meaning to context. Despite the importance of listening comprehension, many education systems prioritise the written language when learning English as a foreign language (Safa & Rozati, 2016, p. 1).

Safa and Rozati (2016, pp. 3-4) address scaffolding strategies used in EFL lessons and with a focus on listening comprehension. They study scaffolding in the ages 12-20 using three different techniques: coequal-peer scaffolding, expert-peer scaffolding, and a non-scaffolding note-taking strategy. Safa and Rozati (2016, p. 2) describe scaffolding as part of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, in which knowledge is constructed through collaboration and support. They define scaffolding as supportive actions provided by teachers and peers to help pupils complete tasks they may not be able to do on their own. The coequal-peer strategy involves scaffolding with pupils at the same level of language proficiency, while the expert-peer strategy involves someone with higher language proficiency helping you. The researchers claim that scaffolding is important for learning English as a foreign language, especially for listening comprehension.

Safa and Rozati (2016, pp. 3-5, 8) divided the 175 pupils into three groups with a designated scaffolding strategy. Before the study, the pupils were tested and analysed, and the results showed that the three groups were homogeneous in terms of listening comprehension and English proficiency. The study concludes that listening comprehension differs after exposure to the different strategies. The pupils exposed to coequal-peer scaffolding developed their English proficiency and some of their listening comprehension. The group with expert-peer scaffolding developed their listening comprehension the most. The collaborative task with scaffolding shows the most improvement in EFL learners' listening comprehension.

3.1.2. Intensity and receptive skills

Recognising the need for multilingual citizens, Hidalgo and Villarreal (2024, p. 1) examined the levels achieved when learning another language at school. Receptive skills are essential, as they facilitate communication and access to social, educational, and professional opportunities, Hidalgo and Villarreal (2024, p. 2) claim. They indicate that reaching higher levels in a foreign language has proven difficult in formal contexts where access to authentic input and exposure to the target language are limited. Hidalgo and Villarreal (2024, pp. 1-2) describe that this has led to the emergence of bilingual programs in many schools around the world. Content and language are integrated into school subjects in the hope that both the quality and the quantity of input will increase. However, studies on the impact of target-language exposure on receptive skills present contradictory findings (Hidalgo & Villarreal, 2024, p. 3). Hidalgo and Villarreal's (2024, pp. 7-8) research question examined whether differences in young learners' receptive skills could be observed when programs of varying intensities were compared. For this purpose, 175 pupils aged eleven to twelve from three state schools in Spain were tested in listening and reading. These schools differ in the intensity of the target language offered (Hidalgo & Villarreal, 2024, p. 3).

Learners in the program with the highest exposure to English performed significantly better on listening and reading tests (Hidalgo & Villarreal, 2024, pp. 7-8). A striking result of this study, though, was that pupils who participated in a less intensive Content and Language Integrated Learning program achieved a level comparable to that of pupils who studied a standard English as a foreign language program in primary school and encountered the target language even less frequently. The findings in Hidalgo and Villarreal's study also highlighted the importance of treating the different language skills separately, given asymmetric development: across all programs, listening skills appear less developed than reading skills. How listening is practiced must be investigated so that it becomes clear why participants in the program, with extensive exposure to the target language, master this skill at a lower level than the other language skills, the researchers indicate (Hidalgo & Villarreal, 2024, pp. 8-9). The researchers emphasise that further research is needed. In particular, they highlight the need for studies on the amount of target language exposure required to have an impact. Additional research is also needed on listening comprehension assessment methods, other language skills, and the motivation, critical thinking abilities, and intercultural competence of children with high levels of exposure to the target language (Hidalgo & Villarreal, 2024, pp. 8-9).

3.1.3. Listening and English as first and additional language

The third article discussed here examines nine to ten year olds' receptive skills in a context of full exposure to the target language, namely, pupils learning English as an additional language (EAL) in UK primary schools (Babayi it & Shapiro, 2020, pp. 1 and 83). Babayi it and Shapiro's (2020, p. 1) study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the relations of vocabulary and grammar with listening comprehension and reading comprehension in EAL language learners. Moreover, they investigated whether the pattern and strength of these relations are comparable with those for learners of English as a first language. In addition, they investigated to what extent there is an EAL gap in English vocabulary knowledge, grammatical skills, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension (Babayi it & Shapiro, 2020, p. 83).

The findings emphasise the central role of vocabulary and grammar in understanding a spoken text (Babayi it & Shapiro, 2020, pp. 85-86, 91). There were no differences in word-reading accuracy between EAL learners and pupils with English as their first language. Still, there was an EAL gap in English vocabulary and grammar, which was associated with lower performance among EAL learners in listening comprehension.

The researchers acknowledge that once reading skills begin to develop, there is a reciprocal relation between oral language and reading skills, which remains to be fully examined in second language learners (Babayi it & Shapiro, 2020, pp. 92-93).

The last two studies described above are aimed at slightly older pupils than the young learners in our study. Moreover, the intensity of exposure to the target language is likely to be lower in many Swedish schools than in the schools where the above studies were conducted, since Skolverket (2024) prescribes only 60 hours of English lessons in total in the lower compulsory education. However, two insights seem relevant to our study: the intensity of exposure to English matters, and vocabulary and grammar play a central role in listening comprehension.

The three studies described above focused on receptive skills. In summary, scaffolding improves young learners' listening comprehension, and high exposure to the target language is beneficial.

3.2. Very young learners

Two articles, one from Spain and one from Turkey, on the teaching of very young learners are discussed below. Although the target groups in both studies are younger than those in our study, it is valuable to discuss them here. We could not find statistics on the proportion of schools in Sweden that start with English in the first grade, but we know from our own experience that this occurs, and many pupils at the start of grade one are preliterate. In that sense, a very young learner can match our target group more than a slightly older young learner who can already read and write. Moreover, these articles discuss a first introduction to the subject of English. Since in Sweden the subject of English is not mentioned in the steering documents for children younger than six (Curriculum for the Preschool, 2025; Lgr22, 2024, s. 22-26), it seems plausible that the target group of our study can be compared to that of the two articles in terms of introduction to the school subject of English as a foreign language. First, the article of Albaladejo and Roca de Larios (2018) on songs, stories, and vocabulary acquisition in very young learners will be discussed. Second, GÜngörs' (2020) doctoral thesis on the effects of an early childhood English language education program on young learners' vocabulary knowledge and communicative skills will be discussed.

3.2.1. Songs, stories, and vocabulary acquisition

The article by Albaladejo and Roca de Larios (2018, p. 116) reports on their research on the effects of listening to songs and stories on vocabulary acquisition among preliterate young learners aged two and three. Stories and songs are believed to facilitate learning because they capture pupils' attention. However, the responses to these listening activities have proved challenging to identify, measure, and link to learning outcomes (Albaladejo & Roca de Larios, 2018, p. 118). Since previous research seems to produce contradictory results, this study attempts to examine what effect exposure to target language input in the form of a story, a song, and a combination of story and song has on the acquisition of vocabulary by young

learners (Albaladejo & Roca de Larios, 2018, p. 118). The method was as follows: 17 children were individually tested on 15 nouns using flashcards, in which they had to select one of four pictures to indicate the corresponding English word the researcher said (Albaladejo & Roca de Larios, 2018, pp. 119-120). This was followed by three different interventions, in which five target words were presented a precise number of times. The first intervention was a story that was told twice. The second intervention consisted of songs sung three times, and the last intervention offered five target words via a story and a song, both presented once. This was followed by the flashcard test again, and a few weeks later, a delayed flashcard test followed (Albaladejo & Roca de Larios 2018, pp. 119-121).

The results of this study indicate a significant difference in vocabulary growth depending on the form in which the nouns were presented (Albaladejo & Roca de Larios, 2018, p. 121). The researchers found that the story condition was the most effective way for these very young learners to learn target words. The combination of song and story was also relatively effective. The results for the song condition, on the other hand, were surprisingly low, the authors add (Albaladejo & Roca de Larios, 2018, p. 123).

The findings of this study suggest that stories contribute to deeper processing behaviour when children focus on understanding meanings. In songs, on the other hand, the music was engaging but could be considered a distracting factor (Albaladejo & Roca de Larios, 2018, p. 124).

The next article discussed here is GÜNGÖR'S (2020) doctoral thesis on the effects of an early childhood English language education program on young learners' vocabulary knowledge and communicative skills.

3.2.2. Program for Vocabulary and Communicative Skills

GÜNGÖR'S (2020, p. V) research comprises two linked sub-studies that aim to improve the quality of English lessons for very young learners. First, two assessment instruments were designed, tried, and evaluated for validity and discriminative ability in assessing the English proficiency of young learners in Turkey. The second sub-study involved implementing a newly designed Early Childhood English Language Education Program (ECELEP) for pupils aged five and six years. The effectiveness of this program was measured by using the assessment instruments from the first sub-study.

There is a lack of reliable, valid, and effective assessment tools for very young learners, and this is problematic, GÜNGÖR (2020, pp. 11-12) argues. Assessing children is vital because it provides information on the effectiveness of early foreign language education and on the instructional process from multiple perspectives. She adds that private schools are beginning

to offer English as a foreign language at different levels of intensity (high, medium, and low; see the articles under subsections 3.1.2 Intensity and receptive skills and 3.1.3 Listening and English as first and additional language). However, without deep insights into how to teach and assess children at this level, the learning outcomes are not at the desired level. As well as high-quality English education programs, assessment tools that meet language learners' aims are in immediate demand, the researcher adds (Güngör, 2020, p. 13).

The effectiveness of the ECELEP was measured by using the assessment instruments from the first sub-study before the start of the program, immediately after the program, and again a while later, and comparing this with a control group that was taught the same number of hours of English with the same subjects, but in a traditional way. Güngör (2020, p. V.) describes these conventional methods as repetition of decontextualised sentences, memorisation of target vocabulary, and teacher-led activities with flashcards. The newly designed program adopts a more constructivist, learner-centred approach and employs communicative and interactive methods, with an emphasis on meaning and context. The researcher concludes that the quality of the new education program is high, as the treatment group made rapid progress in understanding, producing, and communicating English words. The children in this group developed their listening and speaking skills in the target language through playful, meaningful, and interactive contextual language instruction, according to Güngör (2020, pp. V-VI and 11).

Güngör (2020, pp. 2-3) notes in her thesis that there are many advantages to an early start in learning a foreign language. Yet she indicates that age is not the key variable in successful early English education; instead, the quality and quantity of programs, teacher qualifications, suitable conditions, instructional materials, age-appropriate methodologies, and approaches are. In the thesis, considerable attention is paid to the characteristics of high-quality educational programs; however, only a few of the ECELEP's characteristics can be summarised here. Because very young learners get tired more easily from being passive than from being active in many school activities, the ECELEP provides opportunities for physical exercise and activities in the program, such as games, arts and crafts activities, action songs, storytelling, puppetry, and role plays (Güngör, 2020, p. 27). The ECELEP employs a variety of meaningful activities and tasks with brief transitions because children learn indirectly and holistically rather than directly and have short attention spans (Güngör, 2020, p. 28). It must also be noted that the researcher indicates that young learners' productive skills develop only after they have received substantial input over extended periods of exposure.

The study described above makes it clear how important it is to pay sufficient attention to meaningful listening and speaking skills, especially to listening. This aligns with the assignment given to teachers in Sweden, namely, to expose language learners in lower grades

to English through spoken language closely connected to their immediate surroundings (CMEC, 2025, p. 15; Lgr22, 2024, pp. 44-47).

3.3. Strategies in the classroom

The next section discusses three articles. The first, from Spain, is about research conducted by Barranco Izquierdo and Sanz Trigueros (2025). It focuses on students comparable in age to those in grade three in Sweden. The authors researched the influence of lesson planning and teacher approaches on student development. The second article, by Whyte, Wigham, and Younès (2022) from France, focuses on primary school teachers across all grades and their views on teaching. The last article is a doctoral thesis from Mexico, Mercau (2019), which focuses on teachers' practices and their views on English as a foreign language in primary school.

3.3.1. A Planning Guide for Teaching EFL

The foundation of effective education and increased knowledge lies in careful lesson planning. Barranco Izquierdo and Sanz Trigueros (2025, pp. 1-3) researched how teachers plan English lessons to support pupils' development of communicative skills.

The researchers examined four main dimensions: skills planned (SK), comprehensible input-based methods (CIM), students' participation (SP), and classroom atmosphere (CA) (Barranco Izquierdo & Sanz Trigueros, 2025, p. 6). They state that listening activities are strongly associated with CIM, which focuses on the meaning behind the education and contextualises learning. Furthermore, lessons with a higher proportion of listening activities planned create a more relaxed and calm CA. A relaxed mood and positive attitude are fundamental in foreign language learning. The teachers in this study mainly planned their lessons in two ways: either they focused on students' participation and classroom atmosphere, or on comprehensible-input-based methods and listening activities. The pupils with listening-focused education naturally achieved good scores in students' participation and classroom atmosphere, in addition to higher acquisition of English as a foreign language.

Based on the study, Barranco Izquierdo and Sanz Trigueros (2025, pp. 9-10) have presented a planning guide known as SWIRL, which stands for Speaking, Writing, Interacting, Reading, and Listening. The authors of the study claim that this guide is especially good for EFL learners. The researchers argue that listening and reading should be the most significant parts of EFL education in lower primary education. English education in the lower primary school should be tailored to the pupils' skill level. Barranco Izquierdo and Sanz Trigueros (2025, p. 10) show that pupils aged seven to eight years old need 80% listening activities and 20% reading activities, and that the percentage of reading should increase with the pupils' age and skill level. After the age of ten, pupils need to receive education that integrates writing and

interacting education. SWIRL is suitable for all ages, but Barranco Izquierdo and Sanz Trigueros describe the correlation between the percentages of different SWIRL activities and pupils' language level and/or age.

3.3.2. Teacher Beliefs and Practice

Whyte, Wigham, and Younès (2022, pp. 1-2) conducted a quantitative study using a questionnaire administered to 254 teachers, focusing on teachers' beliefs and practices in the English subject in France. They argue that teachers specialised in English often lack competence in working with young learners. In contrast, teachers of young pupils are usually generalists across many subjects and are not highly proficient in English (Whyte, Wigham & Younès, 2022, pp. 1-2). The authors examined the beliefs and teaching practices of generalist primary school teachers currently teaching English. This involved examining teachers in relation to a range of contextual factors, including language proficiency, experience, and classroom equipment.

Whyte, Wigham, and Younès (2022, p. 2) claim that teaching beliefs are strong predictors of teachers' classroom behaviours. Furthermore, they suggest that teaching beliefs influence teachers' lesson preparation and classroom practice more than their disciplinary knowledge does. This means that teachers' beliefs indirectly influence the learning opportunities made available to young learners. The authors claim that previous research shows that primary and secondary school teachers often hold differing views (Whyte, Wigham & Younès, 2022, p. 2). Primary school teachers emphasise the importance of content-rich and age-appropriate activities to meet the specific characteristics of young learners, create positive emotions towards the English language, and exploit children's curiosity by using their interests to create opportunities to learn. They prioritise playful learning and student-centred approaches, and place greater emphasis on oral skills, such as listening and speaking, over written skills. The primary beliefs of many teachers are coherent with research on early childhood education, Whyte, Wigham, and Younès (2022, pp. 2-3) claim.

A total of 254 teachers answered a questionnaire, of which over 90% were women (Whyte, Wigham & Younès 2022, p. 6). Their age and professional experience varied, but the vast majority had more than 10 years of teaching experience and were aged 36 to 55. Classes from pre-school to the end of primary school were represented. The largest proportion of teachers taught pupils aged nine to eleven years.

The study by Whyte, Wigham, and Younès (2022, p. 9) revealed three clusters of teachers with distinct views on language education. One category, Whyte, Wigham, and Younès (2022, p. 10) describe as *sceptical*. This significant minority (40%) did not take a clear position on two opposing views presented below. Since this is a quantitative study, the

researchers could not say with certainty whether the reason for this was the way the questions were formulated in their survey or whether it was perhaps related to the somewhat limited specific training these generalist primary teachers have had, which could result in not having a fully articulated view of language education (Whyte, Wigham & Younès, 2022, p. 10). The other category, with more outspoken opinions, can be divided into two subcategories. One subcategory of teachers prefers *structured* lessons, wants to follow a grammatical syllabus, and to provide a correct model for learners, using an approach of presentation, practice, and production (Whyte, Wigham & Younès, 2022, pp. 9-10). They prefer to correct errors immediately, even during communicative activities. This group had a lower English proficiency than the second subcategory of teachers (Whyte, Wigham & Younès, 2022, p. 10). The second subcategory of teachers embraces *implicit* teaching, with communicative language teaching principles. They think that errors should not be corrected during communicative activities and that presenting language items in advance or restricting materials to elements already explicitly taught is unnecessary. These teachers favour teaching in the target language and want learners to express themselves in small groups. They do not want to present and practice grammar rules one by one, which was favoured in the first subcategory.

Finally, some opinions were expressed across all groups. They all view language learning essentially as a process of imitation, think that interaction plays a central role, and think it is best to begin early with learning a foreign language (Whyte, Wigham & Younès, 2022, p. 9).

3.3.3. Teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices

Mercau (2019, pp. 1-5) investigates how teachers in English as a foreign language (EFL) think about and shape their teaching. Given the rapid global expansion of English education in primary schools, the study focuses on an area with little to no prior research: how teachers' experiences, views, and contextual cues shape their decision-making in classrooms with young learners. Using a qualitative case study design, Mercau (2019, pp. 1-5) explores three language teachers' views and practical knowledge drawn from their experiences working at a private school in Mexico over a 13-month period. Enhancing teachers' perspectives, the study adopts a *bottom-up* approach to capture the complexity of teaching EFL to young learners. This includes institutional restraints, teaching materials, teachers' beliefs, and the actual classroom practices.

Mercau (2019, pp. 1-5) states that primary EFL teaching expands beyond the language itself. Teachers' work is broader and includes other educational responsibilities, such as pupils' literary skills, emotional wellbeing and social development. The study shows how contextual factors limit teachers' education for young learners and their reliance on textbooks in their practice. Primary EFL teaching is also highly adaptive and context-based. Mercau (2019, p.

124) highlights that teachers continuously adjust and adapt their methods and practices in response to pupils' characteristics, teaching materials, and assessments. These adjustments are made despite structural restraints, such as prescribed textbooks and mandatory testing. The study highlights a tension between teachers' personal views and institutional views on EFL teaching. However, these tensions can be reduced when teachers align their teaching practices with their teaching philosophy, build a more positive view of EFL, and strengthen their relationships with pupils.

Mercau (2019, p. 124) further states that teachers' past learning experiences play a central role in shaping their current views and practice. This is particularly evident in a teacher from the study, whose personal history as a young EFL learner shows a strong commitment to creating a more supportive and effective classroom environment than the one she herself experienced. Mercau (2019, p. 124) argues that teachers exercise professional agency through intuitive and creative practices that prioritise language use and foster a safe, encouraging classroom environment. She also means that schools need to recognise teachers' expertise and support them in addressing their knowledge gaps to make the education more fostering and meaningful in EFL classrooms.

4. Theoretical framework

The aim of this chapter is to describe the theoretical perspectives that constitute the study's analytical framework and explain how each theory contributes to answering the research questions of this study. Since the research questions have didactic, linguistic, and teacher-view perspectives, it is advisable to choose theories that align with these perspectives. To answer the second and third questions, teacher cognition theory is appropriate, as these questions focus on the teacher's perspective and attitude. To answer the first question, which concerns teacher practice, the data can be partly interpreted through that theory as well, as it discusses the influence and interaction between cognition and practice; however, sociocultural theory will also be used. The aspects of both theories relevant to this study are explained below. The text following these two theories discusses the theory considered but not selected as the theoretical framework for this research.

4.1. Teacher cognition theory

Teacher cognition theory is the most important component of this study's theoretical framework. It is a dynamic concept, according to Çetin (2023, p. 178). Borg (2003, p. 81) describes this theory as one that examines what foreign and second language teachers think, know, believe, and do. The theory has been refined in recent decades and described in different ways by different researchers. We observe that some researchers (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1986; Nespor, 1987; Woods, 1996) focus on the invisible

aspects of what teachers do, while others (Thompson, 1992; Mohammadabadi et al., 2019; Ghasemi, 2018; Gök-Kaçça & Yiğitoğlu, 2017; Walsh & Wyatt, 2014) also examine discrepancies between cognition and practice (Öztürk, 2021, pp. 179-184). The visible aspect of what teachers do for teaching merges under the concept of 'teacher action'. The unobservable dimension of what teachers do is described by Öztürk (2021, p. 179) as beliefs, values, perspectives, expectations, judgements, knowledge, thoughts, and emotions. They are conceptualised as a part of 'teacher cognition'. Teachers' mental government is known to drive their actions, according to Öztürk (2021, p. 178). However, there may be barriers that make the practice appear different from what the teacher would prefer (Öztürk, 2021, p. 183).

This theory posits that teacher cognition is broadly the interaction between being and becoming a teacher. Moreover, their cognition is closely linked to three overlapping concepts: beliefs, knowledge, and thinking (Öztürk, 2021, p. 182).

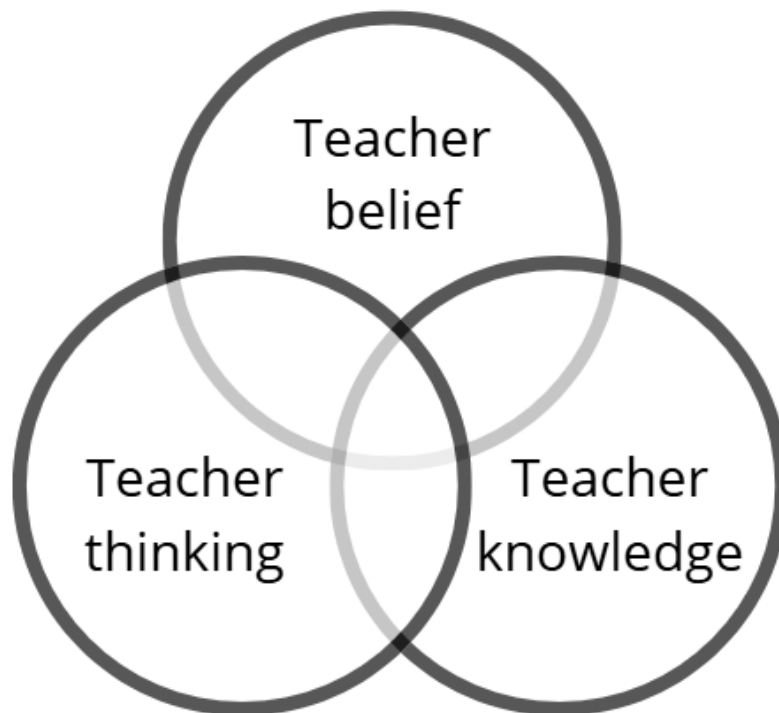


Figure 1. Venn diagram: beliefs, knowledge, and thinking

Teachers' *beliefs* shape their perceptions and judgments, which in turn influence what teachers say and do in the classroom. Their beliefs are crucial to how they learn to teach, how they interpret new information about learning and teaching, and how that information is translated into practice. As for the second domain, teacher *knowledge*, different types of knowledge are needed in teaching. It concerns a mixture of cognitive and practical knowledge

regarding content, pedagogical, and technological aspects (Öztürk, 2021, p. 184). Even the final pillar, teacher *thinking*, is multifaceted. This stage in cognitive development is the most difficult to describe, as different researchers describe it in different ways and divide it into different elements, such as thirteen different styles of thinking, described by Stenberg (1997, as cited in Öztürk, 2021, p. 185) or four zones of thinking, described by McAlpine (2006, as cited in Öztürk, 2021, p. 185).

This study also considers recent research within this theory that examines discrepancies between teacher cognition and teacher practice. Since our research questions concern both teachers' cognition and practice, and context can play an important role in any discrepancies between them, the sociocultural perspective is relevant.

4.2. Sociocultural theory

The sociocultural theory plays an additional role in this study. Säljö (2000, cited in Aminoff, 2021, p. 39) explains that this perspective holds that people's actions are embedded in social practices. Aminoff (2021, pp. 52-53) summarises the sociocultural perspective on learning, stating that both language and the context in which actions are situated play a central role.

In answering the question, how do English teachers of young learners in grades one through three describe how they organise listening activities in their classroom, three sociocultural theory concepts are important: the zone of proximal development, scaffolding, and meaning-based language. The zone of proximal development and scaffolding are related concepts. Appelgren (2021, p. 90) explains that children learn most effectively when they focus on what they can do or understand with help and guidance. The zone of proximal development is described by Belaid (2023, p. 31) as the difference between what a learner can do without assistance and what they can do with assistance, typically achieved through scaffolding. The zone of proximal development is the distance between the actual and potential levels of development. It serves as a transitional phase where learners can make remarkable improvements with the support of a skilled tutor. Therefore, effective learning occurs within this zone. The zone of proximal development plays a crucial role in language acquisition (Belaid, 2023, p. 31). Gibbons (2006, p. VII) defines scaffolding as a future-oriented, temporary aid that leads to the development of new skills. In the classroom, it refers to the temporary, necessary help the teacher provides so students can eventually perform the same task on their own. Meaning-based language does not emphasise grammar and language rules, but the importance of communicative resources that are formed and reformed in the activity in which they are used: concrete linguistically mediated communicative and cognitive activity (Mitchell et al., 2012, p. 248)

How teachers' ideas are formed can also be viewed through the lens of sociocultural theory. Several researchers have studied teacher cognition from a sociocultural perspective (Öztürk, 2021, pp. 182-183). Li (2020, cited in Öztürk, 2021, p. 182) noted the importance of the sociocultural perspective in demonstrating how teachers learn within professional communities and how their experiences shape their thinking, understanding, and beliefs. It highlights the link between teacher cognition and sociocultural interactions in teachers' lives.

4.3. Theory of second language acquisition

Another theory, considered instead of sociocultural theory but not sufficiently appropriate to answer the previously mentioned research questions, is described below.

Krashen's theory of second language acquisition consists of five main hypotheses: the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis, the Monitor hypothesis, the Input hypothesis, the Affective Filter hypothesis, and the Natural Order hypothesis (D'Souza & Padmanabha, 2024, p. 43). In our opinion, research on listening skills and how to develop them most effectively could certainly be viewed through this theory's lens, as it focuses on how a second language is acquired.

Although Krashen's theory of second language acquisition provides valuable insights into the importance of comprehensible input (something we consider important in listening activities), it falls short in explaining the social and interactive dimensions of language acquisition. Since this study focuses on listening activities in a perspective where the curriculum (Lgr22, 2024, pp. 43-47) states that pupils must be given the opportunity to build confidence in their ability to use the language for a variety of purposes and in different situations, sociocultural theory is chosen as the additional theory, besides teacher cognition theory as the primary theory in this study. For these reasons, the theory of second language acquisition was not chosen for this study.

5. Method

The following section will present the methods used in this study. The section begins with a description of the selected method, followed by a description of how the participants were selected. This is followed by a description of the method of analysis.

5.1. Chosen method

To address the aim and research questions of this study, a qualitative method involving interviews was selected as the most appropriate approach. According to Stukát (2011, p. 41), the formulation of the aim and research questions should serve as the foundation for the choice of method, ensuring coherence between what the study seeks to investigate and how

the data is collected. In line with this reasoning, a qualitative approach was considered suitable for capturing the depth and complexity of the topic under investigation.

The qualitative approach was further grounded in Larsen's (2018, p. 137) definition, where a qualitative interview is described as a method through which the researcher seeks to gain insight into individuals' experiences, perceptions, and emotions (Larsen, 2018, p. 137). This perspective emphasises the importance of understanding participants' viewpoints, which aligned closely with the purpose of this study. Since the aim and research questions focused on teachers' views, experiences, and professional practices, it was essential to adopt a method that enabled nuanced, detailed responses.

Furthermore, this study specifically targeted teachers' practices and perspectives, areas that are not easily quantified or captured through purely numerical data. Instead, they require an approach that allows participants to express themselves freely and reflectively. Interviews, therefore, provided the opportunity to explore these aspects in depth, enabling the researcher to gather rich, descriptive data. As highlighted by Larsen (2018, p. 137), interviews are particularly effective for understanding how individuals interpret and make sense of their own experiences. Consequently, the use of qualitative interviews was well aligned with both the aim and the research questions of this study, making it a logical and well-founded methodological choice.

5.1.1. Validity and reliability

Other qualitative methods, such as class observations, were excluded because the study focused on teachers' views. To ensure good validity, it is essential that studies research what is intended, by collecting relevant data (Larsen, 2019, p. 129). The chosen method can therefore strengthen the study's validity. Larsen (2019, p. 37) points out that interviewees may not be completely honest or may be influenced by the interviewer's presence or the order of interview questions. It is important to realise that this can affect the collected data. This will be discussed further in the discussion part of this thesis.

Reliability is all about accuracy and trustworthiness, according to Larsen (2018, p. 131). The empirical findings should be based on systematically collected data that have been analysed with great transparency, including a description of the theoretical perspectives (Larsen, 2018, p. 131). The perspectives are important for the interpretations that are made. Both achieving the highest possible reliability and evaluating the reliability require nuance and precision. Data collection, data processing, and data analysis must be so clear and transparent that they can be reproduced by another researcher. Larsen (2018, p. 132) clearly indicates that reliability increases when several researchers work together, as is the case in this study.

In quantitative studies, high reliability means that repeated studies yield results that are essentially the same (Larsen, 2018, p. 131). In qualitative studies such as this one, it is almost impossible to guarantee this, because the researcher either influences an informant or because observations have to be interpreted. We have to accept that it is not possible to fully guarantee high reliability, even Larsen (2018, p. 132) acknowledges. We have taken this into account when interpreting the data.

5.1.2. Interviews

According to Hartman (2005, p. 232), interviews are conducted to guide individuals in describing the studied phenomenon from either their own or others' perspectives. Hartman (2005, p. 235) further argues that interviews are an appropriate method when the researcher aims to obtain information based on personal experiences and views. Larsen (2018, pp. 137-138) states that an interview with a positive introductory position creates a space in which the interviewee can describe their experiences and opinions, and the interviewer learns information through them. This approach positions the researcher as neutral in relation to the information being described and allows the interviewee a degree of control over the interview based on their answers.

Hartman (2005, p. 232) also describes this in terms of standardisation, referring to the extent to which the interviewee can influence the interview process. Low standardisation means the interviewee can answer questions in ways that allow the interviewer to adjust them, increasing the interviewee's chances of clarifying something. This makes the conversation more relaxed and opens the door to questions the interviewer had not previously considered. Larsen (2018, p. 138) points out that interviews can be non-structured, semi-structured, and structured. A structured interview usually means that it is based on a list of interview questions in a predetermined order. A non-structured interview includes unfinished questions, and the interviewee controls the interview.

In this study, we conducted a semi-structured interview with low standardisation. This means that the interview consisted of pre-selected questions with follow-ups, but in a non-strict order. This also means the interviewee might have answered multiple questions at once through follow-up questions and dialogue. This method was chosen because it allows a conversational approach with the participating teachers and provides favourable conditions for capturing their views in depth. The interview guide consisted of 27 questions, with the first four being background questions. This was followed by 23 open questions in three themes. The first theme consisted of questions aimed at being able to answer the three research questions. The second theme included questions about memories that the teachers had of the English course within their own teacher training. The last theme consisted of one question: whether there was anything else the participant would like to add to the

conversation that they thought was important and that we, as researchers, knew. The order of the questions was flexible, except for the closing question. Before the interviews, a pilot study was conducted to test the clarity of the interview questions and the ability to answer the research questions. The pilot study was conducted with a teacher who met the chosen qualifications and lasted 15 minutes. Based on the pilot study, the interview questions (see Appendix 4) were revised to better address the research questions and clarify them for participants. The data from the pilot study were not included in the final analysis material.

The final list of questions was divided into four sections, with parts two and three sometimes asked in a different order depending on what came up during the background questions.

1. Background questions about the teacher and the school.
2. Open-ended questions (how, what, when, etc.) about listening exercises, the teachers' thoughts, opinions, and views on listening comprehension, and the teachers' thoughts, opinions, and views on listening activities for their pupils.
3. Questions about memories of the English course in their own teacher education.
4. A final question whether the teacher would like to add anything.

5.2. Selection of participants

The study focused on teachers, specifically those teaching English in grades one through three. To qualify for participation, interviewees had to meet certain criteria. The interviewee had to be a teacher in grades one through three. The study focused on English but did not limit participants to English-certified teachers. The participants could be retired teachers as well as new teachers. The study was conducted in four municipalities spread over the middle and lower parts of Sweden, including both rural and urban schools. The study involved eleven interviewees with diverse educational backgrounds, varying lengths of service as teachers, and teachers covering all grades one through three. All participants have spent time as practicing teachers; one interviewee is currently a principal, and another is studying towards a teacher licence while simultaneously working as a practicing teacher. Some of the participants teach in grades higher than the intended study area, as well as lower grades. They were asked to focus their answers on grades one through three.

5.2.1. Implementations

The process leading up to the interviews began by sending information about the study to several principals and asking for contact details for teachers who might be interviewed. This led to one interview. Another approach used was to contact professional contacts from our own network of teachers who met the criteria. This allowed seven interviews to be conducted. These contacts were later used to gain additional interviewees, resulting in three more interviews. The Swedish Research Council states that research ethics concerns principles that underpin good research ethics and addresses questions about the content of the research

and the researcher's relationship to the task (Vetenskapsrådet, 2025). Research ethical considerations concern the balance among interests, such as knowledge versus privacy or the risk of harm (Vetenskapsrådet, 2025). Thornberg and Fejes (2024, pp. 294- 295) add that ethics also involves informed consent and anonymity for the participants and constantly reflecting on one's role as a researcher and one's relationships with participants. Anonymity was especially important in this study because of prior relationships with some of the participants.

Whenever possible, the interviews were conducted on-site at the schools, face-to-face. The teachers who were far from the interviewer had their interviews conducted digitally. All interviewees received a letter of information and a letter of consent. These two letters are included in this study as Appendices 2 and 3, respectively. They were both provided in Swedish to ensure the interviewee understood fully. Information about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature, and the guarantee that their answers would be presented anonymously in the study was also provided orally prior to the interview. Questions could be asked, and the interviewee was asked to read and sign a consent letter prior to the interview. With the interviewee's permission, the interviews were audio-recorded. If the interviewee wished, the interview could also be held with notes only, but all participants consented to the audio recording of their interviews. All interviews were conducted in Swedish to aim to keep the interviewee as comfortable as possible. The recordings were stored without a name and then transcribed, with the documents given titles such as "Teacher #". With this, the interviewees are anonymised in the study, including in the handling and management of the written data. Given the responsibility that the participants may not be identifiable, it was decided to be less transparent and therefore not to specify which of us researchers interviewed which teacher.

5.3. Method of analysis

The interview data consisted of voice recordings without names. To facilitate collaboration and easy access to the interview answers, the recordings were transcribed. The transcript was generated using the artificial intelligence (AI) -powered transcribing feature in Office 365 via Word to improve efficiency and time management. The AI-generated transcript was verified and corrected before the data was coded. The material from the transcripts was compiled and organised into a coding framework, which was a table with eleven columns containing answers from different teachers and many rows of keywords, dividing the answers into topics that start with background information and then the topics discussed. Examples of coding keywords were *years of experience*, *variation*, *combination*, *pupils' reaction*, etc.

The analysis method was derived from phenomenography (Stukát, 2011, pp. 37-38). The transcripts were studied to ensure our knowledge of the material, with a focus on the self-conducted interviews. Once we knew our own material, a coding framework was built so we

both could enter our data before analysis. The layout of the coding framework was kept close to the themes of the interview questions. This deductive way of working had advantages in terms of structure, efficiency, and consistency: it provided a clear framework, saved time in analysis, and improved the reliability of the findings, as the two of us involved in the study had to work together, and we both, separately, had to be able to enter the data in the same working table. Some statements were entered as quotations under the matching code, and others as keywords to better identify patterns. This method took time, especially given the volume and the number of interviews. The working table was in Swedish and for internal analytical use only. It helped identify which parts of the transcript needed translation into English. This choice was made to keep the transcripts as close as possible to the actual interview and to help prevent incorrect translations. All translation is a form of interpretation and largely depends on the translator's English vocabulary. During this process and throughout the study, the interviewee could withdraw at any time without question. After almost all data had been entered, it was possible to search for similarities and differences.

One theme was difficult to code. This concerned the question of whether the meaning of listening comprehension exercises and strategies in the steering documents is given equal attention in English as in the Swedish subject, and included some follow-up questions (see question 25 in Appendix 4). We also noticed that we had difficulty entering data about this. After a few attempts to enter the raw data, it was not possible to include this data in the analysis. The data analysis proceeded as follows: For each theme, the summary keywords were examined to see how the teachers had answered. Some subjects required minimal interpretation, such as when one teacher spoke of a growing word bank and another of an expanding vocabulary, which we have summarised as the same answer. For some subjects, summarising was only possible through a slightly freer interpretation. In many cases, quotes were added to the theme descriptions that symbolised similar statements by several teachers to show how we interpreted the data. In some cases, a quote was added to reflect a different statement. This has been incorporated into a running text in the results chapter in the order of our research questions.

6. Results

The following section presents the results of this study. It consists of the answers given by the interviewed participants. The section begins with a presentation of the interviewees and their roles and histories as teachers. Then, the participants' answers will be presented under the following themes: managing listening activities in the classroom, the perceived effects of these activities on young learners' listening comprehension, and the views on providing listening activities for young learners

6.1. Respondents

The interviewees in this study have been anonymised and will be referred to as “Teacher 1-11”. This is a short presentation of the teachers:

<u>Teacher:</u>	<u>Teaching experience:</u>	<u>Teaching in:</u>
Teacher 1	29 years	Grade 1-6
Teacher 2	25 years	Grade 1-3
Teacher 3	20 years	Grade 1-3
Teacher 4	20 years	Grade 1-3
Teacher 5	10 years	Grade 1-5
Teacher 6	2 years	Grade 3-4
Teacher 7	18 years	Grade 1-3
Teacher 8	12 years	Grade 3-6
Teacher 9	4 years	Grade 1-2
Teacher 10	4 years	Grade F-3
Teacher 11	10 years	Grade 1-3

All respondents hold a teacher’s licence or have some education in teaching English in grades one through three. All teachers except for Teacher 7 are currently practicing teachers. Teacher 7 used to be a teacher and is today practicing as a principal.

One topic in the interview was the teachers’ memories of their teacher training. For some participants, this was a long time ago, so no specific memories of listening skills within the English course could be recalled. However, Teacher 10 remembered much about the English course and expressed positive views on the emphasis placed on listening activities and correct pronunciation. For example, the teacher mentioned listening to different sounds, such as “the difference between the words cheap and sheep”. Teachers 7 and 6 also recall an emphasis on listening and communication, respectively. More general memories of the English course were also sometimes discussed in the interviews. Teachers 1 and 3 remember an intensive, high-level course for which they also travelled to England. Teacher 1 names a shortage of methodology and didactics, while Teacher 3 has a positive opinion on this. Teacher 5 remembers finding it difficult to speak English during the course; Teacher 2 indicated that an English course was not part of the curriculum and that they received credentials through years of work experience; Teacher 8 expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of English education. By saying “at the university, we didn’t get much education about how to teach,” Teacher 11 expressed a general dissatisfaction with their whole education, even the English part. Although this was not one of the interview questions, both Teacher 1 and Teacher 10 mentioned that they felt comfortable speaking English because they had frequently been abroad.

6.2. Listening activities in the classroom

All respondents report using listening activities in their teaching. All teachers state that some form of listening activities is a part of every English lesson. Teachers 6 and 7 highlight the need for repetition in language practice and choose to include small listening activities in English every school day. “When I was a beginner, I probably only had English, like when it was on the schedule. Then, after a couple of years, when I understood that English, you need to hear a little bit every day to really learn, so I mixed it in. I try to get it in every day,” Teacher 7 claims. For all the teachers, listening activities are important. The intensity of these listening activities varies somewhat. Teachers 1 and 10 said that listening activities take up a large part of the English lessons, while Teachers 2, 3, 4, 6, and 9 (45% of the participants) said that listening activities are short segments of the lessons. Teachers 1 and 8 insisted that every segment in these lower grades should be short, because pupils can focus for a maximum of 10 minutes. Teacher 8 clarifies that pupils will not learn anything if the segments are longer than ten minutes. Teacher 6 claims that their listening activities are more flexible by saying “I try to keep the moments short but with a flexible mindset to be able to adjust the moments length to suit the pupil’s concentration at that time.”

The teachers were asked about their listening activities. Teachers 4 stated: “The English textbook we use has such elements, listening comprehension”. Teacher 2 told: “Well, we have... there are spoken things that have been read for this teaching material as well, so that’s the one we’re running. Then they listen to me, and sometimes we can bring in some other film or something else I find on the internet.” Like these two teachers, five other teachers also stated that most of the listening activities are a part of the educational material or textbooks they use. Some teachers use English when giving pupils instructions, and those instructions may be part of the lesson’s listening activities, like Teacher 2 explains: “First of all, I try to give instructions in English. Then I may have to explain some words in Swedish.” Teachers 1 and 10 explicitly advocated using English as the language of instruction and argued that far too many teachers today rely too heavily on Swedish during English lessons, where Teacher 1 stated: “but unfortunately, in Sweden, too many people speak too much Swedish in English lessons, my colleagues included” and Teacher 10 indicated: “a number of teachers don’t even speak English in class”. Teachers 3 and 11 said they give all instructions in Swedish. “I usually give the instructions in Swedish. If they have heard it several times, then I can take it in English. Not that I go in and only speak English. No, I don’t, because those who have it the hardest get upset,” is the experience of Teacher 3. Teachers 4, 5, and 8 did not specify which language they use during instructions.

The activities the teachers engage in varied among the respondents. Six of the teachers rely heavily on textbooks as the main educational materials to ensure they include all language

components, while two teachers (Teachers 3 and 7) use many digital resources, such as videos, songs, and even the news.

The interview question with the greatest variation in responses was whether listening activities should vary or not. Teachers 1, 7, and 11 (27%) vary a lot to give the pupils a chance to put the language in different contexts and keep them interested. Teacher 7 says “I think that when they become interested, you capture their attention, and then I believe they learn more”. Teacher 2 offers little variety because they notice that their current group responds better to it: “Routines are very good in this group, it’s needed. So, I try to use the same patterns.” Teacher 8 emphasises stability and routine, which is why they use as little variation as possible. The teacher means that you can do the exact same activity and just change the content. The rest of the teachers all answered that they use the same patterns or the same book, but still try to vary the lessons.

Listening to the English language can be combined with other activities in various ways. The interviewed teachers were asked whether they combined offering the spoken language with something else and, if so, with what. Most participants (82%) indicated that there is often a combination. Teachers 1, 4, and 6 (27%) indicated that all listening activities are combined with other activities to give pupils context. Teacher 5 mentioned a combination with gestures: “There is also a lot of gestures. I think there is a lot of that with this game as well. And then there is also drawing, there are pictures, yes, it is all of that.” Teacher 2 mentions listening to a text read aloud while reading along or looking at drawings; teacher 3 combines listening with drawing what is being told; and teacher 9 mentions combining listening with tales and theatrical segments. Teachers 4, 7, and 10 also include some multimodal segments, such as games, play-based activities, songs, and dances.

6.3. Perceived effects of listening activities

The teachers were asked about their perceptions of the effects of listening activities on their pupils’ listening comprehension and overall language development. We started the segment by asking the teachers how they define listening comprehension, and then asked questions about other effects of the activities.

6.3.1. Listening comprehension

All respondents speak about listening comprehension in somewhat similar ways, as the ability to interpret, understand, and adapt to what one hears. When the teachers were asked to define the term, Teachers 6, 8, and 9 defined it as the skill of deciphering and interpreting information through one’s hearing. The other teachers explain it like listening and trying to understand what one hears. Teacher 10 formulated it as: “Above all, they should hear a new language and eventually understand what they hear, and based on that, take a stand on it.”

Many emphasise the importance of listening, especially at the start of learning a new language, and even more so when starting at a young age, which they consider positive.

All teachers work in a school where they start with English in grade one. Both Teacher 7 and 8 express their desire to start earlier, in the preschool class. Teacher 8 states that “from a cognitive perspective, our brain is programmed to follow and imitate the patterns around us.” The teacher clarifies that pupils will learn the language by repetition and an early start. The earlier they start hearing the language, the earlier they can start imitating and speaking it. Teacher 8 also draws the parallel between learning a second language and learning one’s mother tongue. Teacher 8 describes this as: “as a baby, you imitate what the people around you say, and this includes both language and dialect”. This means that listening is the key component to language learning. Teacher 6 says that as long as a pupil is immersed in the language, the pupil’s language skills will develop: “all exposure is good exposure.”

The teachers were asked to identify the most important skills to build first when learning English as a foreign language. Just over half of the teachers, namely 55% (Teachers 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10) say that one of the most important skills to learn is to build the courage to speak English. Teacher 2 formulated it as: “listening and, yes, daring to talk, as well,” and Teacher 4 as: “many pupils think that English is difficult and it is a bit scary to speak English like that, so speaking and listening, I think, is important in the lower grades”. Other teachers formulated it differently. Teacher 3 answered: “Yes, understand. That is, to understand and be able to communicate.” Even Teacher 1 and Teacher 10 name oral skills as the most important part of second language learning. Teachers 6, 7, and 9 name the growth of pupils’ vocabulary as the most important part of second language learning. Teacher 9 states that “vocabulary is needed as the foundation to be able to start speaking”.

Listening activities can serve different purposes. The teachers’ answers were highly consistent in their view that listening comprehension should be both a goal in itself and an instrument for other language learning, such as vocabulary or syntax. Teacher 11 formulated it as followed: “It’s both, I would say so. English grades one to three are mostly about learning to understand and use simple words and sentences, those you can use in everyday life. So, on the one hand, it is a means and a means that you use to achieve a goal.”

6.3.2. Other effects

The teachers were asked about their perceptions of the effects of listening activities on their pupils’ language development. We started the segment by asking what the pupils’ reaction is to the listening activities. Sixty-four percent of teachers (all teachers, except for Teachers 4, 5, 9, and 11) feel that their pupils enjoy listening activities and look forward to the English lessons. Teacher 5 reports that their pupils felt uncomfortable at first but are now starting to

improve: "... then it becomes uncomfortable. But when one gets more used to it, gets into the swing of things, I still think that they...[...]Yes, depending on the group. Absolutely, whether they are used to it." Teacher 4 says it varies from person to person: "I think everything. Challenging, fun for some, and tests, and horrible, and difficult for some. It's probably very varied." This is similar to Teacher 11, who thinks it is more about individuals, where some pupils struggle a lot with listening and instructions in general, while others love English listening activities. "One pupil becomes irritated. He doesn't want me to speak English because it doesn't sound like me. But most pupils, who are used to hearing English, think it's fun."

All teachers think that the listening activities they provide support their pupils' language development. Teacher 3 said: "Above all, it is probably the vocabulary that increases, but then by hearing the words used, they automatically pick up the word order, which is grammar, I think." They all agree that young learners develop vocabulary through listening activities. Other skills were also mentioned. Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (45%) indicated that pupils develop an understanding of word order and syntax in English sentences through listening to the language. "It's not just about understanding, but it's also about getting the word right, hearing how the words sound, and sentence structure, everything," as Teacher 5 formulates it. Teacher 7 described it more as a feeling for the rhythm and melody of words and sentences. Several participants also mentioned improvements in pronunciation and the ability to imitate and use the words they had heard. Teacher 1 keeps an eye on what their former pupils receive for their final grade in the last year of primary school and concludes that the learners must have made a good start in listening comprehension skills in the lower grades. "So, I believe in what I do," they add.

6.4. Views on listening activities

All participants emphasise the importance of listening activities and listening comprehension in the lower grades, and especially in the introduction to the English language. Teacher 6 claims that "it is super important for the pupils to get exposed to English".

One question asked about which circumstances had the most positive effect on pupils' learning. The answers to this question varied considerably. Some teachers were unsure about an answer, while others stated that this applied when both the content and the form were considered interesting. Teacher 4 said that the question was hard to give an accurate answer to by saying "English in the lower grades has an incredibly high level of variation, including previous knowledge. Some of the pupils think that English is really hard, while others think it is really easy, so it's hard to say one thing or moment when the pupils gain the most." Teacher 9 also stated this difficulty: "it all depends on how far they (the pupils) have come in their English development". Many teachers indicated that multiple interacting factors contribute to

a positive and meaningful learning environment. Four out of eleven teachers (Teachers 1, 6, 7, and 11) indicated that young learners develop best when addressed at the right level. Teacher 1 added that pupils learn best when they hear their teacher speak English. “You should not be afraid to speak English to them all the time. You should not be afraid to challenge them.”

6.4.1. Discrepancies between desired activities and reality

During the interview, questions were also asked about discrepancies between wish and reality: we asked whether there were any topics or forms that the teacher would like to work with but does not do so for certain reasons, or, vice versa, activities that the teacher would like to refrain from but that are still offered for certain reasons. Teacher 2 indicates that it often happens that they have a lesson goal, but on that day, they notice the group needs something different, and reality therefore looks different. Since they want to put the group’s needs first, they do not actually see this as a discrepancy between wish and reality. Teachers 1 and 3 would like to use textbooks more if they could find reliable materials. In contrast, Teachers 4 and 6 would like to use textbooks less than they do now. Teacher 4 states: “I’m not that impressed. There is always some grammar for each chapter as well. For example, all of a sudden, you have to learn “a” and “an” as if that’s the most important thing you need to know in grade 3. It’s a lot of this kind of grammatical stuff. And I think it’s perhaps more important to build up a vocabulary.” All these four teachers (36%) indicate that they are not very satisfied with the available teaching materials, with several noting that the level is not challenging enough. “Because it’s very banal material, boring, to simple.” Teacher 1 states. Teachers 5 and 7 think they should actually speak more English in class, but feel their English language skills are lacking. “English isn’t that easy for me either,” Teacher 5 adds. The other teachers indicated that wish and reality match quite well.

7. Discussion

In this chapter, the results presented in the previous chapter are first linked to the research questions. In the last section, the extent to which the research method strengthens or weakens the results is critically discussed.

7.1. Discussion of results

This study aimed to examine teachers’ views on developing young learners’ English listening comprehension and aimed to investigate how these teachers explain their classroom practices. This led to research questions about how grade one through three English teachers organise listening activities with young learners, their perceptions of the effects of these activities on young learners’ listening comprehension, and their views on providing such activities.

7.1.1. Classroom practice

The first research question concerns how English teachers of young learners in grades one through three describe how they organise listening activities in their classroom.

The teachers state that a large part of the listening activities involves the teacher speaking. This can include telling a story and giving instructions. Also, a large part states to be based on the teaching material. The teaching material can include listening exercises with audio recordings, but the teacher can also read a story or texts aloud. Many listening assignments aim to increase vocabulary. The teachers often combine listening activities with other activities to provide variety and give the pupils more context, including gestures, film, reading, theatre, drawing, and songs. Albaladejo and Roca de Larios' (2018, pp. 121-123) research about listening comprehension shows that the vocabulary of young learners grows faster by listening to stories than to songs. In the interviews, songs were mentioned, but not as often as listening to stories to gain vocabulary, which is in line with the research by Albaladejo and Roca de Larios (2018, pp.121-123).

Two of the teachers indicated that they actually think they should dare to speak more English in class. One of these teachers relies mainly on the textbooks and is now, fortunately, very satisfied with the new teaching material. But several teachers indicate that they are not impressed with the teaching materials and need better books and digital resources. Some believe they should use theirs less, as this could improve the quality of their teaching, while others would like to make more use of good schoolbooks or digital materials to make their work easier. From this, it can be concluded that a large proportion of teachers indicate (although expressed in two initially opposite ways) that the quality of teaching materials is of great importance to the quality of English education, even in these early years. This is consistent with previous research, which emphasises the importance of high-quality teaching materials (Güngör, 2020, pp. 2-3; Barranco Izquierdo & Sanz Trigueros, 2025, pp. 9-10). Güngör (2020, pp. 2-3) states that the quality of teaching materials is one of the key components to developing language proficiency. This is similar to Barranco Izquierdo and Sanz Trigueros (2025, pp. 9-10), who explain that a quality planning guide is of great importance to pupils' ability to learning English as a foreign language.

Two teachers expressed that, unfortunately, some colleagues speak too much Swedish during English lessons. They were also the ones who indicated they felt confident in English and offered listening activities for most of the English lesson. Within this study, it is not possible to determine what cause and effect is and whether these two teachers have improved their language skills significantly because they are convinced that this is important or, conversely, that they feel secure in the language and have therefore come to find it more important to express themselves in English than their colleagues. It is also possible that there is a

connection, without a causal relationship. But it seems clear that both their skills and their beliefs influence their practice, specifically the offering of exposure to the English language and providing listening activities in the classroom. This is consistent with the teacher cognition theory, which holds that teacher belief, teacher knowledge, and teacher thinking drive their actions (Öztürk, 2021, p. 178). Even Whyte, Wigham, and Younès (2022, p. 2) claim that teaching beliefs are strong predictors of teachers' classroom behaviours. The question of why these two teachers explicitly mention that English should be spoken more during lessons cannot be fully answered here. However, the question may not be the most relevant one. Instead, it could be asked why teachers use Swedish during English lessons. Considering that some teachers wish to speak a larger proportion of English than they currently do, this seems like a justified inquiry. This discussion is relevant to understanding how teachers organise listening activities, as language choice directly affects the amount of English exposure students receive. Looking at this from cognition theory perspective, which states that teacher belief, teacher thinking, and teacher knowledge influence their practice, this would mean that although there is a belief and thinking that says that English should be spoken a lot in the classroom, the amount of proficiency in the English language (knowledge) is insufficient to be able to do this satisfactorily, so that the practice looks different. The subject of courage for speaking English will be returned to later, in the hope of contributing to the gathering of courage.

It differs greatly from teacher to teacher in the extent to which routines are fixed or varied, with reasons for both variants clearly formulated to meet the needs of a child's brain, young learners, or a specific group. This aligns with Mercieu's research (2019, p. 124), which shows that teaching English as a foreign language in primary school is highly adaptive and context-based. Mercieu (2019, p. 124) highlights that teachers continuously adjust and adapt their methods and practices in response to pupils' characteristics and to teaching materials. Such adjustments were explicitly mentioned, especially by two participants in this study.

Although the interviews inquired about the practice of listening activities and, more specifically, the tendency to vary them, there were no specific questions about how long a particular activity normally lasts. However, two teachers spontaneously indicated that all activities for pupils of this age should always be very short. This aligns with one of the guiding principles for the design of the ECELEP teaching material, as stated by Güngör (2020, p. 27): the ECELEP employs a variety of meaningful activities and tasks with brief transitions because children have short attention spans.

7.1.2. Perceived effects

The second research question concerns the perception of grade one through three English teachers regarding the effects of the listening activities they offer young learners on their listening comprehension.

The teachers believe that the listening activities they provide support young learners' language development, with vocabulary growth being regarded as the most important indicator of this. Other skills were also mentioned, such as word order and pronunciation. This reflects a different view on the relationship between listening activities and vocabulary growth from the one investigated by Babayi et al. and Shapiro (2020, pp. 85–86, 91), who examined the impact of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge on listening comprehension and described a causal relationship the other way around. The teachers in our study, however, seem to be clearly aware that listening is not just a comprehension goal, but also a tool for acquiring language skills (including vocabulary). Research on this topic was, unfortunately, not sufficiently within the remit of this study to be described in the “previous research” section, but it is consistent with Ricard's (2016, Teaching Listening #6) claim, which indicates that there are two perspectives on listening skills: listening as comprehension and listening as acquisition. The teachers in our study were highly consistent in their view that listening comprehension should admittedly be a goal in itself, but listening activities are mainly an instrument for language learning, such as vocabulary or syntax. Although the teachers indicated that one of the most important skills is gathering the courage to use the language, only one teacher mentioned that using the language was one of the effects of listening activities.

The most positive effects are yielded when young learners are addressed at the right level, the teachers claim. In some cases, this means providing additional support or adjustments, in others, extra challenges. “You should not be afraid to challenge them,” Teacher 1 emphasises. Both providing additional support and extra challenges align with Safa and Rozati's (2016) claim that scaffolding is important for learning English as a foreign language, especially for listening comprehension. The majority of the teachers interviewed claim that pupils in these lower grades have a wide span of English language skills and therefore need to adjust the education to benefit all pupils. This also aligns with the description of the zone of proximal development as the difference between what a learner can do without assistance and what they can do with assistance, typically achieved through scaffolding, or more generally, the distance between the actual and potential development levels (Belaid, 2023, p. 31). It can therefore be concluded that both the participating teachers and Belaid (2023, p. 31) claim that effective language acquisition occurs within a special zone, but that our teachers find it challenging to work within this zone for a group in which levels differ greatly.

7.1.3. Views on listening activities

The last research question concerns the view of grade one through three English teachers on providing listening activities for young learners.

The results show that teachers believe listening comprehension is an important part of language development, especially for young learners of English as a foreign language. This is consistent with the views of Smith and Conti (2023). These authors explain that listening is the foundation of language learning, a point that Teacher 8 also emphasises: the human brain learns languages by listening, starting from birth. However, Conti and Smith (2019, p. 4) and Hue (2019, p. 268) not only point out the importance of listening exercises but also argue that teachers let their pupils speak and write more than they engage in listening activities, i.e., that teachers prioritise language production over listening. However, this does not emerge from the results of this study, in which the participants recognise the importance of listening activities and claim to engage in them. Whether there is a discrepancy between what the participants do and what they think and report doing is unclear. Whether there is a need to prioritise listening exercises on an even larger scale than exercises aimed at producing language, than they do now, is also unclear. Furthermore, it remains uncertain whether the claims made by Conti and Smith (2019, p. 4) and Hue (2019, p. 268) apply only to older pupils, or whether there is another reason for this discrepancy. Lundahl (2023, p. 261) claims that listening practice is the least frequently trained of the language skills in the higher grades of compulsory education, but that little is known about how this tendency manifests in the lower grades. However, the results of our study suggest that listening activities are given high priority.

How teachers' ideas are formed can be viewed through the lens of teacher cognition theory from a sociocultural perspective, demonstrating how teachers learn in professional communities and how their experiences contribute to their thinking, understanding, and beliefs (Öztürk, 2021, pp. 182-183). How teachers' experiences contribute to their views was insightfully expressed by a teacher who keeps an eye on what their former pupils receive for their final grade in the last year of primary school, and concludes: "I believe in what I do." The teacher said this to make clear that their opinion about the great importance of listening activities and hearing the teacher speak a lot of English was not just plucked out of thin air, but is justified by the fact that their way of working gives good results.

What emerged clearly in this study is that all the participating teachers indicated that listening to spoken English is of great importance. They were highly consistent in their view that listening itself is an instrument for language learning, and the most important way for young learners to start mastering the language. The teachers had very different experiences during their studies to become teachers, with some receiving a lot of English, some little, and one

even no English at all. Memories of the importance of listening activities during their English courses were minimal for most. How proficient the teachers felt in English also varied a lot. Although the participants completed their teacher education at quite different times and therefore may have received different training, all these teachers have received education aimed at teaching pupils in the lower grades. Reasoning from teacher cognition theory, which mainly states that the beliefs, thinking, and knowledge of teachers are strongly influenced by their own education, it can seem plausible that the great similarity between the eleven interviewed teachers in terms of how highly they value listening activities as a tool for language learning, could mainly stem from their general teacher education, which is focused on teaching young pupils in general. Since we did not focus in this study on similarities in the general training of teachers and a possible connection to the emphasis on working primarily with, or, conversely, primarily not with, oral skills across multiple subjects, we cannot establish this with certainty.

Whyte, Wigham, and Younès (2022, pp. 2-3) claim that primary school teachers emphasise the importance of content-rich and age-appropriate activities to meet the specific characteristics of young learners, create positive emotions towards the English language, and exploit the curious nature of children by using their interests to create opportunities to learn. They place greater emphasis on playful learning and student-centred approaches, and prioritise oral skills, such as listening and speaking, over written skills. Whyte, Wigham, and Younès (2022, pp. 2-3) claim that many teachers' beliefs are consistent with research on early childhood education. This also applies to the teachers who participated in our study. The teachers' views on providing listening activities also focused on the importance of meaningful content and communication. Both the teachers and Mitchell et al. (2012, p. 248) suggest that meaning-based language does not emphasise grammar and language rules, but rather the importance of communicative resources formed in the activity in which they are used, namely, concrete, linguistically mediated communicative and cognitive activity.

There are two topics for which the researchers whose articles were discussed in the chapter "Previous Research" reported different results from ours: exposure to the target language and the importance of grammar. These two topics will be discussed below.

One teacher's statement, "all exposure is good exposure," and several teachers' emphasis on meaningful communication over the value of grammar is contrary to the findings of Hidalgo and Villarreal (2024) and Babayi et al. and Shapiro (2020). The research by Hidalgo and Villarreal (2024, pp. 7-8) showed that reasonably more exposure does not automatically lead to better listening skills if it occurs in different forms, and the findings of Babayi et al. and Shapiro (2020, pp. 85-86, 91) highlight the central role of vocabulary and grammar in understanding a spoken text. However, the studies mentioned above are aimed at learners who

are somewhat older than the target group in our study. To clarify why this might be significant, we will first discuss grammar. It seems likely that in more advanced levels of English, where, for example, cause and effect must be established in a listening exercise, the importance of grammar is greater than in a listening activity aimed at the target group of our study. At this point, we would like to point out that it can also make a difference whether listening is a goal or a tool: if listening comprehension is the goal, then grammar may be of greater importance than if listening is a tool to acquire a larger vocabulary, something that seems to be given a higher priority for our target group. Güngör (2020, pp. V-VI and 11), who conducted research on our target group, states that approaches employing communicative and interactive methods, with an emphasis on meaning and context, are highly effective, a view that aligns with the ideas of several teachers in our study. Returning to the statement “all exposure is good exposure,” previous research has yielded mixed conclusions. However, the extent to which these findings are affected by the target group being somewhat older than ours remains unclear. Regarding the study by Hidalgo and Villarreal (2024, pp. 8-9), which examines the effect of exposure to the target language, it explicitly states that more research is needed on the amount of target language exposure required to have an impact. If the statement “all exposure is good exposure” is interpreted as that all exposure contributes to listening comprehension skills, then it may be a bit simplistic, but if the statement is interpreted as that it cannot be negative to hear spoken English, then this could contribute to teachers having more courage to speak English, which was stated as an explicit wish by two of the participants.

7.2. Discussion of methods

This section discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the methodological approach on which the study was based.

The participation of the interviewed teachers was entirely voluntary, a condition for ethical considerations, and also practically impossible to organise without consent. The consequences for the representativeness of the results are only guessable. It is understandable to assume that only teachers who are very enthusiastic about listening comprehension skills wanted to participate in an interview. However, since a fairly large proportion of participants were recruited directly from our professional network, and only one was recruited through a more general call, we think it is reasonable to assume this is a negligible risk. The participants' variation in education, years of teaching experience, and locations helps ensure high validity.

The chosen method, semi-structured interviews with low standardisation, was used to ensure a relaxed setting and to allow the interviewee to contribute to the questions. This negatively affected the compilation process because the questions were not asked the same way or in the same order. However, this also made the interviewees feel confident and relaxed throughout

the interview. Because of the low level of standardisation, the interviewees may have answered some questions differently depending on the order in which they were asked. Larsen (2019, p. 37) points out that interviewees may not be completely honest or may be influenced by the interviewer's presence. This can have affected the collected data.

One of the questions was hard for several participants to answer: what circumstances have the most positive effect on pupils' learning ability? The question was posed in relation to the second research question and yielded interesting answers. Unfortunately, this question contributed less to the study than we had hoped, though. In the Pilot study, we formulated this question differently. During the Pilot interview, we discovered that the question was not stated clearly enough. The question was reformulated but deliberately kept quite broad. However, several participants indicated that they did not fully understand what we meant. The data collected from this question yielded varied results, but in general, the teachers who could answer the question thought pupils learn best when they are addressed at the right level, when they are focused, and when the language has a purpose. However, with a larger number of similar answers from participants, we would have been bolder in stating this result than we do now.

Another question, which was hard for many participants to answer, concerned whether the meaning of listening comprehension exercises and strategies in the steering documents is given equal attention to English as to the Swedish subject. We also found that this theme was difficult to code within our schedule because we interpreted the question slightly differently. Since we also noticed that this theme did not directly answer the research questions, we did not include this data in the results.

The interviews were expected to take around 15 to 20 minutes, but in reality, they varied widely in length. The longest interview took 55 minutes and the shortest only 9 minutes. After the transcripts were compiled into a table, both the long and short interviews provided full answers to all questions, and despite the large difference in length, both yielded equal amounts of usable data. Although we think the length difference is remarkably large, it does not seem to be a reason to assume that the interviews were unsuitable for answering the research questions.

8. Conclusions

This section discusses the conclusions drawn from the study's results and analysis, and how the work contributes to the development of knowledge important for professional practice. The limitations of this research and what would be valuable to investigate further are discussed below.

Since an initial exploration of the topic suggested that little attention is paid to listening activities in education, as described by Conti and Smith (2019, pp. 4-5), Hue (2019, p. 268), and Lundahl (2023, p. 261), the aim of this study was to explore teachers' views on how to develop young learners' English listening comprehension. In particular, it focused on organising listening activities in grades one through three and how teachers perceive the effects of these activities. However, the results of this study suggest that teachers of young learners in Sweden do understand the importance of listening activities and are well aware of research on how young pupils learn. All the teachers in our study consider listening an important part of early language learning, and many indicated that it is a crucial tool for developing vocabulary, which is seen as one of the primary goals in learning English as a foreign language. A goal that was seen as even more important is courage: daring to speak the language. Remarkably, this applies not only to the pupils but also, to a certain extent, to some teachers. The teachers highlighted the importance of creating a supportive learning environment in which pupils are addressed at an appropriate level. Several teachers compared learning a second language to learning the mother tongue, which happens through regular exposure and opportunities to hear the language in meaningful contexts. Even the importance of teaching materials was highlighted, both for the quality of education and to relieve the teacher, a point also shown in previous research (Güngör, 2020, pp. 2-3; Barranco Izquierdo & Sanz Trigueros, 2025, pp. 9-10). The results also show that teachers organise listening activities in different ways. Some teachers prefer a high level of variation, others emphasise routines and structured repetition. These differences suggest that teachers adapt their approaches to suit their pupils' needs and the dynamics of their classrooms.

In summary, listening activities are considered the key to early English language learning. Regular exposure to the language, combined with flexible teaching methods, appears to support the development of both listening comprehension and vocabulary in young learners.

8.1. Limitations and further research

This study has some limitations. First of all, it is based on eleven interviews conducted across different areas of middle and southern Sweden. This is a large amount within the scope of this work, but of course, we cannot estimate whether additional results would have been obtained if we had had the opportunity to conduct more interviews and over a larger area. As a result, the findings cannot be generalised to all Swedish teachers of young learners. Nevertheless, they provide an indication of teachers' views on listening activities for young learners. In addition, the research questions are explicitly from the teachers' perspective. The results are therefore not generalisable to what actually happens in the classroom, since a different research question must be addressed and a different method used, such as classroom observations.

Although the above suggests that future research should include more interviews and observations, this study also offers additional recommendations. Several teachers explicitly wished for quality teaching materials that fit well within the curriculum and contain meaningful, varied, interesting, and challenging listening activities. Moreover, research shows this is of great importance; we recommend reviewing available teaching materials or creating new ones, based on science, experience, and national objectives.

Because this study falls within the field of English, the chapter Previous Research focused more on foreign language learning than on educating young learners, unless it specifically concerned English as a foreign language. We recommend investigating the extent to which insights from previous research on language learning in children may also be relevant to foreign language learning, so that in the future, more research from that field can be used as a basis for new research within EFL, and a more holistic approach can be adopted in the education of young learners.

Since some teachers indicated that speaking English is quite tense, we also recommend conducting research into how this topic can be addressed in teacher education programs, so that future teachers can confidently expose their young learners to self-spoken English. This may include both more training in speaking English to remove any stigma around it and more English in general in teacher education programs.

In conclusion, we hope that the results of this study, which suggest that teachers understand the importance of listening activities and are aware of insights from early childhood education research, contribute to teachers' self-confidence, which in turn helps them teach with greater conviction.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

Dokumentation av skriv- och arbetsprocessen vid parskrivande

Student 1: Lisa Blomqvist

Student 2: Susanne Cornelissen

	Student 1	Student 2
Problemställning Vilka delar har skrivits fram av respektive student? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Formulering av syfte och frågeställningar – Motivering av syfte med hjälp av skolans styrdokument och tidigare forskning 	 V V	 V V
Beskrivning av litteratursökprocessen Vilka delar har skrivits fram av respektive student? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Vilka sökmotorer och sökord som har använts? – Vilka avgränsningar som gjorts under sökprocessen? – Hur utvald litteratur kan motiveras i relation till studiens syfte? 	 V	 V V V
Litteraturbakgrund Vilka delar har skrivits fram av respektive student? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Beskrivning av skolans styrdokument – Problematisering och definition av centrala begrepp – Sammanställning av tidigare forskning under tematiska rubriker 	 V V	 V V V
Teori Vilka delar har skrivits fram av respektive student? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Beskrivning och motivering av utvalt teoretiskt perspektiv 		V

Metod Vilka delar har skrivits fram av respektive student? – Val av metod – Urval – Genomförande – Analys	V	V
Etiska ställningstaganden – Vem har skrivit vilka etiska överväganden som gjorts? – Vem har skrivit informationsbrev (i de fall det är relevant)? – Vem har skickat in anmälan om behandling av personuppgifter till dataskyddsombudet (i de fall det är relevant)? – Vem har skickat in underlag till etikprövning (i de fall det är relevant)?	V V - -	V - -
Resultat – Vem har ansvarat för att skriva fram vilka delar?	Respondents; Listening activities in the classroom; Perceived effects of listening activities; Views on listening activities	Respondents; Listening activities in the classroom; Perceived effects of listening activities; Views on listening activities
Diskussion – Vem har ansvarat för att skriva fram metoddiskussionen? – Vem har ansvarat för att skriva fram resultatdiskussionen? – Vem har ansvarat för att skriva fram hur arbetet bidrar till kunskapsutveckling av betydelse för yrkesutövningen?	V V V	V V V

Underskrifter:

Appendix 2:

Information om studie med fokus på lärares uppfattningar av hörförståelse i engelska

Du tillfrågas härmed att delta i studien Learn to listen – Listen to learn, i form av en intervju

Studiens syfte är att undersöka hur hörförståelse används i engelskundervisningen i lågstadiet. Studien fokuserar på lärares åsikter och tankar kring hörförståelse samt hur det ser ut i praktiken. Studien utförs för att fylla en informationslucka om hörförståelse och dess fördelar inom språkutveckling, mer specifikt det engelska språket.

Du har blivit vald att delta i studien då du är en lärare inom engelska i årskurserna 1 till 3. Studien fokuserar på kommunala grundskolor i Dalarna.

Ditt deltagande i studien omfattar en intervju på max 30 minuter antingen på din skola eller om så önskas, via Zoom. Frågorna som ställs under intervjun kommer handla om din roll som lärare och hur du tänker runt hörförståelse inom engelska. Kommer det frågor du ej vill besvara kan du utan vidare förklaring säga pass så går vi vidare. Du kommer under studiens process att anonymiseras och enbart benämnas som "Teacher #" samt en siffra. Intervjun kommer att spelas in för att underlätta arbetsprocessen. Om så önskas kan intervjun även utföras genom anteckningar. Om du skulle vilja, får du gärna ta del av det färdiga arbetet.

Eventuella svar som berör elever som individer kommer behandlas med hög konfidentialitet samt undvikas i uppsatsen då studien inte fokuserar på elever. Allt insamlat material kommer att sparas lokalt på datorer under hela arbetsprocessen utan risk för spridning. Direkt efter att uppsatsen har blivit godkänd kommer samtlig data att makuleras.

Högskolan Dalarna är ansvarig för behandlingen av personuppgifter i samband med examensarbetet. Som deltagare i undersökningen har du enligt 3 Fastställd av FEN 2022-02-09 Dataskyddsförordningen (GDPR) rätt att få information om hur dina personuppgifter kommer behandlas. Du har också rätt att ansöka om ett så kallat registerutdrag, samt att få eventuella fel rättade. Vid frågor om behandlingen av personuppgifter kan du vända dig till Högskolans dataskyddsombud. Ditt deltagande i undersökningen är helt frivilligt. Du kan när som helst avbryta ditt deltagande utan närmare motivering. Undersökningen kommer att presenteras i form av en uppsats vid Högskolan Dalarna.

Vi som utför studien är två studenter: Lisa Blomqvist samt Susanne Cornelissen. Oss når du enklast genom mail eller via telefon. Nedan står även kontaktuppgifter till vår handledare på Högskolan Dalarna, Zita Farkas om så önskas. Ytterligare upplysningar lämnas av nedanstående ansvariga:

Lisa Blomqvist

Susanne Cornelissen

Zita Farkas

Appendix 3:

Samtycke till att delta i studien

Jag har fått muntlig och skriftlig information om studien och har haft möjlighet att ställa frågor. Jag får behålla den skriftliga informationen. Min medverkan kommer bestå av en intervju.

- Jag samtycker till att delta i studien Learn to listen – Listen to learn. Jag samtycker att information om mig behandlas enligt den information som angetts. Följande uppgifter samlas in: Förnamn, kommun, år som verksam lärare, e-post. De insamlade uppgifterna kommer att bevaras till dess att uppsatsen är examinerad och godkänd, dock högst tre år räknat från att datainsamlingen påbörjats.
- Jag samtycker att min intervju blir inspelad och att inspelningen används under hela skrivprocessen.

Plats och datum	Underskrift

Ansvariga för studien:

Ort och datum: _____

Namnteckning: _____

Appendix 4:

Bakgrundsfrågor:

1. Hur länge har du varit en undervisande lärare? Är du legitimerad? Hur länge?
2. Har du en examen i engelska mot lågstadiet?
3. Vilken/Vilka årskurser undervisar du engelska i?
4. Vilken årskurs börjar eleverna med engelska på din skola?

Intervjufrågor:

5. Använder du hörförståelse i engelska undervisningen i lågstadiet?
6. Vilka förmågor anser du är särskilt viktiga att utveckla i engelskämnet i lågstadiet? (Här syftar vi på till exempel läsa, skriva, lyssna, grammatik, ordförråd, att våga, osv)
7. Hur skulle du beskriva vad hörförståelse är för någonting?
8. Ser du hörförståelse mer som ett mål i sig (till exempel som en förmåga att lyssna aktivt) eller mer som ett medel för annan språkutveckling, (till exempel öka vokabulär eller grammatiken?) eller som både och? Varför? (Är målet att eleverna utvecklar hörförståelse eller använda hörförståelse för andra förmågor inom engelska?)
9. Hur ser du på hörförståelse i engelskundervisningen för yngre elever?
10. Hur arbetar du med hörförståelse? (om du gör det)
11. Hur ofta används hörförståelse? (Varje lektionstillfälle? Varje vecka? Ibland? Sällan?)
12. Använder du samma typ av aktiviteter eller försöker du variera dem? Varför?
13. Vad lyssnar eleverna på? Till exempel dig? varandra? andra röster/dialekter? Film? Ljudfil? Digitalt? Interaktivt?
14. Genomförs lyssningsaktiviteterna oftast i korta inslag eller som längre moment?
15. Kombinerar det med andra arbetssätt? -(till exempel bilder/ tala/ gester/ rita/ skriva/osv?)
16. I vilka undervisningssituationer upplever du att eleverna lär sig som mest genom lyssnande? -(till exempel när de lyssnar på varandra? När det är tyst? När det är meningsfyllt? Smågrupper, osv.)
17. Vilka färdigheter anser du att eleverna lär sig mest i samband med hörförståelse? (Hörförståelse, språkkunskap generellt, grammatik, ordförråd osv)
18. Vilka effekter anser du att hörförståelseövningarna har på elevernas lärande?
19. Vilka aspekter av språket anser du att eleverna lär sig genom hörförståelseaktiviteter? (till exempel grammatik, ordförråd, kulturella aspekter, ordföljd, uttal, osv)

20. Upplever du att elevernas hörförståelse utvecklas genom dessa aktiviteter? På vilket sätt?
21. Hur upplever du att eleverna reagerar på hörförståelsebaserade aktiviteter i engelska?
22. Hur uppfattar du elevernas inställning till hörförståelseaktiviteter – (upplever de dem som roliga, utmanande eller mer testliknande/ som ett prov?)
23. Finns det något du skulle vilja arbeta med inom hörförståelse som av olika skäl inte görs?
24. Finns det något du arbetar med inom hörförståelse som du av olika skäl inte vill jobba med? -(till exempel ett styrt arbetssätt som din skola har och du inte föredrar/ läromedel som du ska använda/ centralt innehåll från lgr22 som du ogillar osv)
25. I svenska är hörförståelse tydligt framträdande både i styrdokument och undervisning. Upplever du att hörförståelse har samma status i engelskundervisningen?
Varför/varför inte?
Tycker du att de borde skrivas fram mer tydligare?
26. Vad minns du om din utbildning som lärare kring engelska?
Vad minns du kring hörförståelse på engelska?
27. Innan vi avslutar, är det något ytterligare du vill kommentera eller förtydliga?
Finns det någonting som du tycker är viktigt att vi som utför studien vet?