"Why is it important to learn English?"

A study of attitudes and motivation towards English and English language learning in Swedish upper secondary school

Karin Pethman Estliden

2017

Examensarbete, Avancerad nivå (yrkesexamen), 30 hp
Engelska med ämnesdidaktisk inriktning
LP90

Handledare: Marko Modiano
Examinator: Pia Visén
Abstract

The study of motivation in language learning and language teaching has a long history. The present study investigates what attitudes students in upper secondary school have towards the English language and what motivates them to learn it. The study is based on a questionnaire regarding motivation and sixty students have participated. The study shows that the students have acknowledged the status of the English language in the world and its function as an international language as well as its function as a tool for communicative purposes. A conclusion is that they have positive attitudes in general towards the English language as well as learning English.

Keywords: Motivation, attitudes and motivational factors, learning English as a second language.
Table of contents

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 5
1.1. Hypothesis .............................................................................................................................. 5
1.2 Defining motivation .................................................................................................................. 6
2. Background ............................................................................................................................... 7
2.1 Defining motivation theory ..................................................................................................... 7
2.2 Self-Efficacy Theory .............................................................................................................. 8
2.3 Attribution Theory ................................................................................................................ 10
2.4 Goals and goal setting theory ............................................................................................... 12
2.5 Aptitude and intelligence in second language learning ......................................................... 13
2.6 Age and second language acquisition ................................................................................... 14
2.7 Attitudes, integrative motivation and instrumental motivation ............................................. 15
2.8 English as an International Language .................................................................................. 17
2.9 Gender differences in motivation and second language learning achievement .................. 19
3. Method ....................................................................................................................................... 20
3.1 Survey participant .................................................................................................................. 20
3.2 Method of research ............................................................................................................... 20
3.3 The questionnaire ................................................................................................................ 21
3.4 The diagnostic test ................................................................................................................. 21
3.5 The statistical data ............................................................................................................... 22
4. Results ....................................................................................................................................... 23
5. Discussion .................................................................................................................................. 27
6. Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 32
7. References .................................................................................................................................. 32
1. Introduction

The ongoing globalization of Sweden has had great impact on our society and on the people who live in it. Sweden is a rather small country with approximately 10 million inhabitants. Individuals need to be able to communicate with people from all around the world and our tool of communication has become the English language. The English language has grown strong in Sweden. Many people come in contact with it daily when listening to pop music, watching TV or from using social media. In Sweden children begin to study English at the age of nine and they continue to do so until they graduate from high school. The English language has high status in Sweden compared to other languages that are spoken in our society today as for example Finnish or Arabic. The English language is seen as a high-status language not only in Sweden but also internationally. English has become a big part of education especially at universities. Some corporate groups have English as an official language although they may be based in Sweden. English is formally the official language for one third of the world’s countries which is about 1.5 billion people and at least 375 million people have English as their native language. The majority of international communication is done in English within important areas such as politics, marketing and the financial world (Höglin 2002, p.7). English is at the present our leading language in communicating across borders but also when it comes to communicating with other people who do not speak the same native language within our own country.

Motivation is a key factor when it comes to learning a second language or in any learning for that matter. A lot of research has been carried out regarding the subject and there are several theories from which the subject can be analyzed. Nevertheless, it is person bound and therefore it differs from individual to individual, which from a classroom perspective as well as from a teacher perspective makes motivation a complex phenomenon. This study aims to investigate what attitudes students attending Swedish upper secondary have towards the English language and what motivates them to learn English.

1.1. Hypothesis

The hypothesis in this study is that one of the major reasons for students’ motivation to learn English is because of its status of being an international language. Furthermore, since the students are all attending theoretical programs in Swedish Upper Secondary School, future studies as well as future jobs are also predicted as main reasons for their interest in learning.
the language. The hypothesis regarding the diagnostic test is that the majority of the students will score rather high on the test based on how English is being taught in Swedish schools as well as the presence of English in Swedish society in general.

1.2 Defining motivation

Pintrich and Schunk (2002) discuss how there are many definitions of the term motivation and that there are many different opinions regarding its exact meaning. The term “motivation” comes from the Latin verb “movere” which means “to move”. The idea of movement is reflected in common ideas about motivation as being something that gets us going, keeps us going and makes us finish tasks that we have been assigned. Motivation has been connected to inner forces, enduring traits, sets of beliefs and effects and to behavioral responses to stimuli. Pintrich and Schunk (2002) offer a wide-ranging definition of motivation based on learners’ thoughts and beliefs, which is considered by many researchers to be essential to motivation: “Motivation is the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained” (Pintrich and Schunk 2002, p 5).

Pintrich and Schunk (2002) further discuss motivation as being a process more than being a product. In the process, motivation is not seen directly but we infer it in choice of tasks, effort and persistence. Motivation also includes goals that encourage action. Cognitive views regarding motivation are bound together in their emphasis in the importance of having goals. Goals are not always formed in a good way and chances are that they will change as an individual gains more experience but the main point is that people have something in mind that they either try to avoid or to achieve. Motivation also requires physical or mental activity. Physical activity includes for example effort and persistence while mental activity includes cognitive actions such as planning, rehearsing, solving problems and assessing improvement. Many activities that students take part in are targeted toward reaching their goals. As a final point, motivated activity is instigated and sustained. Starting toward a goal is important but it can also be difficult because it forces us to make a commitment to change and take a step forward towards something new. A crucial part of motivational processes is to sustain action since many of our goals are long-term such as earning a college degree and getting a good job. Much of what is known about motivation comes from outlining how people act in response to the challenges, difficulties, problems, failures and setbacks they are faced with while they try to achieve their long-term goals (Pintrich and Schunk 2002, p 5).
Hollyforde and Whidett (2002) discuss how motivation can be seen as internal processes that can activate, guide, and maintain behavior and especially goal-directed behaviour. Furthermore, they state that “motivation is a psychological concept related to the strength and direction of human behavior” (Hollyforde and Whidett 2002, p 2). These definitions presuppose that all behavior is an effect of motivation. Kanfer on the other hand refers to motivation as being only about the ‘free will’ element of behavior and explains it as:

“The psychological mechanisms governing the direction, intensity, and persistence of actions not due solely to individual differences in ability or to overwhelming environmental demands that coerce or force action” (as cited in Hollyforde and Whidett 2002, p 3).

Hollyforde and Whidett also discuss how motivation that is a result of a ‘kick in the pants’ is not motivation but ‘movement’. Movement is ‘a function of fear of punishment or failure to get extrinsic rewards’ and motivation as ‘a function of growth from getting intrinsic rewards out of interesting and challenging work’ (Hollyforde and Whidett 2002:2, 3). Hollyforde and Whidett outline that according to their investigations many researchers claim that motivation is the drive behind human behavior (Hollyforde and Whidett 2002, p 3).

2. Background

2.1 Defining motivation theory

Campbell states that a theory is:

“a collection of assertions, both verbal and symbolic, that identifies what variables that are important for what reasons, specifies how they are interrelated and why, and identifies the conditions under which they should be related or not related” (as cited in Hollyforde and Whidett 2002, p 5).

Due to this statement, motivation theory can be defined as something that outlines a researcher’s answers to questions like ‘What makes someone persist at one activity and yet quickly give up another?’ or ‘Why do people make the choices they make?’ (Hollyforde and Whidett 2002, p 5). Pintrich and Schunk (2002) define a theory as a “scientifically acceptable set of principles advanced to explain a phenomenon”. They outline that theory serves as a
framework for understanding environmental observations and therefore helps to connect research and education (Pintrich and Schunk 2002, p 7).

The study of motivation when it comes to learning a second language has a long history. As a consequence of the cognitive revolution that took place in the last decades, many influential cognitive motivation theories were proposed in mainstream psychology. Soon after that, researchers within the field of second language learning started to use those theories to get a better understanding regarding motivation in the field (Dörnyei 2003, p 7). In the following, three of those cognitive approaches will be briefly discussed.

### 2.2 Self-Efficacy Theory

Pintrich and Schunk (2002) explains that self-efficacy refers to perceived capabilities for learning or performing actions at designated levels. People who hold low self-efficacy for accomplishing a task may try to avoid it while someone who believes that they are capable are likely to take part. Especially when difficulties arise, efficacious students will work harder and persist longer than those students who doubt themselves (Pintrich and Schunk 2002, p 161). Schunk and Pajares (2009) discuss how students who feel more effective when it comes to learning should be more prone to engage in self-regulation including setting goals, creating an effective environment for learning, monitoring their comprehension and assessing their progress when it comes to reaching goals. Self-efficacy can also be influenced by the outcomes of behaviors such as achievement and goal-progress and by input from the environment, for example, by feedback from teachers. Performances that can be seen as successful should increase self-efficacy while those seen as a failure should lower it. Occasional failure or success after many successes or failures should not have much impact (Schunk and Pajares 2009, p 36). Schunk and Pajares state that by observing others succeed, self-efficacy can be raised and therefore help motivate them to take on the task because they are apt to believe that if others can do it-they can as well. However, an increased self-efficacy can be negatively affected if it is followed by performance failure. People who observe other people fail may then believe that they do not possess the competence to succeed and therefore keep them from taking on the task. They discuss that individuals can also create and develop self-efficacy beliefs as a result of social encouragements such as “I know you can do it”.

Persuaders are an important factor when it comes to the development of an individual’s self-efficacy and an effective persuader must be able to nurture people’s beliefs in their capabilities while at the same time assuring them that success is within reach. They further on
state that positive feedback can raise an individual’s self-efficacy but the increase will not maintain if they later perform substandardly. Positive persuasion may work to empower and inspire, negative persuasion can work to decline and remove self-efficacy (Schunk and Pajares 2009, p 36, 37).

Alderman (2008) claims that one of the main assumptions underlying self-efficacy is that there is a difference between having the skills to perform a task and using the skills in different situations, which will affect motivation. He discusses that there are two types of expectancies regarding possible outcomes, outcome expectancy and self-efficacy expectancy. An outcome expectancy can be explained as an individual’s anticipation that a specific action can lead to a certain positive or negative outcome, for example: “If I use effective learning strategies I will make at least a B in this course”. A self-efficacy expectancy is an individual’s preconception of his or her capability to perform the skills, actions or persistence required for the given outcome. For example: will I actually be able to use the learning strategies needed to make a B in this course? The most influential factor is the efficacy expectancy which indicates how effective one will be? The beliefs of personal efficacy are the fundamental element of agency which refers to actions carried out with intent. They regulate our choices, our behavior and effort, as well as how one persist. These self-efficacy indicators are important factors affecting motivation in academic tasks (Alderman 2008, p 69, 70).

Alderman outlines that it is different from self-esteem and self-concept which are more task, domain and context specific rather than general (Alderman 2008, p 70). Collins carried out a study of research which demonstrates how the belief one holds about ability influences strategies. Collins selected children at low, medium as well as at high levels of math ability and then gave them difficult problems to work out. In each group there were children who were confident about their math ability and there were also children who were insecure regarding their ability. The children’s beliefs about their capability and not their actual ability turned out to be the factor that distinguished the problem-solving strategies used by children in each group. The confident children chose to revise more problems and they were quicker to abandon ineffective strategies than those children who had doubts about their ability. Perceived self-efficacy turned out to be a better predictor of positive attitudes toward mathematics than what actual ability was. This established that self-efficacy is not just a reflection of someone’s ability but the actual beliefs one holds about that ability (as cited in Alderman, 2008, p. 70, 71) Moreover, Alderman points out that people may perform poorly
because (a) they lack the skills or, (b) they have the skills but they do not have the confidence that will allow them to use them in a constructive way. The level of self-efficacy is a key factor in self-regulatory strategies used by students and some of the research findings are brought up in Alderman (2008):

- “Students with higher self-efficacy undertook more difficult math tasks.
- “Students with higher self-efficacy set higher goals and expend more effort toward the achievement of these goals”.
- “The level of self-efficacy that students reported during their first year of college was a powerful predictor of their expectations, overall satisfaction and of their performance”.

One can ask if there is an optimal level of efficacy beliefs and Alderman discusses how the most useful efficacy judgments are those that are slightly above what a person can achieve on a certain assignment (Alderman 2008 p, 70 & 71).

2.3 Attribution Theory

Attribution theory became the dominant model in research regarding student motivation in the 1980s. It is exceptional because it can link people’s past experiences to their future achievement efforts by introducing causal attributions as the connecting link (Dörnyei 2003, p 8). When it comes to the main component in the theory, Dörnyei discusses that the subjective reasons to which we attribute our past successes and failures shape our motivational disposition to a large extent. If we for example blame failure in the past on a particular task to our own low capability, chances are that we will not try that particular activity again. However, if we believe that the problem was caused by inadequate effort or unsuitable learning strategies that we used, we will probably try the activity again. Due to the high frequency of language learning failure all around the world, Dörnyei outlines how attributional processes are assumed to play an important role regarding motivation in language learning (Dörnyei 2003, p 8 & 9). Alderman (2008) discusses what reasons for failure and success teachers can expect to find in a classroom and he brings up four reasons that are most commonly given as the cause of success and failure in settings where achievement is required: a person’s ability, effort, the difficulty of the task as well as luck. The reasons are defined as:
1. Ability- how we rate our aptitude, skill or knowledge.
2. Effort-how hard we tried, including mental and physical work, and time spent to accomplish a goal.
3. Task difficulty- how difficult or easy we believe the task to be
4. Luck- to the extent we believe luck was a factor (Alderman 2008, p 29, 30).

These reasons for success or failure have been organized into three dimensions or ways of looking at the causes and Alderman outlines them as:

1. Attributions are classified according to an internal-external continuum or where the responsibility lies. This refers to whether the cause is a factor within the person such as (ability or aptitude, effort) or a factor outside of the person (luck, task difficulty).
2. The second dimension is a stable-unstable continuum. The stability classification refers to whether the perceived cause is seen as something consistent or variable over time. Unstable causes for success or failure are those attributed to temporary factors that can be modified.
3. The third dimension, a controllable-uncontrollable continuum, refers to the extent we believe we have influence or control over the cause of an outcome. An uncontrollable factor is luck, whereas effort is generally believed to be controllable (Alderman 2008, p 30).

Alderman discusses how important it is for teachers to especially understand the significance of the stable-unstable perspective since research has found that students view task difficulty and ability as something stable. When a student fails and says “I will never be able to learn English”, he or she is probably seeing his or her ability to learn English as something that is stable. This is an internal-stable factor to the student and the reason for failure seems to be fixed -a self-defeating factor to the student. Alderman argues that teachers want students to see ability as a skill or knowledge of something that can be learnt- an unstable ability. In Alderman (2008; p.31&32) another source of attributional information is also discussed which has to do with comparing one’s own performance with others. The idea presented is
that if the majority of a class fails a test, students are likely to blame the failure to the
difficulty of the task and not to their own ability. Nevertheless, if one student failed and the
rest of the classmates got an A or a B, that student is likely to believe that the failure was due
to his or her own low ability.

2.4 Goals and goal setting theory

When it comes to goal and goal setting theory, Alderman discusses how goals are “something
that the person wants to achieve” and “goal setting theory assumes that human action is
directed by conscious goals and intentions’ (Alderman 2008, p 106). Alderman outlines goals
as cognitive representations of a future event and therefore motivation can be influenced
through five processes:

1. Direct attention and action toward an intended target. This helps
individuals focus on a task at hand and organize their knowledge
and strategies toward the accomplishment of the goal.
2. Mobilize effort in proportion to the difficulty of the task to be
accomplished.
3. Promote persistence and effort over time for complex tasks. This
provides a reason to continue to work hard even if the assignment
is not going well.
4. Promote the development of creative plans and strategies to
reach them.
5. Provide a reference point that provides information about one’s

In Hollyforde & Whidett (2002; p 84 & 85) research regarding how goal-setting theory can be
presented in three main conclusions is outlined. Firstly, more difficult goals lead to higher
levels of performance than easy goals. This conclusion was based on the outcomes of a series
of experiments; setting tasks such as brainstorming, addition, complex computation.
Secondly, specific goals resulted in higher levels of performance than general goals (eg ‘do
the best you can’). Various studies showed that the ‘Do the best you can’ approach constantly
produced lower performance levels than specific goals, even when the specific goals were
hard. Thirdly, behavioral intentions influence the choices people make. The level of difficulty of someone’s chosen goal actually depended on what the person who undertook the task was aiming to accomplish.

2.5 Aptitude and intelligence in second language learning

Despite factors such as motivation and age, it seems as if some people are better at learning a second language than others. In literature regarding second language learning, an individual’s inherent ability to learn a second language is called language learning aptitude. Aptitude can characteristically be looked upon as something comparable to intelligence which cannot change through training. Since different skills are tangled in the process of learning a language, aptitude needs to include several factors. (De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor 2005, p 69). Carroll states that aptitude is generally described as a combination of four different factors which are as follows:

1. The ability to identify and remember sounds of the foreign language;
2. The ability to recognize how words function grammatically in sentences;
3. The ability to induce grammatical rules from language examples;
and
4. The ability to recognize and remember words and phrases (as cited in De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor, 2005, p 69).

Further on, De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor (2005) discuss how several tests have been developed and carried out in attempts to evaluate language aptitude, and the tests that are most often mentioned are the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) and The Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB). De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor (2005) declare how these tests contain a wide range of tasks including for example phonemic coding ability tested by sound-symbol association where the learner must correlate a sound and a symbol. Grammar was tested by making the learner recognize the function that a specific word fulfils in a sentence. On the whole, the tests overlap but one difference is that Pimsleur includes intelligence as being one aspect of aptitude while Carroll claims that intelligence must be seen as something distinct from aptitude. Both of the tests have proved high correlations with
proficiency scores in school. Nevertheless, the tests were shaped towards formal second language learning and when teaching practice changed and started to include practice in communication, the tests became old-fashioned. Different studies have shown that both the MLAT and PLAB indicate a high level of correlation between intelligence and controlled language production but low correlation when it comes to free oral production as well to communicative skills in general. (De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor 2005, p 70). Genesee carried out an investigation among students in French Immersion Programmes in Canada, who found that intelligence was related to the development of French second language learning when it came to reading, vocabulary and grammar while it was unrelated to the students’ oral production skills (as cited Lightbown and Spada 2006, p 57).

2.6 Age and second language acquisition

Age and its importance when it comes to learning a second language is something that has been extensively investigated. Lenneberg’s critical period hypothesis has been strongly connected to the age factor. The hypothesis states that it is not possible to learn a second language in a native-like way if the learning process begins after a critical period-puberty. This standpoint is mostly linked to learning the phonological system of the second language. The critical period hypothesis claims that as the human brain gradually matures it loses its plasticity. The maturation process is called cerebral lateralization which is a process of specialization concerning the hemisphere. Lenneberg claimed that once this process is completed, the human brain would not be able to pick up a new language system (as cited in De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor 2005, p 65 & 67). Lightbown and Spada (2006) discuss how it has been frequently observed that most children from immigrant families eventually will speak the language of their new community with a native-like fluency while their parents mostly do not. Adult learners of a second language may have the capability to communicate successfully but differences in word-choice, accent and grammar often distinguish them from native speakers and second language speakers who started to learn the language at a young age (Lightbown and Spada 2006, p 68). Further on, they declare how the conditions for language learning can vary. For example, young learners may have more opportunities to hear as well as speak the language in an environment where they feel secure and do not feel the pressure of communicating grammatically correct. Older learners are more often in situations where they must use a more complex language (Lightbown and Spada 2006, p 68).
2.7 Attitudes, integrative motivation and instrumental motivation

Ellis (1994) states that language teachers have already acknowledged the importance of learners’ motivation and occasionally explaining their own sense of failure to the students’ lack of motivation. Second language acquisition studies consider motivation a key factor when it comes to learning a second language. There have been differences though in the way that teachers and researchers have conceptualized ‘motivation’. Skehan outlines four different hypotheses in an attempt to explain motivation from a non-theoretical view:

1. The Intrinsic Hypothesis: motivation derives from an inherent interest in the learning tasks the learner is asked to perform.
2. The Resultative Hypothesis: learners who do well will persevere; those who do not do well will be discouraged and try less hard.
3. The Internal Cause Hypothesis: the learner brings to the learning situation a certain quantity of motivation as given.
4. The Carrot and Stick Hypothesis: external influences and incentives will affect the strength of the learner’s motivation (as cited in Ellis 1994, p 509).

In Lightbown and Spada (2006; p. 63) research is presented regarding how the relationship between a learner’s attitude toward the second or the foreign language and its community and success in learning a second language is correlated. Considering the fact that it is rather complicated to know whether positive attitudes produce successful learning or if it is successful learning that triggers positive attitudes, or if both are affected by other aspects, the research indicates that positive motivation is associated with a will to keep on learning. Further on, Lightbown and Spada (2006) discuss how motivation in second language learning is a problematic phenomenon. They state that it has been defined in two ways: the learner’s communicative needs as well as their attitudes toward the second language community. If a learner needs to speak the language in many different social situations or to accomplish professional ambitions they will understand the value of the second language and therefore they will be motivated to learn it. Also, if learners have good and favorable attitudes and beliefs about the speakers of the target language, learners will wish for more contact with them. Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert coined the terms Instrumental Motivation and Integrative Motivation. Instrumental Motivation refers to language learning for immediate or practical goals while as Integrative Motivation stands for language learning for cultural
enrichment and personal growth. Studies have shown that these types of motivation are connected to success in second language learning (as cited in Lightbown and Spada 2006, pp 63 & 64). In Ellis (1994; p. 510&511) research showing that measures of instrumental and integrative motivation of 337 students of Spanish in High Schools in the United States of America, suggested that it was impossible for these learners to separate the two different kinds of motivation. Ely investigated these two types of motivation in first-year university students of Spanish in America and also found evidence of strong integrative motivation as well as instrumental motivation (as cited in Ellis 1994, p 510&511). In Ellis (1994; p 512) research regarding factors which caused high school students of French and Spanish in the United States to drop out is discussed and the most noteworthy finding was that those students who continued their studies beyond the second year, claimed low importance to fulfilling what the curriculum required of them - instead they reported an interest in the target language cultures and a wish to attain proficiency in all language skills. This suggests an integrative motivation. Other factors that she found were playing a part were grades that the students had achieved in previous foreign language courses and when the students had begun to study. The students who started early were more likely to continue. Further on, Ellis (1994) discusses how the Carrot and Stick Hypothesis see external stimulation and influences as factors which determine a learner’s motivational strength. This has been studied in Second Language Acquisition research through investigations of instrumental motivation. Ellis (1994) outlines how instrumental motivation was found a week predictor of foreign language achievement in several Canadian Studies. It appeared that instrumental motivation was much more powerful in other contexts where the learners had no or little interest in the target-language culture as well as no or few opportunities to interact with members of the target-language community. In Ellis (1994; p 513&514) an investigation showing how 46 university psychology students would be rewarded with 10 dollars if they were to succeed in a paired-associate English-French vocabulary test is discussed. The same amounts of students in another group were instructed to do “their best”. Not only did the former group do significantly better, they also spent more time viewing the pairs of the words with the exception of the sixth and last trial in the assignment when the chance of receiving a reward was no longer offered. This indicates that once the opportunity to receive a reward is removed, learners may decrease their effort. Therefore, this can be seen as a vast disadvantage of instrumental motivation.
2.8 English as an International Language

McKay (2002) argues that some people are defining an international language as being equal to a language that has a large number of native speakers. If that is the case, Arabic, Hindi, Mandarin, Spanish which together with English are the five most spoken mother tongues in the world, could be international languages as well. However, McKay states that unless those languages are spoken by a great number of native speakers of other languages, the language cannot function as a language of international communication. Looked upon from that perspective, English is the international language used for wider communication to an extent that no other language can be compared. In many areas, English is the tool of communication between people from different countries as well as between individuals from the same country. McKay states that from this standpoint, English can be seen as an international language not only from a global sense but also from a local (McKay 2002, p 5).

Crystal (1997) states that: ‘a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country’ (Crystal 1997, p 2). He discusses how a language, to be able to achieve such status, must be used by people in countries that do not have English as their mother tongue and they must give it a place in their societies. This can according to Crystal be done in two ways. Firstly, a language can be made as the official language of a country where it will be used as a tool of communication in areas such as the educational system, the media, the law courts and in government. In the second way, a language can be made a priority in a country’s foreign-language teaching although the language itself has no official status. Crystal argues that one of the main reasons for the spread of English is that it has repeatedly been in the right place at the same time.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries English was the language of the leading colonial nation-Britain. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was the language of the leader of the industrial revolution- also Britain. In the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth it was the language of the leading economic power-the USA. As a result, when new technologies brought new linguistic opportunities, English emerged as a first-rank language in industries which affected all aspects of the society-the press, advertising, broadcasting, motion pictures, sound recording, transport and communications. (Crystal 1997, p 110-111)
Further on, Crystal claims how at the same time the world was formatting networks of international alliances that were in need of a lingua franca and English was the clear first choice. English became during the first part of the twentieth century the leading language of international political, academic as well as of community meetings.

McKay (2002) discusses what factors that presently can be related to the demand of English learning and its role as an international language and she points to different domains. For example, she refers to how English is in a global way making different countries negotiate and discuss educational, social, political and economic issues. English dominates the motion picture industry as well as popular music which are the two main mechanisms in the development of global culture, especially amongst young people. Travel and tourism are other factors that McKay claims to contribute to the spread of English she points out that international travelling has a globalizing effect that stresses the need for an international language. Book publishing is another area to which McKay refers to, while stating that more books are published in English than in any other language as well as 84 percent of the Internet servers are English medium. Finally, McKay establishes how to be able to access higher education in many countries, you are reliant on your knowledge of English (McKay 2002, p 17&18).

Marko Modiano (2009) emphasizes the importance of recognizing the fact that learners of English today are not learning the language so that they may be able to communicate with native speakers. They are learning it because it will be essential to them in the future in relation to work, education as well as in social activities. In many of these activities, native speakers are not included. Further on, he discusses how many different languages that are spoken and pursued in education within the EU, but there is one language, English, that is the most useful language when speakers with different languages interact (Modiano 2009, p 58&59). Modiano claims that the spread of English across the EU is linguistically unique and states that;

Never before has one language been so widespread among the general population, taken such a prevalent place in education at all levels, had such presence in information services such as printed media, film, radio and television, been so prominent in music and entertainment, as well as the Internet, and also serve as a contact language with people from throughout the world. (Modiano 2009 p 72-73)
2.9 Gender differences in motivation and second language learning achievement

Meece, Bower Glienke and Askew (2009) discuss how the role of gender in relation to motivation has a long history in both educational and psychological studies. Before 1970, men were more likely than women not only to get a college degree but also to participate in advanced studies and get a high paid job. In the last three decades, vast changes in women’s level of education as well as their occupational status have been noticed. Nevertheless, gender differences regarding motivation still exist. Meece, Bower Glienke and Askew outline how early theories of motivation described women as underachievers while current studies show that gender differences are domain specific. Boys seem to have positive achievement-related beliefs when it comes to mathematics, science and sports while women seem to have more positive motivation patterns regarding language, arts and reading. It seems as if the gender gap in connection to mathematics and science decreases with age while the differences in motivation in connection to language and arts persist throughout the school years (Meece, Bower Glienke and Askew 2009, p. 411,424).

Ellis (1994) states that many predictions regarding gender differences in connection to second language learning are based on sociolinguistic theory. Several studies have been made and he discusses a study including 490 Chinese university students in Hong Kong (257 male and 233 female) which showed that the female students performed higher overall on ten tests of general L2 English proficiency and in many cases, the differences were significant. Ellis argues that several studies indicate that females have a more positive attitude to learning a second language. He discusses a study showing that low-achieving boys dropped out learning French as an L2 language to a much greater extent than low-achieving girls from the age of thirteen and on. The study also showed that girls had more positive attitudes to learning French than boys (Ellis 1994, p 202&203). Further on, Ellis claims that ‘one obvious explanation for females’ greater success in L2 learning in classroom settings is that they generally have more positive attitudes’ (Ellis 1994, p 203).
3. Method

In this section, the participants of this study will be presented as well as the research method that was used in the attempt to reach the purpose of this study.

3.1 Survey participants

Three classes from an upper secondary school have participated in this research. They are all first graders and are currently taking English 5 and they are all attending a theoretical program. Since this study is based on a quantitative method of research, three classes would generate a sufficient number of participants. All three classes were given information about the intended and anyone who did not feel comfortable about participating, was given the opportunity to decline. All students present agreed to take part. All students who answered the questionnaire also completed a diagnostic test. They gave their approval to a study of their results regarding the diagnostic test they had done. They were also informed that they would be anonymous in the study.

3.2 Method of research

This study is based on a quantitative method which includes a questionnaire. Trost (2001) claims that if you are trying to find a pattern or if you are trying to understand something, a quantitative investigation is preferable (Trost Jan 2001, p 23). Ejvegård (2004) also states that when you are trying to bring out attitudes, different types of tastes and opinions, a questionnaire is the most suitable approach. Further on, he discusses how the questionnaire needs to be well formed and not too extensive, because the more questions you ask, the risk of getting less answers increases (Ejvegård 2004, p 55). When it comes to research based on questionnaires, Trost (2001) talks about open or closed answering alternatives. An open answering alternative means that the person who answers has the possibility to write his or her answer with their own words. A closed answering alternative has already given answering alternatives from which the participant can choose from. A disadvantage with open answering alternatives can be that some people find it hard to express themselves in writing and therefore they do not answer the question (Trost 2001, p 71&72).
3.3 The questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of six questions:

1. How difficult do you think it is to learn English in school on a scale of 1-5? (5 indicates the highest level of difficulty).
2. Do you find it important to learn English?
3. Motivate why or why not you find it important to learn English!
4. When do you use your English skills outside of school? For example, when you play video games, watch a movie or when reading a book?
5. In the future, how and when do you think that your English skills will be useful?
6. How motivated are you to learn English on a scale of 1-5? (5 indicates the highest level of motivation).

They were given the opportunity to choose whether they wanted to answer the questionnaire in Swedish or in English. The reason for doing so was to make sure that the students felt comfortable enough to express themselves and therefore decrease the possibility that they would not answer the questions in the way they wanted to—or for that matter, not answering the questions at all. The majority answered in Swedish.

3.4 The diagnostic test

The diagnostic test is a test that each student has to take when they start studying English at this school. The reason for this is that the teachers want to find out what level the students are at when it comes to their English skills and if there are students who need extra support to be able to pass the course. Initially when the school started to use this diagnostic test approximately 14 years ago, it was also meant to help the teachers divide the students into different studying groups, depending on how they scored on the test. The highest score is 243. Students who scored between 120-140 points were the lower group, students who scored between 140-180 became the intermediate group and those who scored 180 and higher became the advanced group. Students who scored 120 points and lower, were given extra support. The test includes reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary. The vocabulary part consists of 61 different sentences where the students are asked to fill in a missing word. They have three different options to choose from. The grammar part is structured in the same
way, except that there are 90 sentences instead of 60. The reading comprehension section consists of two parts. The first part is based on 11 different short parts of texts. Each text is followed by 4 different statements regarding the text. The students are to choose the statement that is correct. The second part is based on a longer text which is followed by 11 questions and three statements from which the students are asked to pick out the statement that is true for the text. The diagnostic was included in the study to contribute with some knowledge regarding these students English skills and if any correlation between their motivation and their English skills could be drawn.

3.5 The statistical data

The total number of participants is 60, 38 girls and 22 boys. However, one person has not answered question number 1 and 2 persons have not answered question number 6. On question number 1 and 6, the students have been asked to answer on a scale of 1-5. Some students have answered with two digits, for example 2-3 or 3-4. In those cases the lowest digit has been accounted for. Question number 3, 4 and 5 are so called ‘open questions’ where the students have expressed themselves with their own words. Their answers have been divided into different categories. Note that the students in most cases have given several answers. The diagnostic test is accounted for in two different ways. Firstly, the students score on the diagnostic test is outlined based on the three groups in which the teachers used to divide them into (see section 3.4). Secondly, the average score for boys and girls is outlined.
4. Results

In the following part, the result of the questionnaire will be presented. Each question will be accounted for.

4.1 How difficult do you think it is to learn English on a scale of 1-5? (5 indicates the highest level of difficulty).

Figure 1

36% of the students answered 1 on the scale, 47% answered 2 on the scale and 17% answered 3 on the scale. No one answered 4 or 5 on the scale.

4.2 Do you find it important to learn English?

Figure 2

Each of the 60 students found it important to learn English.
4.3 Motivate why or why not you find it important to learn English?

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why or why not do you find it important to learn English?</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You can live everywhere if you know English</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English is an international language</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you want to study abroad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you want to move abroad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because many songs are in English</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because many movies are in English</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with people from other countries</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It can be useful in a future job</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is an important language within media</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be able to travel all over the world</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English is a beautiful language</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you travel to USA, England or Australia, it easier to do stuff and make yourself understood</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with others in our society</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will be useful in the future/ It is good to know</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We live an international society</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you want to work abroad</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is an important language in politics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You use English everywhere</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be able to use the internet</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you read books, it is good to know</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 When do you use your English skills outside of school?

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When do you use your English skills outside of school?</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I watch a movie</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I read</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I chat</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I play video/computer games</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I am abroad/ When I travel</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I speak to friends/relatives from other countries</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When I watch TV & 20 \\
When I use the internet/computer & 19 \\
When I use my cell phone & 1 \\
I speak English to my little brother so he can practice & 1 \\
When I speak to people from other countries & 5 \\
When I read/are given instructions in English & 5 \\
When I listen to music & 10 \\
In media & 1 \\
In work & 1 \\
When I sing/practice music & 3 \\
Sometimes I speak English in my spare time for fun & 5 \\

## 4.5 In the future, how or when do you think that your English skills will be useful?

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the future, how and when do you think that your English skills will be useful?</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a future job</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When/If I move/work abroad</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with people from other countries</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I go to live/work/study in USA or England (An English speaking country)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I travel/go abroad</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When/If I go to college</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I watch TV</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I use the internet</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In media</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I watch movies</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I apply for a job</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I want to study abroad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I speak to English people in the future</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I speak to friends/people from another country</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I read books</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I speak to relatives from America</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future communication in general</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my spare time</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be cool</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While listening to soccer interviews</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6 How motivated are you to learn English on a scale of 1-5? (5 indicates the highest level of motivation).

Figure 3

43 % stated 5, 31 % stated 4, 17% stated 3, 7 % stated 2 and 2 % stated 1 on the scale. This shows most students are highly motivated to learn English.

4.7 The students results on the diagnostic test

Figure 4

77% scored between 180-243 points, 22 % scored between 140-180 points and only 1 % scored between 120-140 points.
4.8 Differences between boys and girls on the diagnostic test

Figure 5

The girls average score on the test is 203 points and the boys average score is 189 points.

5. Discussion

The aim of this essay is to explore what attitudes students in upper secondary school have towards the English language and what it is that motivates them to learn it. In this section, the results regarding the questionnaire and the students attitudes and motivation regarding the English language will be discussed.

Figure 1 shows that these students find it easy to learn English. Many Swedish students may have an advantage when it comes to learning the English language because of the general exposure of English in our society as well as because English is a related Germanic language. As mentioned in the introduction, most of us come in contact with English on a daily basis while watching TV or listening to the radio. The enormous expansion of the Internet and the use of social networks as well as for example gaming online are factors that have contributed even more to these students exposure of English. De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor (2005) refer to the critical period hypothesis when outlining that it is not possible to learn a second language in a native like way if the process begins after a critical period, a period which refers to puberty. Due to that statement, Swedish students are in a beneficial environment since they begin to learn English in school at the age of nine. Therefore, their opinion of English being easy to learn can be supported. The fact that the majority seem to find English easy to learn, may also reflect that their previous experiences of English have been successful and therefore increased their self-efficacy, gradually making them believe that English is a subject they can manage although they most certainly have experienced failure as well along the way. French
and German are examples of other languages that Swedish students study but they begin at the age of thirteen and the period of their studies vary from three to five years. The schools do not offer the same amount of time to learn these languages nor are the students exposed to those languages outside of school to the same extent as they are to the English language. Therefore they do not have the same possibility to learn, for example, French and German the same way as they learn English. Swedish children bathe in English, it is almost as natural to them as their mother tongue, as opposed to e.g. German, French or Spanish. The motivation for learning this specific second language is much closer to learning the mother tongue, where the motivation is implicit, something that you never really consider, you just do.

The diagnostic test outlined in figure 3 shows that the majority of these students managed to get high scores on the test and that may also support their opinion and attitude of English being easy to learn. So, can one draw the conclusion that all of these students are good language learners, well equipped with a great deal of language learning aptitude? The MLAT and the PLAB showed high co-relation between intelligence and controlled language learning but low correlation between free oral production and communicative skills in general. This does not show any correlation to spoken English and how they manage communicative strategies either, which is an important part when it comes to language learning. Getting the students to speak English in the classroom is something that many teachers struggle with. Nevertheless, the diagnostic test serves a purpose because it gives the teacher an indication what the students seem to manage as well as what they may need to practise more. It also shows that even if the students score high on this test, it does not necessarily mean that they have high proficiency when it comes to using the language in other various settings.

The students were unanimous when it came to the question whether it was important or not to learn English. No one answered that it was not important to learn English (See figure 2). One reason for that is that they have acknowledged the English language as being an international language and an important tool when it comes to communicating in various situations. As table 1 shows, 31 students answered that it is important to learn English because it is an international language and 26 students claimed that it is important for being able to communicate with people from other countries. Modiano (2009) states that learners of English today are not learning it to be able to communicate with native speakers of English but because it will be required of them in other areas such as social activities. This is supported by this investigation since only 2 students expressed that it was important in case you wanted to
visit USA, England or Australia. Crystal (1997) discussed the world’s need of a Lingua Franca and that seems to be one of the major reasons why these students feel that it is important to learn the language. It was stated in the hypothesis that future jobs and studies would be major reasons for the students to learn English, but that statement was proved wrong by this study. Only 8 students answered in ways that somehow were connected to future studies and work (See table 1).

Section 5.4 outlines when the students use their English skills outside of school and the vast majority of their answers are connected to information services such as movies, TV, Internet, books and music. Other areas in which the students use their English are when they travel and communicate with the people they meet. These are the same reasons that Modiano (2009) discusses while explaining the spread of English across the EU. McKay (2002) emphasizes how English dominates the motion picture industry along with popular music which she states are the main mechanisms in the development of global culture among the youth of today. She also mentions travel and tourism as other reasons for the huge demand of English.

Lightbown and Spada (2006) discuss Instrumental Motivation and Integrative motivation, which are two variables that have been connected to success in language learning. This study shows that those two variables are both involved in these student’s motivational process. Instrumental motivation has to do with someone’s need to learn a language for immediate and practical goals. When the students in table 1 claim to find it important to learn English for reasons such as “to be able to communicate with people from other countries”, “English is an international language” and “it will be useful in the future” it can be linked to Instrumental Motivation. Integrative motivation has to do with the favorable attitudes the learners have towards the target language speakers and their culture. Table 2 shows when the students use their English skills outside of school and 45 answered that they use English when they “watch a movie”, 28 students answered “when I read” and 10 students answered “when I listen to music”. This correlates to Integrative motivation since the students obviously are interested in some parts of the English culture.

Pintrich and Schunk (2002) claim that ’motivation is the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained’ and a crucial part of that is to sustain action since many of our goals are long term such as earning a college degree and getting a good job. As table 3 reveals, 29 students answered that when it comes to the future and how their English skills
will be used, it would be when they are going to travel abroad and 14 students answered in their future job. Only 3 students answered that it would be useful if they went to college. This study shows that the majority of the students see the English language as a tool useful while using the Internet, watching TV and movies, in printed medias, when they travel and when they need to communicate with people from other countries. It may also indicate that regardless of the fact that most of them probably have to go to college in the future, their focus is elsewhere. They are only seventeen years old and at the present, their focus lie in for example their social life and what they think about the future has to do more with fun activities such as travelling. The schools, on the other hand, are focused on preparing the students for academic studies and future jobs. We teach general cultural skills, literature and reading proficiency. Although it appears as if students and teachers seem to have a conflict of interest, the majority of the students claim to be highly motivated to learn the English language according to figure 3, but will that last throughout upper secondary school? Making the students sustain motivation is one of the most difficult tasks for the teachers but also for the students themselves. This conflict may affect their ability to sustain their motivation negatively. Motivation is a process, but how aware are the students regarding that process? There are many different factors that affect a person’s motivation in either a positive or a negative direction. In a classroom there may be 30 students who all differ when it comes to motivation, ambition and interest. It is the teacher’s job to meet all these students on their level and give them the support they need to develop their skills. Motivation is a crucial part when it comes to learning a language, but the questions are to what extent are teachers and students aware of that process in the classroom? We use motivational theories to explain environmental observations and given outcomes, but how do teachers manage to use that information to actually change a student’s language learning pattern? From a pedagogic point of view, how does one work actively in the classroom with motivation? Lightbown and Spada (2006) state that little research has been done when it comes to how pedagogy interacts with motivation in second language classrooms. They refer to the field of educational psychology and discuss research which indicates increased level of motivation for students in co-relation to pedagogical practises. For example:

- **Motivating the students into the lesson** At the opening stages of Lessons (and within transitions) it has been observed that remarks teachers make about forthcoming activities can lead to higher levels of interest on the part of the students.
• **Varying the activities, tasks, and materials** Students are reassured by the existence of class routines they can depend on. However, lessons that always consist of the same routines, patterns, and formats have been shown to lead to a decrease in attention and increase in boredom. Varying the activities, tasks, and materials can help to avoid this and increase students’ interest levels.

• **Using co-operative rather than competitive goals** Co-operative learning activities are those in which students must work together in order to complete a task or solve a problem. These techniques have been found to increase the self-confidence of students, including weaker ones, because every participant in a co-operative task has an important role to play. Knowing that their team-mates are counting on them can increase students’ motivation (Lightbown and Spada 2006, p 65).

These methods are useful in the classroom and help create good learning conditions but in the long run, schools have to modernize our teaching materials as well as content. The students in this study have claimed that their interest in learning the English language, lie in using the Internet, watching TV and movies, in printed medias, when they travel and when they need to communicate with people from other countries. The curriculum regarding English says that the core content should include:

- Themes, ideas, form and content in film and literature; authors and literary periods.
- Contemporary and older literature, poetry, drama and songs.
- Living conditions, attitudes, values, traditions, social issues as well as cultural, historical, political and cultural conditions in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used.
  (Skolverket 2011)

Maybe the National Agency of Education needs to re-think the content of our English teaching and meet our students where they are when it comes to interest and motivation in order to sustain their long-term motivation. English teaching tends to focus on England and
America when it comes to the above content which seems natural since the majority of the people in those countries are native speakers of English, but these students are obviously not particularly interested in the people who live there, but rather of their culture when it comes to music, literature and movies. The students are not interested in old literature, poetry and drama, they want a modern approach to those subjects. Their interests lie in using English as a tool of communication when they meet people from all over the world and while using the Internet.

Ellis (1994) discusses several different studies showing how female students performed higher overall compared to males on tests of general L2 proficiency. He also argues how different studies indicate females having a more positive attitude towards learning a second language than males. As figure 5 shows, the girls average score is higher than the boys, therefore this study confirms Ellis theory to a certain extent. To be able to draw any further conclusions a more extensive research should have been carried out regarding these participants motivation from a gender perspective.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine what attitudes students in upper secondary school have towards the English language and what motivates them to learn it. This study is based on a questionnaire and the students were found to be highly motivated to learn English. In the hypothesis it is stated that their main reasons for learning English were for future studies and future jobs and because of the English language status as an international language. It was also stated in the hypothesis that diagnostic test scores would be rather high. The study shows that these students find it important because they have acknowledged English as an international language which they can use to communicate with people from all over the world, during for example travels. The main areas in which they use their English skills are when they watch TV, use the Internet, listen to music and while playing videogames. Future studies and jobs as main reasons for learning English could not be verified. The students performed well on the diagnostic test and that may correlate to their positive attitudes towards the English language.

7. References


Höglin, Renée (2002) *Engelska språket som hot och tillgång i Norden*, Nordiska ministerrådet, Köbenhavn


