Extramural English and young learners’ confidence in speaking English

A mixed-method study on the effects of extramural English on young learners’ confidence

Sandra Vollen

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Luleå University of Technology
Department of Arts, Communication and Education
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Handledare: Marie Nordlund

Luleå tekniska universitet
Institutionen för konst, kommunikation och lärande
Abstract
This study was carried out in two locations in the northernmost part of Sweden, in two different primary schools, one in a village in a rural area and one in a mid-sized city. A mix of methods was used, including interviews, questionnaires and logbooks. A total of 37 pupils in year 3 of the Swedish primary school system took part in the study. The purpose was to find out what extramural English (EE) activities pupils engage in, how much time they spend on these activities and to what extent it affects their confidence in their own English proficiency. The study comes to the conclusion that the pupils engage in a wide variety of EE activities, and that the time spent on these activities also varies greatly. Based on the interviews, there seems to be a positive correlation between engagements in EE activities and confidence using English as a foreign language.

Keywords: Extramural English, young learners, language learning, confidence, foreign language acquisition
Foreword

I would like to thank my supervisor Marie Nordlund, whose guidance has been invaluable during this study, and also, a special thanks to my very good friend Myrra for proofreading and giving me feedback on my paper. Lastly, I would like to thank my family, who has supported me throughout this entire process, I could not have done this without your support!

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1. Introduction

The English language is highly valued in Sweden, not just for academic studies or for work-related matters, but also because it gives us a chance to communicate and interact with people from all over the world. As English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world today, learning English becomes close to essential.

In a nationwide questionnaire, Skolverket (2004) revealed that more than half of Swedish fifth graders estimated that they had learned as much or more English outside the school’s walls as in school. If this is how pupils feel about classroom English, then teachers need to review the content of what is being taught and why. There is a probability that pupils would benefit from a realignment concerning the content, giving extramural English (henceforth EE) a larger part in classroom English.

This study is highly relevant since children are exposed to the English language from a very young age, far more so than merely two decades ago. The source for this increase of English amongst young children is exceedingly related to the expanding digitalized world that we live in. Nowadays, the opportunities to engage in English-related activities are plenty. Several researchers have made a connection between these increased opportunities and the English proficiency of the younger generations. Among others, Sundqvist (2009) shows a positive correlation among children in year 9, who devote a great deal of time to EE and lower anxiety levels when it comes to speaking English. She states that lower levels of anxiety allow for language learners to use their language skills more freely, and therefore they have a greater chance of improving them, as practice makes perfect. The importance of EE therefore seems obvious, as it may lead to decreased anxiety, increased self-confidence, and over all increased results in English language learning.

However, the use of EE among pupils in the earlier years of Swedish primary schools is an area in which research is lacking at the moment. This paper therefore touches upon an area which is, in a way, uncharted territory and provides some insight as to how some pupils experience the effects of EE and their views upon English as a school subject.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to show the extent of pupils’ engagement with extramural English and how this correlates with their perceived self-confidence in speaking English.

The following research questions are addressed:

- What type of EE-related activities are young learners engaged in?
- How much time do young learners spend on various English related activities?
- How, and to what extent, do different amounts of exposure to EE affect young learners’ confidence in speaking English?
To clarify, the meaning of self-confidence should not be mistaken for self-esteem. These words are often used as interchangeable synonyms. However, they differ greatly in meaning. Self-esteem concerns the awareness of our own worth, what we are, whereas self-confidence is about how strong a belief we have of our own ability, in what we do (Johnson, 2003).
2. Background

This chapter gives an explanation on how children learn a foreign language, what foreign language anxiety is, the meaning of extramural English (EE) as well as where children experience it. This chapter also summarizes some of the research previously carried out in this field, as well as a description of the current English as a foreign language education in Sweden and its steering documents.

2.1 How children learn a foreign language

It is widely recognized that children are very successful language learners (Pinter, 2006). A reason for that may be because they are active, curious and playful, they express an enthusiasm to explore and to learn new things. Children learn through interactions with others or by exploring the, to them, unknown. The famous psychologist Piaget suggested that “children construct knowledge for themselves by actively making sense of their environment” (Pinter, 2006, p.5). It is a learning process which means that the child adjusts information to fit his or her own understanding of the world and later, when the child grows older, they adapt new ways of understanding the world around them. By interacting with their surroundings, they cultivate and add to their knowledge level, making it grow larger as time passes (Pinter, 2006). Vygotsky agrees with Piaget that children construct their own knowledge. However, Vygotsky believed that learning comes prior to development. His belief was that children learn better in interactions with others, his idea was that when a child is together with someone more knowledgeable, like a parent, sibling or friend, they can help that child reach a higher knowledge level. The concept is called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and it describes the difference between what a child can achieve with their current knowledge on their own, to the possible achievement of knowledge that could be attained for the child with the help of someone. It is within these types of interaction that learning occurs, when a child is “challenged” to a task that may be out of his or her knowledge range, it can be accomplished with a little help (Pinter, 2006). Lantolf and Thorne (2007) agrees with Vygotsky that children learn more in interactions with other more knowledgeable people, and as a result, children develop new language skills that would have been difficult, or even impossible, for them to attain on their own. Effectively, at a younger age, before we start educating them in a foreign language, we simply use the child’s natural interest for language, and guide them to knowledge in a way that stays true to the ZPD.

It appears that children who start learning a foreign language at a younger age, may acquire the language easier. This may very well be because up to a certain age children learn foreign language skills in an informal way, much in the same way they did their first language. According to Bialystok (1991), this kind of prior knowledge and experience will guide children to seek the means for achieving the same functions in the foreign language. By applying their knowledge to possible forms, patterns and meanings in their native language, children are more or less able to give meaningful interpretations to the foreign language they hear. With that they can make a more educated guess about what people are likely to say or talk about in various
situations. This is a cognitive process where a child interacts in a situation where the target language is being spoken and, by observing the situation at hand, tries to discover what rules the people who are speaking the target language are following, by using analytical procedures. This helps the child to reach some knowledge of the target language rules and enabling them to adopt these rules for themselves (Bialystok, 1991).

Psycholinguistics suggests yet another reason for why children appear to be great language learners, namely that that there is a sensitive period in childhood for language learning. Initially, it was Lenneberg (1967) who proposed a Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). The hypothesis advocates that there is a limited progressive period, from childhood until puberty, during which it is possible to attain a foreign language to a nativelike level. However, once this window of opportunities has passed, the ability to learn a language declines. The validity of the CPH has been questioned and is still a subject of debate in language acquisition over the extent to which the ability to acquire language is biologically linked to age (Pinter, 2006). One of the researchers who has questioned the CPH hypothesis and does not consider it to be regarded as a scientific hypothesis is Singleton (2005). He argues that the CPH is misleading, comparing it to the mythical creature Hydra. The creature’s multiplicity of heads represents the ways of how the critical period for language acquisition is understood, and if one way of understanding it is falsified, two new ways will come. He states that by having such diverse versions of the CPH, it weakens its credibility.

However, there seems to be an agreement that an early start to language learning is beneficial, because it allows a longer time overall for learning. It lets children, who with relative ease acquire the prosody and phonological system of the foreign language, learn naturally as young language learners, but as they grow and become older, a broader range of learning strategies develop. This gives children who start their language learning early, a particular benefit as they are able to use both sets of beneficial strategies for learning. By being less prone to foreign language anxiety, as well as acquiring the prosody and phonological system of the target language with ease when they are younger. As they grow older, they have developed various strategies for learning, such as note-taking as well as being more familiar to the concept behind a new word that they come across in the target language (Johnstone, 2009).

Although children acquire a foreign language relatively easy, it is not without motivation. Motivation means to be moved to do something. A person who feels energized or eager toward something is considered to be motivated. The two main forms of motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The aspects that separate these two types are that intrinsic motivation is referred to as doing an activity just for the fun of it, while extrinsic motivation is about doing something to later gain a separable outcome, such as studying for a test in order to get a good grade (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation is a strong factor when it comes to learning a foreign language, because it determines how much time and effort children are ready to spend on learning tasks. As children learning English as a foreign language may not be intrinsically motivated to learn the language, they must find the content of the lesson or task interesting and relevant if they are to engage in learning.
2.2 Extramural English

Studies have been scarce when it comes to researching young learners in primary school and their exposure to EE. Nonetheless, recent years have given rise to certain literature regarding informal English focused on younger learners. Most of what we learn, we learn from other people in informal situations. Informal learning is attaining knowledge about the fundamental structure in some intricate stimulus such as language. Ellis (1994) explains that the attainment is achieved “naturally, simply, and without conscious operations” (p.3), meaning that the learner is not aware of what or when they are learning. Informal learning is a broad subject and has been used in various terms and definitions, for example: Naturalistic learning, which occurs through direct communication with users of the target language, usually in situations where someone lives with native speakers (Lamb, 2004). Self-directed naturalistic learning is used as a term for when learners create naturalistic learning situations with the purpose of learning the target language, the focus may be on learning to communicate in the language or something else other than the language itself (Benson, Grabe & Stoller, 2001). Out-of-class learning is when pupils study and practice the target language on their spare time (Yi, 2005). Sundqvist (2009), influenced by the various forms of informal learning, presented above, developed an umbrella term for all types of informal learning, namely extramural English (EE). The term is an adjectival composition of Latin origin, roughly meaning English outside the walls. The prefix extra means outside and the stem mural is wall. The definition of EE states that it may not be the intention of the recipient to learn the target language as a result of EE and that the learning always occurs outside the classroom. Whether it is intentional or not to learn the target language is not of importance, neither form is excluded from the concept of EE. Extramural English is an example of an informal type of learning, because the reason for acquiring and developing new language skills is not a goal in itself. Instead the increased language skills are simply a tool for reaching the real goal, for example, reading a book not yet translated, understanding the instructions in a game, or communicating with relatives abroad. Due to this the child is motivated and engaged, increasing their resilience to failure and their capacity for linguistical problem-solving.

In studies on the vocabulary aspects of informal learning researchers have identified two main types of learning: incidental learning and unintentional learning. Incidental learning which is used to refer to the attainment of an expression or a word without the conscious intention to transfer it to memory. In other words, “picking up” an unknown word from listening to someone, watching tv or from reading (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001; Sylvén, 2010). Also, unintentional learning, which often occurs when pupils ‘learn’ without trying to learn. This learning process is possible during conditions of reduced attention, where they simply sense and react/respond to their environment (Forsman, 2004). All the informal types of attaining English share some similarities, the main one is that they all occur on the pupils’ spare time.

Theoretically, EE is based on the principle of learner autonomy. Developing learner autonomy involves learning how to learn and is a gradual process. In order to become autonomous, learners need to be exposed to a range of useful learning. When learners choose to engage in
language activities outside school walls, where they do not have the support of their teacher, they control their own learning, and thus, develop their learner autonomy. These learners are likely to be more efficient in their learning, because the learning will be more personal and focused. Even though learners would usually voluntarily devote their time to EE activities, it may not always be the case. It may be that some children only engage in EE because they feel pressured by external influences such as parents or peers (Sundqvist, 2010), which goes against the principle of learner autonomy where the child is able to take responsibility of their own learning.

2.3 Media usage among children in Sweden

Swedish children today have relatively easy access to different types of media in comparison to how it was twenty years ago. Given that the vast majority of the different types of media available are in English, it is reasonable to assume that children are exposed to English on a much more frequent basis these days.

Since 2005 Statens medieråd has published a biannual report on children and their media usage. Their purpose is to help children and adolescents to become conscious media users and provide tools to protect them from harmful media influence. In two nationwide questionnaires, a mapping of the media habits and attitudes towards media of children between 0-18 years of age is presented, Småungar & medier (Statens medieråd, 2017b) covering 0-8-year-olds and Ungar & medier (Statens medieråd, 2017a) covering children between 9 and 18 years of age. The publication was based on two questionnaires that was sent out to the Swedish children in the age groups 9-12-year-olds and 13-18-year-olds. The questionnaires were sent out to a total of 3998 children, equally distributed between the age groups. For this paper the age group which is relevant is ages 9-12, which had a response rate of 40.4%. Figure 1 below presents a compressed version on the media usage of children 9-12 years old (Statens medieråd, 2017a) to display how much media is a part of the everyday life.
The question on how much time the children spend on various media platforms as well as other spare time activities was supposed to give an insight into the occurrence of media usage outside school bounds. 100 children between the ages of 9-12 answered. The results show that spending time with family is the most common daily activity (85%), followed by using the internet (75%), and phone usage (70%). Even though spending time with family was the highest ranked answer, using the internet or the phone was not far behind. The number of children that use their phone on a daily basis increases, the increment is substantial amongst 9-12-year olds, from 57% in 2014 to 70% in 2016. The everyday usage of social media has also increased, but not as drastically, from 30% in 2014 to 34% in 2016 (Statens medieråd, 2017a). In addition to map out what activities children chose to engage in, an interest was also to know approximately how much time children spend on various activities each day, the results are presented in Figure 2 below. (Statens medieråd, 2017a).
Figure 2. A summary of how much time 9-12-year-olds spend each day on various activities (Statens medieråd, 2017a)

Figure 2 describes to what extent children of the ages 9-12 use media on a daily basis, and what media they use. However, the questions that were answered also included non-media related activities for the purpose of giving a composed image of what kind of activities children engage in during their spare time. Family time was the highest ranked answer in the categories 4-5 hours, 5-6 hours and 6 hours or more. The three top activities the children spend 3-4 hours a day on was meeting with friends (15%), family time (13%) and using the internet (12%). The same activities was most common in the category 2-3 hours where meeting with friends (29%) was most common, followed by, family time (20%) and lastly, using the internet (19%). The usage of various media platforms was never the highest ranked answer in any of the categories. However, the digitalization of today’s society has created complications regarding measuring the usage of media in a fair way. It is worth noting, for example, that multiple activities can take place simultaneously and due to that fact, adding the numbers together does not give a clear image on how much time the total media consumption occupies (Statens medieråd, 2017a). For example, one could very well listen to music while at the same time doing sports, or interacting on social media while watching tv, and it is usually done while using the phone. This would make minutes spent on those activities count double. Nevertheless, one of the three leading activities that children of the ages 9-12 spend the majority of their spare time did include media related activities, even if the measurement of media is not presented as a clear image.

2.4 Foreign language anxiety

Another variable that needs to be taken into consideration in language learning is that of foreign language anxiety (FLA). Anxiety is described as a state of apprehension, a vague fear that is
associated with an object (Hilgrad, Atkinson & Atkinson, 1971). However, there are several different categories of anxiety. One type of anxiety suggested by MacIntyre (1999), is *situation specific anxiety* which is experienced only in a specific situation. According to MacIntyre (1999), FLA is a situation specific anxiety that relates to surroundings of foreign language learning. It is felt when pupils are required to use a foreign language. The reason for this may be because listening and speaking requires a great deal of concentration in a time frame of which pupils have no control. Consequently, increasing the pressure on the pupil to successfully process the input (listening) or output (speaking) results in the emergence of anxiety.

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) identified three aspects of FLA, the first being *communication apprehension*, the second one being *fear of negative evaluation* and lastly *test anxiety*. According to Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert (1999), speaking is often considered as the most “anxiety-provoking aspect in a second language learning situation” (p. 424) often caused by the perceptions of a low language ability in relation to native speakers as well as peers. As the Swedish school system does not focus on tests and negative evaluations, but rather on a will to communicate, the first type of anxiety is the most relevant for this paper. Pupils suffering from communication apprehension will not feel comfortable trying to communicate in the target language in front of their peers because of their limited knowledge of the language, especially in the areas of speaking and listening. Research has shown that learners suffering from FLA has a lower willingness to participate in language developing activities (Aida, 1994; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). This leads to them not getting the same amount of practice as their less apprehensive peers, which in turn leads to lower performance and achievements (Aida, 1994; Horwitz, 2010; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

2.5 Previous research on extramural English

Previous research has shown that EE appears to have a very positive affect on pupils’ English knowledge. Sundqvist (2009) researched the impact of out-of-school English on 9th graders oral proficiency and vocabulary size. She collected data from speech recordings of oral tests, questionnaires, language diaries, interviews as well as the results of the National Tests in English. The questionnaires were to attain knowledge of the informants’ background as well as their contact with EE. The purpose of the language diaries was to shed light on how much time per week the informants had spent on different EE activities. Her findings show a strong correlation between EE and English acquisition. However, the correlation was greater for vocabulary size than it was for oral proficiency. Sundqvist established that the pupils who spent time on the internet or played interactive videogames had a larger vocabulary size than the others. Her result also showed that reading in English as an EE activity surprisingly seemed to be of less importance for pupils’ vocabulary development.

Another study which verifies the positive effect of EE is Sylvén (2010), a study on vocabulary development amongst Swedish upper secondary school pupils during their first and second year. She found that the input of English had a significant effect on the size of their vocabulary. She compared vocabulary test results in classes where many school subjects were taught in
English and in classes where English was used only during English lessons. The result showed that some pupils, who had low exposure to English at school, but were often engaging in EE activities performed better than some of their fellow pupils who were taught in English at school but came in less contact with EE. The conclusion she comes to is that the overall contact with English seems to be decisive when it comes to language acquisition, not just the exposure to English pupils receive in school.

Whereas Sundqvist (2009) and Sylvén (2010) validate the benefits of EE on vocabulary growth, Olsson (2012) has found additional indication that EE may promote writing proficiency. She found a positive correlation between the frequency of EE use and results on the written part of the National Test in English. This study too was carried out with pupils in year 9 and the aim was to investigate whether interactions in EE do have an impact on pupils’ proficiency in writing. The study involved a mapping of EE interactions and an investigation of grades. Moreover, two types of texts written by the pupils, a letter and an article were gathered and analysed. The analysis was carried out in two steps. The first step was to see whether there were any differences in text, word or sentence length or variation in vocabulary and the usage of infrequent words. The second was to see what kind of linguistic resources pupils use when expressing attitude and gratitude in the two different text types. The results indicate that pupils with frequent EE usage are able to adapt their vocabulary use according to text type to a higher degree.

A conclusion from the three studies above is that EE matters, and is needs to be acknowledged as an important source for obtaining knowledge, recognizing that the informal learning process is of great importance to many young learners and, for some, it is dominant. Previous studies have focused on significantly older learners than the present one but are, nevertheless, relevant as they show positive correlations between EE and several features of language proficiency.

The studies above have focused on EE in general, however, there are certain EE activities that have been shown to be frequently occurring within the topic of EE, namely MMORPGs. In 2011, a study diving more in depth into a specific type of EE, gaming within an MMORPG (massive multiplayer online role-playing game) was published (Kongmee, Strachan, Pickard & Montgomery, 2011). The researchers studied the effects on language learning that playing commercial MMORPGs had on eight Thai undergraduate students’ English skills. The study used a variety of methods, such as interviews as well as virtual ethnography methods to observe participants and create language tasks and tests. The participants then took part in real world practice using an action research process. The researchers found that the participants of the study experienced greater motivation and confidence than before in using English, partly because the games provided a safe and anonymous space for them to practice and test their skills. Another benefit was that the teacher could give feedback on their use of the English language in a friendly and relaxed way, minimizing the feelings of anxiety and embarrassment of making mistakes. Researchers concluded that using MMORPGs as a supportive tool for language learning benefitted the participants as they showed greater patience and a higher degree of motivation in using English than before, which was assumed to be partly caused by
increased confidence. Another cause for the increased motivation was thought to be the fact that the students could control and own the environment and the learning process.

2.6 English language teaching in Sweden

One on the main intentions with English language teaching in Sweden is for pupils to develop faith in their own ability to use the target language in different situations and for diverse purposes. Furthermore, to give the pupils an opportunity to develop comprehensive communicative skills (Skolverket, 2018). For primary school pupils, encounters with English language teaching should mainly be in the spoken form. This is a standpoint supported by scientific results that show that the methodological principles “hear - do” and “listen – understand – imitate - speak” are the most efficient ways to make pupils believe in their capacity to use the language (Skolverket, 2009).

Pupils do not receive any grades in year 3. However, some knowledge requirements need to be fulfilled by the pupils. What requirements the pupils need to attain can be found in the core content for pupils in years 1-3 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Knowledge requirements that ought to be attained at the end of year 3 (Skolverket, 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core content in years 1–3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content of communication</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Subject areas that are familiar to the pupils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interests, people, and places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Daily life and ways of living in different contexts and areas where English is used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening and reading – reception</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clearly spoken English and texts from various media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Simple instructions and descriptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Different types of simple conversations and dialogues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Films and dramatized narratives for children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Songs, rhymes, poems, and tales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Words and phrases in the local surroundings, such as those used on signs and other simple texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking, writing, and discussing – production and interaction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Simple presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Simple descriptions and messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Songs, rhymes, and dramatizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pupils in year 3 are in school approximately 22 hours/week. Out of these 22 hours, 60 minutes are reserved for English teaching, whereas in middle school 220 minutes a week are reserved (Skolverket, 2019b). The amount of time from year 3 to year 4 increases well over the double.
2.7 CEFR and ELP

The *Common European framework of reference for languages* (CEFR; Skolverket, 2009) was developed as a continuation of the Council of Europe’s work in language education and it constitutes a common ground for formulating syllabi and education materials specific to linguistic learning in all of Europe. CEFR provides an extensive description of what set of skills and knowledge that must be possessed, in order to communicate successfully in another language. The description also covers the cultural context wherein the language is included. (Skolverket, 2009). The need for CEFR was realized because it is essential to further strengthen linguistic learning as well as linguistic teachings in Europe, to assure that pupils’ needs are being met. As well as to ease the collaboration within the field of modern languages in different countries, by increasing the clearness of courses, curriculums and qualifications (Skolverket, 2009). CEFR is intended to be applied to fields such as linguistic education, linguistic certification and autonomous learning by providing a common ground for linguistic qualifications with clear descriptions of goals, content, and methods as well as support for teachers, examining bodies, course designers and education administrators in their work.

The reason for CEFR is to have a mutual way of assessing linguistic knowledge in Europe, a homogenous assessment template. Having objective criteria to describe linguistic proficiency will simplify the process of evaluating and examining pupils’ language proficiency in a way that ensures an equal grading or evaluating no matter where the language education has taken place. The CEFR classification structure is based on the premise that it is imperative to handle the complexity of the human language by dividing linguistic competence into six separate stages (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3. The CEFR levels of general language skills (Skolverket, 2009).](image)

The language syllabi in Sweden have been based on the CEFR since 2011. In the Swedish curriculums, the levels from basic users and the first level from intermediate users have been distributed into four different stages throughout compulsory school;

- Step 1 (year 4) = A1/A2
- Step 2 (year 6) = A2
- Step 3 (years 7-8) = A2/B1
- Step 4 (year 9) = B1 (Skolverket, 2017)
The aim is for pupils in year 3 to be on a general A1 level in linguistic skills. The level A1, also known as the *breakthrough* level, is considered to be the lowest level of overall language usage, that is, where learners can communicate in a simple way, such as introducing themselves and others. Also, by asking and answering simple questions about themselves, for example, how old they are, where they live, people they know and things they have. They can also ask and answer questions regarding immediate requests or known topics. They can understand known everyday expressions, and very basic phrases referring to basic needs (Skolverket, 2009).

The *English language portfolio* (ELP) is related to CEFR and is designed to support the development of learner autonomy, intercultural awareness and plurilingualism. Designed and developed by the Council of Europe alongside the CEFR, it allows young learners to record their experience of learning languages other than their native language and to assess and relate their language learning achievements to the proficiency levels of the CEFR (Skolverket, 2019a).

The ELP is divided into three components. The first is *the language passport* where pupils document what languages they know, how well they master the languages as well as how they acquired them. Secondly, in *the language biography*, pupils reflect on and assess their language learning and cultural experience. Lastly is the *dossier*, where pupils collect samples of work that reflect the language proficiency they have attained and their intercultural experience. In Sweden, the ELP has been developed for use in three age groups, years 6-11, years 12-16 and year 16+. For this study, the ELP for years 6-11 was used (Skolverket, 2019a).
3. Method

There are two different types of methods in research, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research is about investigating what is measurable that is, quantifiable. Quantifiable data is data collected that can be represented with numbers (e.g., statistics). This research method is usually used when questions involving how much or what amount there is of something. The aim with quantitative research is often to explain or foresee the course of events. Qualitative research is about seeking understanding within unquantifiable things, mostly by interpreting the collected data. The focus of this method lays in how things are and what type of characteristics something has. Therefore, the difference between the two methods are the collection of “quantifiable data” in quantitative research and the collection of “qualitative data” in qualitative research (Backman, Gardelli, Gardelli & Persson, 2012).

This study is situated within the general SLA field (second language acquisition) therefore, it has not relied on a specific or single theory. However, the study was conducted with the use of a mixed-method research. Thus, containing both qualitative and quantitative elements. The qualitative data included semi-structured interviews and the quantitative data consisted of a questionnaire and a weeklong logbook. Using a mixed-method, the researcher is able to reach a more comprehensive view of the research problem; being able to view the material from different angles, may improve the researcher’s ability to draw conclusions about the target focus of the study (Larsen-Freeman, 1991; Nunan, 1992). Sequentially using the different methods, firstly the quantitative form, made it possible to develop the questions for the interviews via the results from the quantitative section of the study (Dörnyei, 2007).

3.1 ELP questionnaire

A questionnaire is a form of canvassing inquiry which entails one or multiple questions, usually on a present-day topic, to a quantity of people. The interviewee answers questions in writing and the answers renders more or less complete. Questionnaires are very adaptable and can be used in various topics. Furthermore, a questionnaire is effective because of its swift way of gathering a large amount of information, where the data is readily processible (Dörnyei, 2007).

The pupils filled in a six-page questionnaire, where selected parts from the European Language Portfolio for the years 6-11 were used (Skolverket, 2019a; see Appendix 1). For this study, the language biography was the only section of the ELP that was applied. The cause for the reduced questionnaire was partly because having the entire ELP would, probably, have had a deterrent effect on the pupils’ participation. Also, using the ELP as a whole was not relevant for the study. The questionnaire consisted of 26 questions. On the first page, the pupils were to fill in their answers with their own words, such as what other languages they speak and where they have learned them, some examples on what to write were displayed for the first question. On the second page, the pupils had to fill in a box, either Yes or No if they believed that learning languages is important and then give an explanation to why they thought so. The third page consisted in multiple options where the pupils were to put an x in the box/es beside statements about when they use the target language and with whom, they found to be accurate. On the last
three pages, pupils self-assessed their English proficiency by filling in “clouds” with different statements regarding learning achievement concerning the areas of listening comprehension, oral proficiency, and communicative proficiency. For this part, three different colours, which represented different levels of knowledge, were used; Green= I know this well, Blue= I know this rather well, and Red= I know this, but only slightly. They individually filled out their ELP questionnaires in their seats. It took the pupils approximately fifty minutes, which is equivalent to one lesson, to fill in the ELP. Some finished faster than the set timeframe, so the teacher had prepared some extracurricular work for them to do in the meantime.

The class teachers had beforehand decided on a time and day to collect the ELP, so that it would not interfere with the ongoing National Tests that the pupils in year 3 were taking. While there, the present researcher provided information about the different parts of the questionnaire, so the pupils would know how fill it in. They were also reminded that participation was voluntary so if anyone had had a change of heart, they could end the participation and not feel pressured into participating. To increase the feeling of a safe and well-known environment the respective teachers remained in the classrooms for the entire lesson, helping the pupils when they had questions regarding the ELP so that no question was left unanswered for. The questionnaire brought insight upon some background information on their contact with English as well as how the pupils value their own English oral and auditive proficiencies, which was of importance for the continuation of the study.

3.2 Logbook

The logbook for the study was inspired by Sundqvist’s (2009) language diary, developed in collaboration with Liss Kerstin Sylvén. The language diary has been used in studies such as Sundqvist and Sylvén (2011), Sundqvist (2012) and Sundqvist and Sylvén (2012), to name a few. The involvement of EE was an important part of the present study as well. By using logbooks as a data collecting method, the researcher is given the opportunity to obtain a view of particular situations of pupils’ experience of language learning. This particular logbook was an event-contingent procedure, meaning that the pupils were to fill in when a specific language-related event occurred and how long it lasted (Dörnyei, 2007).

After the ELP questionnaire had been filled out the pupils were given their weeklong logbook. It was a language diary where the pupils had eight different activities, including the option “other”, that were of interest for this study.

The activities listed in the logbook were:

- Reading
- Internet
- Listening to music
- Singing
- Playing MMORPGs
- Playing OPGs
- Television
- Other
The pupils were to fill in approximately how much time they devoted each day to the various activities, both English and Swedish activities. The activities varied between passive and active activities. In passive activities there is no output such as speaking or singing in the target language, there is only input, such as listening and reading. In active activities both input and output in the target language occur.

The information given to the pupils was that this logbook was to be brought home and filled in at the end of each day. It was necessary to explain more specifically that the interest was in the English activities they would participate in during their spare time, therefore the logbook was not supposed to be filled in at school. Furthermore, that the purpose of the logbook was not to have the pupils engage in EE activities as much as they possibly could during the week, just what they would normally do. If they did not usually participate in some of the activities that was listed, then they should just leave those columns blank. One thing that needed to be stressed, was that the importance was not how much they engaged in EE but, the amount of time they did was filled in, even it was 5 minutes of listening to music a day for the entire week and nothing else. In addition to writing down their time spent on EE, the pupils were also instructed to write down how much time they spend on the listed activities in Swedish as well. This was so a comparison could be made between EE- and extramural Swedish (ES) to convey an impression on what type of extramural contact was most dominant amongst the pupils. The visit ended with handing out the logbooks and informing the pupils that at a later state, some follow-up questions in the form of an interview were to come.

The logbook given to the pupils was in Swedish, considering their English proficiency levels, as it contained explanations of what MMORPG meant as well as OPG (in this context it stood for One player game) and some examples of games for each type. Having the logbook and explanations in Swedish would be facilitating for the pupils. To each logbook a note was attached, addressed to the legal guardians of the pupils, appealing to them to help their children remember to fill in the logbook every day as it could easily be forgotten, but was of grand importance, for the validity of the study. The pupils were instructed to bring the logbook back the week after and hand them to the teacher, so they could be collected later. The reason behind having the pupils bring the logbook back to their teacher as opposed to posting them directly to me was that Sundqvist (2009) stated that the response rate increased when the pupils had to bring the language diaries back to school.

3.3 Interviews

To shed further light on the results of the ELP questionnaires and logbooks, interviews were conducted. Interviews is a form of conversation that mainly aims to the questioning of a person. Interviews is mostly known as a journalistic instrument but has advanced to become also a method for data collection in scientific research (Dörnyei, 2007).

There are three different types of interviews, what separates them from one another is the level of standardisation. Structured interviews have a high level of standardisation and are structured
in all senses of the word. The questions are decided in advance and are asked in the same way, in the same order and with the same follow-up questions to each interviewee. Opinion polls are a type of structured interview. Unstructured interviews are not structured and the interviewee “controls” the interview. It can be compared to a normal conversation where the interviewer only has follow-up questions when he/she reacts on a specific matter. Semi-structured interviews are an interview method that is in-between the previous two mentioned. This method has some main questions that are previously decided and tied to the research topic, but the interviewees are freer in the shaping of their answers. The questions are open-ended and aim at creating a space for the interviewees to narrate their own experiences. If the interview is conducted in several groups, they can deviate from each other because of different follow-up questions that may occur depending on what the interviewee has answered (Bryman, 2011).

The interview method that was best suited for this study was the semi-structured interview, because it is a flexible interviewing process that allows for rich and detailed answers and values the interviewee’s perspective. This method also allows the participants to feel secure and that the interview itself is viewed more as a conversation rather than an “interrogation” (Bryman, 2011). This was taken into consideration because the interviewees were relatively young, and some could feel anxious about being interviewed. After reviewing both the ELP questionnaire and logbooks, some information gaps were identified from which the questions for the interviews were developed. During the interviews the same main questions were discussed (see Appendix 2) but with different follow-up questions, based on the pupils’ answers.

The interviews were conducted on three separate occasions (one in each class), in focus groups involving three or four pupils. The reason for having a couple of pupils together in groups instead of numerous interviews one-on-one was to be able to have a more “casual” feeling to the interview, with a greater chance of a “flowing” conversation, but also to diminish the feeling of anxiousness that some pupils might experience whilst being interviewed. The location of the interviews was set in the respective group room of each class, as it was a familiar space for the pupils. These interviews were carried out in Swedish, simply to not make the pupils feel anxious that they might not understand the questions or to hinder the pupils’ way of answering, by having a limited way of expressing themselves. The interview began with an introduction of myself again, since a couple of weeks had passed since the last encounter and continued with a reassurance that the data were to be treated confidentially, meaning that the pupils names would be left out and their anonymity was guaranteed. Lastly, before the interview started, the pupils were informed on how the interview was going to be carried out and they were asked for permission to record the session, which they all agreed to. The reason for recording the interviews was to assure that no information was to be lost and a soundcheck was done to make sure that everyone’s voice was audible.

The participants of the interviews were those who had engaged in EE related activities for 10 hours a week or more. In the beginning, the pupils were noticeably nervous and to ease their nerves, the interview questions were not asked immediately, instead a conversation ensued on general things, not at all related to the study. After some time had passed, the nerves had settled
and then it was time to begin with the interview. All three interviews took between 20 and 30 minutes each.

3.4 Informants

The Swedish curriculum and its related steering documents do not specify the exact year when the teachings of English must begin, only that it has to do so at some point during the first three years of compulsory school. Furthermore, it does not specify how much time should be spent on English in each year, it only specifies the total amount of English lesson time for years 1-3, 4-6 and 7-9, respectively (Skolverket, 2018). This gives each school a certain degree of autonomy, and although most schools choose to start early, the decision for this study was made to only use pupils of year 3 as informants. The reason behind this was to make sure that the amount of time they would have spent on English in school would be roughly the same for all informants. That way the main difference in English experience would be the EE activities.

Two different schools in the northern parts of Sweden were contacted with the offer to take part in the study. Both schools provided contact information to four different teachers (two from each school), three of these teachers showed an interest in participating. I visited them personally to introduce myself, tell them what kind of education I was pursuing and the purpose of my visit. After a talk about the general aims of the study and how it was going to be carried out, they agreed to take part in the study. They were provided with my phone number and email, to be able to stay connected for further planning.

Three classes participated, one class from a city school and the remainder of classes were from a small community school. The classes did not differ so much in the number of pupils for each class, but the level of participation percentage did. The three classes consisted of a total of 68 pupils, and participating was: class A 8, class B 10 and class C 19 giving this study a total of 37 participants, 22 boys and 15 girls. The time spent on English teachings was equivalent in two of the classes, which was 60 minutes a week in a whole class setting. The third class had a more movable approach to their English teachings, in the sense that, periodically English teachings would be done more frequently during some periods and less during other periods during the semester.

In Table 2 below, pupil participation per data collection stage is presented. There were three pupils who officially decided not to continue their participation during the logbook stage. Apart from this, there were also several pupils who simply did not return the logbooks.

Table 2. The number of participating informants during the three stages of data collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELP</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logbooks</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5 Ethical considerations

Before the research could begin, ethical considerations had to be made. Since the questions touch areas of a social and pedagogical nature it was important that the informants be protected from inappropriate insight into their private life or their socio-economic standing. It was of crucial importance not to subject them to psychological or physical harm, humiliation, or indignity. These guidelines originate from the *individual protection claim* and is of utmost significance in research ethics considerations (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).

*The information requirement*

The participants in this study were informed about the terms for their participation so they understood that they were taking part in research and what the research required of them. They were also informed that their involvement was voluntarily and that they at any stage in the research process could choose to discontinue their involvement and there would be no effects regarding that decision. Furthermore, they were assured that their participation was anonymous, and that no data could be traced back to them.

The crucial component for the information stage was that it needed to cover all relevant segments such as the purpose of the research, the methods being used, the possible outcomes of the research, as well as associated demands, discomforts, inconveniences, and risks that the participants may face that could influence their willingness to partake (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).

This was done in several steps, to make certain that participants as well as their legal guardians had the necessary information to make a well-informed choice regarding their participation. First a letter with this information was sent home to the legal guardians so that they had a chance to make a decision and also explain the information to their children at home (see Appendix 3). After that the participating children received information verbally in the classroom to give them a chance to ask any questions they might have, and to make certain that they had understood the terms.

*The compliance requirement*

When conducting a study, it is of vital importance that the participants are given the chance to make an active choice about their participation, and the level of participation. For this particular study it was necessary to obtain written consent from the pupils’ legal guardians, as they were under the age of fifteen. Most of the pupils who did not want to participate in the study had their legal guardians answer “no” on the consent form. However, consent also needed to be obtained from the informants, whose legal guardians had accepted their involvement, to see if they wanted to participate. This was done so that pupils would not feel coerced into participating (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).
The confidentiality requirement

In order to preserve the anonymity of the informants, all the information regarding pupils and classes have been kept in a locked cabinet to which only I have had access. To further ensure the integrity of the participants, potentially sensitive information, such as names, gender and location, has been anonymised in the transcriptions and results.

Data-usage restrictions

All data included in and gathered for this study may be used exclusively in this study and degree paper. All information and data will be destroyed upon completion of this study and paper. This is in order to guarantee that the data collected is only used in accordance with the consent forms signed by the legal guardians of the participating pupils.

3.6 Method of analysis

The data analysis for this study was that of typology/category development. Dörnyei (2007) explains that this is when “we analyse one data type and establish some substantive categories or themes. These categories are then applied in the analysis of the other type of data” (p.272). The first step was to convert the raw data from the ELP questionnaires into a readable statistical overview by turning the pupils’ answers into numbers so that coding into statistics could be done. The second step of the analysis was the pupils’ logbook entries. After a compilation of their time spent on EE the pupils were divided into four categories of EE users: from time to time users, casual users, frequent users and very frequent users. A concurrent comparison was made to ensure whether there was a correlation between the pupils’ individual ELP answers and logbook entries. These two collections of statistical data served as the basis for the interview. Lastly, the interviews were analysed, by identifying the important topics of what they had expressed, in relevance of this study. The recordings were listened to and the processing method of the data was transcription, which is a form of a processing of the spoken word (Dörnyei, 2007). When all data had been analysed, the examination for correlations between time spent on EE and the pupils’ self-assessed English proficiency begun. Correlations between EE and pupils’ confidence was only possible for the participants in the interview.
4. Results

This chapter presents the results generated from this study together with a brief conclusion. In order to create an easier overview, the results of each part of the study is described in a separate section, and then brought together in the conclusion.

4.1 ELP results

In the first section of the ELP the pupils answered questions relating to where, how, and with whom they learned and used English, as well as whether they found it important to learn different languages. These results are analysed in this section.

The pupils had the possibility to fill in multiple options regarding where they have learned English, simply because the possibility of learning the language in just one situation seems rather unlikely. However, as seen in Figure 3, the most frequent answer the pupils gave on where they learn English was in school (49%). Secondly, the pupils learn English at home (27%). The third most frequent answer was that of games (11%).

![Figure 3. A summary of the pupils’ answers in regard to where they have learned English.](image)

Continuing with the results on the pupils’ thoughts on whether or not they think is important to know different languages. The ELP presented that the majority (92%) think that it is of importance while the remaining (8%) thought otherwise, with statements such as “You know the languages you know”, “If you don’t travel, then no” and “it is not of importance”. Nonetheless, the general impression is that *travelling abroad* is the most significant reason to learn languages (57%). Followed by *being able to talk to people from other countries* (24%), *to talk with relatives who does not speak Swedish* (8%) and, lastly, *because it’s fun* (3%).

In the final part of the first section of the ELP, the pupils were to answer where they use English and with whom. This was multiple choice question. The ELP showed that the majority of pupils use English mainly in school (37%), followed by home and in their spare time (23%) each, and
Lastly, abroad (17%). In regards as to whom they speak English with, the results show that the most recurrent answer is their teacher (21%), then family, relative, friends and classmates (19%) each and 3% answered with people from other countries.

The self-assessment has been compressed and is presented in Figures 4, 5 and 6 below. The different colours indicate: Red- *I know this a little*, blue- *I know this quite well*, green – *I know this well*. Although the option with mixed colours was not presented, the pupils thought that the difference between the described degree of knowledge in the different statements was too big and thus the mixed-colour option was used; Yellow (between green and blue) - I know this better than quite well, but I have not reached to “I know this well” yet. Purple (between blue and red) - I know this better than a little but have not reached “I know this quite well”. In general, the pupils’ responses show that the vast majority regards their English acquisition as good.

![Diagram showing self-assessment results](image)

**Figure 4.** The overall result from the oral proficiency section.

The overall result from the first section of the self-assessment part, indicates that the pupils feel secure with their general oral proficiency, as shown in figure 4. The statements, in which the pupils assessed their level of oral proficiency, in declining order; name different colours in English (92%), being able to tell someone how old they are (81%), tell another person something about their family (73%), sing along in a few songs in English (65%), tell another person where I live (59%), naming a few general items in English (57%), naming weekdays, months, seasons and time (46%) and, lastly, being able to count to 100 (30%). The main statement that the pupils feel the most insecure about is their ability of counting to 100, with 32% saying that they only have little knowledge of this.

The second part of the self-assessment, which included listening comprehension, indicates that the pupils feel more confident with their overall listening comprehension than with their oral proficiency, see Figure 5 below.
The overall result of their listening comprehension.

The task that the pupils feel most certain about is when someone is greeting them and asks them how they are (95%), followed by understanding questions that are asked slowly and clearly (65%), understanding very simple instructions (59%), understanding when someone tells them something about themselves (54%), and, last of all, occasionally understanding common words (46%). What the pupils seem to have the most trouble with as regards to understanding is when their teacher is giving them instructions, the rate was only 8%.

The final section of the ELP self-assessment, involved communicative skills and how the pupils assess their proficiency level in regard to this topic. The results show that the majority of pupils think that their communicative skills in English are good, see Figure 6 below.

The statement regarding greeting and saying goodbye to someone is what most of them feel they can do well (86%). Following, the ability to follow short instructions (68%), say “thank you” and “you are welcome” (62%), ask “what is your name?” and answer simple questions (54%), ask “how are you feeling” and answer if that question is asked to me (49%), understand what someone is saying when they tell me something about themselves (48%) and, lastly, ask “what time is it?” (43%). The statement that the pupils feel is the most difficult is being able to ask, “what time it is?” (16%).
4.2 Logbook results

Based on the data from the logbooks, it reveals that EE activities is the more popular choice, with 53% of the pupils engaging more in EE activities rather the ES activities. The EE activity the pupils enjoy engaging in the most is playing MMORPGs (37%), followed by watching tv (18%), playing OPG (14%), using the internet (12%), listening to music (9%), singing (7%), reading (2%) and other (1%).

In order to discover the proper average time spent on each of the listed activities in the logbooks, a calculated version of the arithmetic mean value was carried out. An arithmetic mean value is when all values are added up and then divided by the number of values, in this case the total amount of time spent in one specific activity was divided by the number of pupils who had engaged in that activity. In Table 3 below, a summary of the mean value based on the logbook entries can be seen.

Table 3. A summary of the mean value of time spent each day on the listed EE activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Pupils engaging in the activity</th>
<th>The rounded off (to even decimals) mean value of time spent each day on the activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MMORPG</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPG</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3,5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tv</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1,5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Figure 7 below, a comparison is presented of the pupils’ answers from the self-assessment section in the ELP regarding whether they had engaged more in EE- or ES activities. The table shows that the pupils who engaged more in ES activities are mostly the ones who have faltering perceptions about their English oral proficiency, listening comprehension and communicative skills, whereas the pupils with positive opinions of their English abilities are the ones who engage more in EE activities.
While the results show that pupils engage more in EE activities, the time variance is spread widely, the lowest from 0.5h/week to the highest of 35h/week. To ensure a better overlook of the results, based on the different amounts of time spent the pupils are divided into four categories: from time to time users at 0.5-8h/week, casual users at 9-17h/week, frequent users at 18-26h/week and very frequent users at 27-35h/week. The pupils are then put in the categories that corresponded with what they have written in their logbooks (see Table 4).

Table 4. The distribution of pupils in each category shown in percent and amount.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>from time to time</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>11 pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>casual</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>4 pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frequent</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>2 pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very frequent</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>2 pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>19 pupils</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A correlation is visible (see Figure 9 below) between the amount of time the pupils are engaging in EE-related activities and their self-assessment of their English proficiency. Figure 9 show that the uncertainty of their level of proficiency is phasing out as more time is being spent on EE.
Figure 9. A comparison between time spent on EE activities and the pupil’s self-assessment answers.

4.3 Interview results

In the third and final section of the results, the interviews brought forth that the majority of pupils who are interviewed frequently engage in EE-related activities. They express that playing computer/video games, mainly MMORPGs such as Fortnite, and watching YouTube are their primary EE activities. They also put forward that the English they learn in school is not as useful to them as the English they learn in their spare time, with the general opinion that the English they are being taught in school is too easy.

No indication of FLA is perceived during the interviews, only the common apprehension of sometimes using the wrong word. When asked about the reason for feeling confident when speaking English, the general consensus is that they think that learning English is of importance, they all really enjoy engaging in English outside school so being confident just comes naturally, because EE is a part of their everyday life.
5. Discussion

The aim of this study is to show the extent of pupils’ engagement with extramural English and how this correlates with their perceived self-confidence in speaking English. The intention was also to further the knowledge of EE and its importance to language learning. In this chapter, the choice of method for this study is discussed as well as the results. The chapter ends with a conclusion, summarizing the findings of the study and giving suggestions for further research.

5.1 Discussion of method

The selection process for this study did not go according to plan. The intention was to have two classes from two different schools each participating in the study. A request was sent out to four teachers at the different schools, but only three of them responded thus, bringing the participating classes to a total of three. Even if it was not the anticipated number of classes involved in the study the variety was deemed to be good enough to continue.

The ELP questionnaire had already been tested by the Council of Europe and CEFR, so the decision was made that there was no need for further improvement. The ELP had a well-structured design, with comprehensible questions and statements, so the pupils would easily know what they were supposed to do on each page. The pages that were selected proved to be sufficient enough since the aim was to gather information about where, when and with whom the pupils use the English language, and also how they self-assess themselves.

Using questionnaires is an asset because they are standardized and prepared in advance, which ensures that all pupils answer the same questions. The questionnaire used contained both fixed answers and open answers. Fixed answers have a certain advantage because it makes it easier to compare the participants’ different answers. A problem that occurred during the analysis of the fixed answers, was judging whether the answer that the pupil had given actually was what the pupil had meant in regard to the questions. This problem was resolved later on in the analysis, when a comparison of the pupils ELP and logbooks was carried out. The open answers in the ELP had the possibility to make the analysis rather difficult, because they can differ quite a lot which makes it more difficult to categorize and compare them for an easier overview (Backman, Gardelli, Gardelli & Persson, 2012). However, the answers that the pupils gave were quite similar to each other, making the categorization of the answers to not be troublesome.

Logbooks, diaries or other types of writing entries is a special feature in research because the information that is attained from this method is difficult to replicate by using other methods (Dörnyei, 2007). It helps to get an insight into the pupils’ lives in natural contexts. The activities in the logbook had been developed after considering what children their age normally engage in during their spare time. The logbook that was reformed was considered to be best suited for this study.

Some miscalculations are probable in the logbooks because it is fairly reasonable to assume that the pupils did not write down exactly how long they spent on each activity, but instead
wrote down an estimated guess or that some activities simply were forgotten to be filled in. Furthermore, some of the pupils had only written an X at activities they had done, rendering that specific data to be invalid. The big problem during this stage of the study was the lack of hand ins. Even though the pupils were reminded, on several occasions to hand in their logbooks the response rate ended up being very low. Three pupils decided to drop out from the study during this stage of the study, leaving the participants to a total of 34, only 19 of the logbooks were handed in and filled in correctly. The reason the pupils gave for the lack of logbooks hand ins was that they had misplaced them. The logbook was given to the pupils in paper form, which may not have been the best course of action since a piece of paper is proven to easily be misplaced or accidently thrown out in trash along with other papers. The alternative could have been to give them a book to fill in, but on a material level it was not possible to hand out 37 books, so it was not an option. Another option could have been to have the pupils fill in the logbook digitally and then mail it back, but the pupils are too young and many of them do not have an email address or it could possibly be too technical for some if the logbook was to be used digitally. It can also not be automatically assumed that every single household has access to the necessary equipment to be able to use a digital logbook.

The results based solely on the logbooks are not very reliable. Nevertheless, both the ELP and the logbooks showed to correspond well with each other, thus making those two stages of the study reliable. As well as when combining the results from all three sections of the study, the results are deemed as valid. The reliability and validity of this study, however, has to be viewed in the context of the small group of pupils, and cannot be assumed to be representative of a larger population.

While questionnaires and logbooks are a good foundation to get an overview of the research subject, interviews go deeper into the subject matter than what questionnaires and logbooks do. One thing to be cautious about, since it can bring forth problems, is how the researcher acts during the interview as it influences the pupils to respond in a certain way. The semi-structured interview method was deemed to be best suited, considering the age of the pupils. Since the questions was preconstructed, but did not need to follow a specific order, follow-up questions could be asked (Dörnyei, 2007). The formulation of the questions was designed so they would not lead the pupils to answer in a certain way, which strengthens the validity of this stage of the study.

The interviews were recorded, because if notes had been taken instead, it would have distracted from the conversation at hand, as well as not being able to write down all the essential information. Since the recordings did only include audio, it led to a loss of information that mannerisms, such as facial expressions and gestures provide (Dörnyei, 2007). However, this additional type of information that would have been provided in video recordings was not believed to bring more insight than that of the spoken word. A problem that occurred later on, when converting the recorded sessions into a textual form was that it was sometimes problematic to distinguish which pupils said what. To resolve this problem the recordings were listen to several times.
Originally the goal was to interview pupils who frequently engaged in EE activities as well as those who did not, in order to be able to make a comparison in attitudes between these two groups. Unfortunately, this was not possible to do within the timeframe of this project, due to the limited number of logbooks handed in. In class A only four out of eight books were handed in, for class B and C that number was 3 out of 10 respective 12 out of nineteen. Almost all the logbooks that were turned in were from children who engaged frequently in EE activities. Regrettably, the pupils with little engagements in EE activities did not want to partake in the interviews, which may well be one reason as to why they did not turn in their logbooks. This left little room for a selection process to be made, especially in classes A and B. This led to a shift in focus of the interviews, instead of comparing the groups the aim became to gain a deeper insight into the motivations of the children who were frequent users of EE.

5.2 Discussion of the result

This study has aimed at answering the following three main questions.

- What type of EE-related activities are young learners engaged in?
- How much time do young learners spend on various English related activities?
- How, and to what extent, do different amounts of exposure to EE affect young learners’ confidence in speaking English

The first two questions were relatively easily answered, the logbooks, questionnaires and interviews all gave an insight into what EE activities pupils engaged in, and to what extent. The third question is both more interesting, as it potentially has a large impact on young pupils learning of English, but it was also harder to answer clearly. While the first two questions are quantifiable and measurable the third one has a more qualitative focus and is therefore more complex.

Where pupils learn English, in their own opinions

The questionnaires revealed that the majority of pupils in schools A, B and C feel that their overall English proficiency is good, and that they feel that learning English is of importance. The pupils who do not agree on the importance of learning English are the pupils who assess their English proficiency as very low. In the ELP questionnaire, it is inferred that 22 out of 37 pupils feel that they learn English in school, this may partly be a non-complete result as they may not be aware of the English they learn while performing EE activities. Due to EE being an informal way of learning, that does not happen in school, according to Ellis (1994), learning in informal settings happens naturally and without conscious operations. This means that the pupils may not be aware that they are learning, while engaging in EE-activities, which could be a reason for their answers, as they may not consider watching YouTube as a way of learning a foreign language.
Although the majority of the pupils are of the opinion that their main source of learning English is in school, several of them state that they use their English outside of school for example at home and abroad. They also say that they use their English to talk to family, friends and relatives. As most researchers and teachers agree, languages are learned in collaboration and communication with others (Pinter, 2006), and these answers furthers the plausibility that the pupils would have answered differently on the question regarding where they learn English if they had been aware of the concept of EE.

*How much time pupils spend on the different EE activities*

Based on the logbooks, a conclusion is that all 19 participants during this section of the study spend time on EE, which also corresponds with their answers in the ELP questionnaire. However, the amount of time that they engage in EE-related activities varied. The findings in the logbooks show that the vast majority do not spend that much time engaging in EE and only a handful engage more frequently. The logbooks also brought forth answers as to what type of EE-related activities young learners are engaged in as well as how much time they spend on various EE-related activities. The three activities the pupils would most frequently engage in, consist of playing computer/video games, watching television and using the internet, for example, YouTube. These findings corroborate the pupils’ statements during the interviews. In the results a mean value has been calculated and represents how much time pupils devote to the various activities. The reason for why the mean value of MMORPG is drastically higher than the rest of activities, is because one pupil had played an estimated time of 20 hours for one week, which brought the mean value on the activity to a higher level. Otherwise, the most common time that the pupils spend on each of these three activities is three hours a day. The level of honesty found in some logbooks can be debated, however, the assumption is that the pupils have filled in the logbooks truthfully. These findings on popular EE activities corresponds partly with Sundqvist’s (2009) and Olsson’s (2011) findings, thus strengthening the validity of this study.

*Pupils experiences of EE activities impact on their confidence*

The interviews revealed that the most common source of EE in all three classes seemed to be playing computer/video games, mainly MMORPGs. The MMORPG genre can be a great source of language learning because it is fun, informal and effective, and creates the ownership of learning within a digital safe space, where pupils can communicate by using their target language with global players (Kongmee, Strachan, Pickard & Montgomery, 2011). Within the virtual world of MMORPG, players from all over the world are in one combined area. The virtual world provides an easy way to experience the target language, where language mistakes can be made and learned from while remaining their anonymity, relieving the pupils from scrutiny from classmates or teachers that could occur in a classroom setting (Bryant, 2007). Furthermore, the use of MMORPGs may enhance the pupils’ confidence in using the target language with players from a wide range of nationalities and cultures.
With the eleven pupils that were interviewed, any indication that FLA was considered a factor with them was not found, since they are all feeling quite confident in speaking English. The only hesitation they have is the possibility of saying the wrong word, nothing else. The pupils claim that EE is a big part as to why they feel confident when they speak English. However, they all feel that the English teaching in school is not instructive enough, that the English subject is too easy because they have already learnt what they are being taught in their spare time. This indicates that these pupils feel that they may have surpassed the A1 level of English proficiency (Skolverket, 2009). Furthermore, in Ryan and Deci’s study (2000) it is concluded that children are mainly driven by their intrinsic motivation. They engage in activities and tasks they find to be interesting, and if the English teaching in school is too simple, and not interesting enough for the pupils it may cause a lack of motivation derived from a sense of not having the opportunity to develop. This would not be in correspondence with the current Swedish curriculums which state that pupils should be able to develop according to their own preconditions and concurrently get stimulated to use and develop to their full capacity (Skolverket, 2018).

A reason for the pupils feeling that English teachings in school is too simple might be because of how it is taught, and whether the structure and content has changed over the years. After hearing the pupils’ statements on the matter, it does not seem to have evolved with today’s technology and amount of English in society. Statens medieråd (2017a) presented that 75% of the children involved in the inquiry use the internet daily. This increase of digitalization, where children have a greater access to English, also provides children with the opportunity to engage and learn more English than the school has to offer. This needs to be taken into consideration when planning English teaching, instead of assuming that the English the pupils come across in school is their main source of input, which may have been the case some decades ago before the internet boomed but it does not hold true today.

Comparisons between data gathered from the different methods

The ELP self-assessment section and the pupils’ reported time spent on EE-related activities show the correlation between the more time pupils engaged in EE-related activities, the higher they assessed their overall English proficiency levels. It may be assumed that this answers the question regarding the pupils’ confidence in speaking English. The parallel assumption that the pupils who simultaneously assess their English proficiency level as high and frequently engage in EE have a strong confidence cannot be verified. The assessment only reflects their self-image on their proficiency levels and not their confidence, since a person with a low self-image can compensate this by having great confidence and vice versa (Johnson, 2003).

Between the logbooks and the interviews there is a high level of correspondence. The information considering what type of EE activities pupils engage in is the same in both parts of the study. In regard to time spent on EE activities this correspondence holds true once again, the estimated time spent that pupils state in interviews is roughly the same as in the logbooks. This adds a certain amount of validity to these results.
5.3 Summary

To a certain extent this study shows that engaging in EE activities has a positive effect on the pupils’ confidence. However, to be able to go more in depth into this subject area it would have been beneficial if pupils who do not engage much in EE activities could have been included. Nevertheless, the findings in this study correlates with Sundqvist’s (2009), Sylvén’s (2010), and Olsson’s (2012) findings that pupils’ English proficiency is positively affected by engaging in EE. By having attained a higher proficiency level, a reasonable assumption is that it partly increases the feeling of confidence among pupils. To summarize, the pupils involved in this study engage in a wide range of EE activities, although the majority engage in various games and YouTube. The pupils with a high degree of engagement also seem to have a high level of confidence in their English proficiency and enjoy using English. However, they feel that the English taught in school is too easy, and therefore not motivating. The study also shows that the amount of time pupils spent on EE varied greatly, from 0.5 hours/week up to 35 hours/week. It would have been interesting to see if the pupils who did not engage frequently in EE felt less confident when they would speak English, hopefully this may come to be in future research.

5.4 Conclusion

The results indicate a correlation between time spent on EE related activities and pupils’ confidence in their own English proficiency. They also show a connection between the time the pupils spent on EE activities and their confidence. This leads to the conclusion that time spent on EE causes an increase in pupils’ confidence, in all areas of their linguistic proficiency. Pupils who spend a lot of their spare time engaging in EE believe that this is a major reason for their confidence. With that conclusion in mind, it would likely be beneficial for pupils’ language learning if EE activities were actively encouraged and viewed as important by teachers as well as adults in the pupil’s home.

The study also shows that the main activities that pupils engage in are those of computer games, watching television and using the internet, mainly in order to watch videos on YouTube. These are activities that media often portrays as bad for children, as opposed to more physical activities. This would mean that there is a discrepancy between how these nonphysical activities are viewed and how they actually affect young learners, leading again to the above stated assumption that an active encouragement of these nonphysical activities, in moderation, would be beneficial.

The small sample of pupils who participated in all three stages of the study are not sufficient for these findings to be qualified enough to be put into a national or global scale. However, these findings show that this is an area which would benefit from further research, in order to gain more knowledge. If future research would show that the findings of this study are
representative of a larger population, that would in turn indicate that more research into the effect EE can have on younger learners’ confidence in general is of interest. Some areas of future study that might be of interest are:

- FLA and its causes, as well as how to avoid and counteract it
- The correlation between EE activities and young learners’ confidence learning and using English
- Teachers and/or parents’ attitudes towards EE activities
- Comparisons between the different Nordic countries regarding usage of EE activities and English proficiency among pupils at different stages of the school system
- If the difference between how pupils are experiencing their linguistic proficiency (their level of confidence) and their actual linguistic proficiencies conform with each other
- How to motivate pupils with considerable amounts of EE experience in the classroom

English as a foreign language has been taught as a mandatory subject in the earlier years for quite a short time, relatively speaking, and therefore still needs to be researched more in depth and developed in order to find the right way of teaching it in the context of the Swedish school system. However, it would seem to be of vital importance. Swedish people have a reputation abroad of having a very high level of English proficiency, something that might be a contributing factor in Sweden’s standing in a global context. The globalization of the world proceeds at an increasing rate, and it would be naive to assume that Sweden’s standing, as a competent and globally important nation, will remain unless we make sure that future generations of Swedish workers, researchers, artists, influencers and other professionals continue to hold a place on the front of their international fields. In order to do so they need to be raised with the idea that foreign languages, English in particular, are important and interesting, otherwise they have no chance to stand out on a global arena. Therefore, the continued research and development of English teaching in the Swedish school system is of great importance.
References


Appendix 1. The selected pages of the ELP.
Jag skulle vilja lära mig de här språken:

Varför?

Tycker du att det är viktigt att kunna språk?

☐ Ja  ☐ Nej

Förklara varför!
Mina kontakter med

(språk)

Var använder du språket?
(Du kan kryssa för mer än ett alternativ)

☐ hemma
☐ i skolan
☐ på fritiden
☐ på andra platser. Var?

Vem använder du språket tillsammans med?
(Du kan kryssa för mer än ett alternativ)

☐ mamma
☐ lärare
☐ pappa
☐ kamrater på fritiden
☐ syskon
☐ kamrater i skolan
☐ släktingar
☐ andra? vilka?
Färglägg bubblorna!
Jag kan det lite=röd
Jag kan det ganska bra=blå
Jag kan det bra=grön

CHECKLISTA

Jag kan förstå mycket enkla instruktioner, t.ex. från min lärare.

När jag hör människor prata kan jag då och då förstå vanliga ord.

Jag kan förstå när någon hälsar på mig och frågar hur jag mår.

Jag kan förstå enkla frågor när någon talar långsamt och tydligt.

Jag kan förstå när någon berättar mycket enkelt om sig själv och sin familj.

Detta kan jag också förstå:
Färglägg bubblorna!
Jag kan det lite = röd
Jag kan det ganska bra = blå
Jag kan det bra = grön

CHECKLISTA

Jag kan säga några veckodagar, månader, årstider och klockslag.
Jag kan räkna till 100.
Jag kan säga vem jag är och var jag bor.
Jag kan säga några färger.
Jag kan säga hur gammal jag är.
Jag kan säga något om min familj.

Detta kan jag också säga:
Färglägg bubblorna!
Jag kan det lite=röd
Jag kan det ganska bra=blå
Jag kan det bra=grön

CHECKLISTA

Jag kan förstå när någon ber mig om något. Jag kan själv be om något.

Jag kan hälsa på någon och säga hej då.

Jag kan säga varsågod och tack.

Jag kan fråga vad någon heter och svara på enkla frågor som någon ställer till mig.

Jag kan fråga hur någon mår och säga hur jag själv mår.

Jag kan följa mycket korta instruktioner.

Jag kan säga vad klockan är och själv fråga om tiden.

Jag kan förstå när någon berättar lite om sig själv och ställa några enkla frågor tillbaka.

Detta kan jag också prata med andra om:
Appendix 2. The interview questions (translated into English).

- Where do you feel that you have learned most English, is it in school or in your spare time?
- How much time do you spend on EE-related activities?
- How do you feel about speaking English in front of other people?
- Which type of EE-related activities do you enjoy engaging in?
- Do you feel confident when you speak English? – Why/why not?
Appendix 3. The letter home to the legal guardians.

Anhållan om tillstånd för att ert barn kan delta i en undersökning inom ramen för ett examensarbete vid lärarutbildningen vid Luleå tekniska universitet

Mitt namn är Sandra och jag är student som utbildar mig till lärare vid Luleå tekniska universitet. Jag ska nu skriva den avslutande uppgiften inom lärarutbildningen som är mitt examensarbete och som ger mig min lärarbehörighet.

Examensarbets syfte är att se vilka samband det är mellan elevernas exponering till extramural engelska och deras självförtroende att tala engelska.

De frågorna jag söker svar på är:

- Vilken typ av extramural engelskaaktiviteter (fritidsengelska) sysslar eleverna med?
- Hur mycket tid spenderar eleverna på extramural engelska?
- Hur är skillnaden mellan de olika nivåer av extramural exponering i förhållande till deras självförtroende att tala engelska?

För att kunna besvara dessa frågor behöver jag samla in material genom intervju/loggbok/frågeenkät med elever.


Vad jag behöver från er är att ni som elevens vårdnadshavare skriver under detta brev och så snart som möjligt skickar det med eleven tillbaka till skolan så att ansvarig lärare kan samlata i svaret vid tillfälle. Sätt således ett kryss i den ruta som gäller för er del:

☐ Som vårdnadshavare **ger jag tillstånd** att mitt barn deltar i undersökningen

☐ Som vårdnadshavare **ger jag inte tillstånd** att mitt barn deltar i undersökningen

Datum .................................

...............................................................

vårdnadshavares underskrift/er elevens namn

Har ni ytterligare frågor ber jag er kontakta mig på nedanstående telefonnummer: 070xxxxxxx

Med vänliga hälsningar

...............................................................

Studentens namn

Handledare för undersökningen är .................................................................

Kursansvarig lärare är universitetslektor Marie Nordlund, Luleå tekniska universitet.