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English Language Learning

Students' Perception on Their Own Language Learning

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Abstract

This is a qualitative study, which aims at looking closer into how eight students look upon their own English perceiving skills. A qualitative interview method was used to interview eight students in upper secondary school. The participants were four boys and four girls. The results from the interviews have been presented under three different headings, which are as follows: Motivation, Classroom and Acquisition. A lot of studies have been done on the subject of language-learning and it has resulted in many theories, and the ones that seemed relevant for this study have been brought up and connected to the answers the students gave. Most of the students felt motivated to learn English and the main reason was their future job plans. In the classroom, the participants thought that the teacher's behaviour and attitude towards the English subject was the most important factors to motivate them. The interview results showed that the students thought that the best way to learn English was through media, foremost by speaking and writing with their friends on the computer. Those answers can be connected to something that the Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotskij presents with the socio-cultural theory, where he promotes the idea that learning a language is best done by interacting with other people.

Keywords: Self perception, learning English, motivation, interview, acquisition

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1. Introduction

The teacher program that is available at the University of Gävle to become an English upper secondary teacher involves some teacher training at upper secondary schools in the area.

During the weeks of teacher training, thoughts of how the students perceive their own English language skills and how this can be used in the best possible way were often discussed in the staff room. The opinions were many, different teachers had different opinions and that raised some questions. How do the students perceive their own English language skills? How can this knowledge be used to improve the teaching in schools? A research project was set up in order to gain more knowledge about these matters.

The study began with a closer look into how the curriculum was written for the subject English and what the aims for the courses that are offered to the students were. One of the sentences in the curriculum for the English courses is: "Through education, the students shall be given the opportunity to develop their linguistic security in areas such as speech and writing as well as the ability to express themselves with variation and complexity" (translated from www.skolverket.se). This is a key sentence in the curriculum, and it will be investigated in the study to see if this is how the students really feel and experience their English lessons. Do the students feel that they can develop their English skills during class? Do they feel that they get a chance to practice different areas such as grammar, writing, speaking, listening and reading that are required to be able to express themselves with good variation and complexity?

This was the inspiration for this study, to get a better understanding of how the students feel about their English lessons, if they feel that they are inspiring and meet their expectations. Another thing that raised some questions was how the students learned English, and how they feel that they can learn English in the best possible way.

When it was time to write the C- essay, a project was carried out that investigated the students' language learning in general and also their own perception of it. The best way to get some answers to the questions was to ask the students themselves. An interview was carried out in order to get some results and answers to the questions.

The interview sheet that was used contained questions that were divided into three areas: Motivation, Education and Acquisition.

The results of the research will hopefully help teachers and newly graduated teachers to get a better understanding of how students learn English. The readers of this essay will also get an insight into what motivates students to learn English, how they feel about their English

lessons and if they feel that they develop during class. The results will also show how students acquire English in the best possible way.

1.1 Aim for this study

The aim with this study is to better understand how the students in upper secondary school perceive their own English learning. The results of the study will also show how motivated the students are and how they want to use their English skills in the future. The aim is also to give prospective English teachers and other language teachers a better understanding of how the students think and feel about their own perception in English learning. With answers from this study, language teachers may benefit from the results in a way that makes it possible for them to adapt their teaching to the students' needs and wishes. With teachers knowledgeable of this, students will get better chances to reach a higher grade and acquire better skills in English, and the teachers will better understand the students' own perception of language learning in language learning.

1.2 Framing of Questions

Main questions for this study:

1. What is it that motivates students to learn English?
2. How do students learn English in the best possible way?
3. How do students experience their education in the classroom?

To achieve answers on these questions, the answers were divided into three sub-headings:

1. Motivation to learn the language
2. Education in School
3. Acquisition of English

Under the sub-heading *Motivation*, what motivates students to learn English will be presented.

Since the students are obligated to learn English in school, it is interesting to see how students feel about their *Education* in the classroom in the subject. Here it will be presented how they experience their education, do they feel that they develop or is it something that they wish to change during their lessons? The answers from the questions that have been put under this sub-heading can help teachers to structure their lessons in a more adapted way, more in line with the students' needs.

Under the last sub-heading, *Acquisition*, information and answers from the students will be presented, answers containing information about how they feel that they best can learn English. How do the students use their English in their spare time and how do they look upon their own skills in the language?

2. Theories and Science

2.1 Behaviourism theory

When it comes to language learning, different kinds of studies about its theories and science have been conducted for a long time now. Its origin reaches all the way back to the middle of the 20th century (translated from Abrahamsson, 2009). Between the years 1930-1960 a theory called *Behaviourism* was born. The creator of this theory was John Watson. The theory is based on observations of human behaviour. The social environment is central for human language learning (translated from Arnquist, 1993). Two famous names that are related to behaviourism are Ivan Pavlov and Leonard Bloomfield. These two believed that language learning occurs by imitations, practice and by feedback (reward and punishment). For example, an imitation can occur in the classroom when the teacher says something and the students repeat it. As a reward the teacher says “Good job” (translated from Svensson, 2009). The part of imitation is something that will be useful in this study since some of the answers can be related to it. One part of behaviourism tells us about how behaviour that is already known by students affects new behaviours. This is called *transfer* and it means more specifically that a first language that has been learned can affect students when they learn English (translated from Abrahamsson, 2009). Robert Lado, who is a proponent of this view, says:

We assume that the student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult (translated from Abrahamsson, 2009 p.32).

He continues to explain: “individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meaning of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture” (translated from Abrahamsson, 2009 p.32).

2.2 Cognitive theory

One of the theories that are relevant for this study is the cognitive theory. This theory is based on the thinking that the development of language learning works side-by-side with human cognitive development (translated from Arnquist, 1993). Cognitive psychologists have a

model called an information-process. This means that a student builds up knowledge that eventually will lead to automatic language learning. When students learn a new language they have to pay extra attention to all the details in the language that they try to speak or understand, this stage is even called the “Pay attention”-stage. However, there are limits to how much a student can pay attention to during a lesson. For those who just have begun their process to learn English, they must use most of their resources to understand the main words in the sentences. When this occurs, the English learner may not notice the grammatical morphemes that are attached to some of the words and especially not the ones that substantially affect the meaning. Eventually the students will gradually make progress through practice and experience, both in class and in their spare time. They will understand the new information easier. Their English language-skills will develop more automatically. When this happens the students can start to pay more attention to other aspects of the language, for example grammar. There are some researchers that compare the automatic language learning to when you learn how to bike or drive a car. Once your skills become automatic you do not have to pay all your attention to the actual language learning because it comes by itself (Lightbown & Spada, 2011, p.39-40). This model of information-process is very useful for this study since some of the answers can be related to the cognitive view on language learning.

2.3 Socio-cultural theory

The foremost representative of the socio-cultural theory is the Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotskij. His theory shows how human development, including language development, occurs by interaction with other individuals (Lightbown & Spada, 2011, p. 47). This theory explains that when an individual interacts with an interlocutor they will get support to reach a higher level with help from his interlocutor. This is called the *zone of proximal development* (Lightbown & Spada, 2011, p. 47). The learner gets support with words from his or her interlocutor which will lead to language learning. With this said you can see that this theory tells us that social interactions are very important for language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2011 p.47). This theory is very useful for this study since the students interact in social meetings in the classroom. The students communicate with each other and get a chance to help and develop their English skills together.

2.4 Theory of Second language learning

“A second language usually represents any language that a speaker adapts when the first language has been established or has started to establish itself” (translated from Abrahamsson, 2009, p. 13).

There are different types of models that explain how humans develop a second language, even called an L2. Further, L2 is the abbreviation that is used when referring to a second language where the L stands for language. One researcher in the L2 area is Stephen Krashen. He has created a model called *the monitor model*. He points out how important it is for teachers to adapt the language level to the level of the language student (translated from Sigurd, 2007 p.153). If the student gets a chance to hear an adapted language level, that in complexity is fit for him or her, then it is possible for the student to develop the grammar structure in a more natural way, just as when children learn their first language. It can be said that if the teacher adapts an appropriate language level when communicating with the students, the grammar structure will be learned naturally (translated from Sigurd, 2007 p.154). There are studies that show that teachers talk in the same way to students as a person would who speaks their first language to someone who has a different first language. For example, they talk more slowly and use less vocabulary. This results in changes in the way the teacher speaks to the students, and does it in the same pace as they develop their language skills (translated from Sigurd, 2007 p.154). People that believe in this theory think that it is just as important for the students to get an adapted language level during their lessons, as it is important for the students to be involved in discussions. The development in language research has led to changes in how teachers are recommended to teach language in school. When the schools were influenced by behaviourism, the teacher said words and the students were supposed to repeat them. The students learned by imitating the teacher but today, as explained, other methods are advocated. Today students are expected to be more involved in lessons, to communicate more in the classroom. Even the view on linguistics has changed. Today teachers see their students as a resource in the education and therefore they encourage interactions in the classroom more than they used to (translated from Sigurd 2007, p. 154).

2.5 Motivations effect on language learning

In the book *Art of learning languages* by Erik V. Gunnemark (1996) you can read about different prerequisites for success in language learning. The first thing that the researcher

points out is the significance of motivation. He mentions that the reason behind the motivation to learn a language can be many but the main reason is usually the need of learning a language to be able to communicate with people from another country (p.13). When searching for what it is that motivates people to learn a language, the researcher Zoltán Dörnyei's name occurs frequently. He has done a lot of research about how motivation affects language learning, and since that is one of the areas that will be investigated in this study, his research is interesting and important. Sofia Thörn has done a study that contains information about Dörnyei's studies and her study has given a lot of interesting information about him and his research. For a long time researchers have thought that the main reason behind motivation has been personal interest, and studies have shown that people in a group, for example a school class, affect the individuals motivation to a greater extent. Another thing that affects the student's motivation is the teacher's behaviour in class and how the teacher is teaching. This is an important factor for the students, because it will affect their language learning. As Thörn has written, she mentions three basic points that Dörnyei has pointed out according to what it is that affects the student's motivation to learn a language:

- Appropriate teacher behaviours and a good relationship with the students
- A pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere
- A cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms (Thörn, 2011)

Another important factor of learning is the student's self-confidence. The more self-confidence the students have, the more motivation he or she will have. You will need it especially when learning a new language in order to learn from your mistakes instead of blaming yourself for them (Gunnemark, 1996, p.17). This is an interesting point, and I will look closer into it in the discussion later on.

2.6 Curriculum

This is what is written in the curriculum 2011 English 5 and its aims:

The education in the subject English shall aim towards linguistic and external knowledge development for the students so that they can, will and want to use English in different situations and for specific purposes. The students shall be given the opportunity to develop their

comprehensive and communicative skills by using the English language in functional and meaningful situations. These skills include understanding, spoken language and texts, production and interaction which means to express yourself and cooperate with others in speech and writing and to adapt your language to different situation, purposes and receivers. Through education the students shall also be given the opportunity to develop their linguistic confidence in speech and writing and also their ability to express themselves with variation and complexity (translated from www.Skolverket.se).

The schools in Sweden must, according to the law, follow the curriculum that has been written. Teachers are obligated to organize their teaching in line with the course goals and its aims. They are expected to make sure that the students get a chance to achieve what is expected from them to learn in order to pass the course (Skolverket.se). When you read the aims for the different courses in English, you get an understanding of what is expected from the students to learn at upper secondary high school. There is a lot of focus on both speaking and writing and the goal for the students is to be able to interact with other people and to be able to adapt the English language when facing different situations where it is suitable in life. The curriculum of 2011 also says:

The education shall be conducted in English. In their education, the students shall be given the opportunity to study different variations of spoken and written English, and also get a chance to put the content in relation to their own experiences and knowledge. The students shall be given the opportunity to interact in speech and writing and also produce spoken language and written texts on their own and together with others, with support from different tools and medias (translated from www.Skolverket.se).

With this said it means that when teaching English, the working language is expected to be English. The aims and goals that are written in the curriculum that has been brought up are interesting for this study since the research that has been carried out will look closer into how the students feel about their English learning in the classroom.

3. Method

The study will be conducted by the use of a qualitative method, where interviews will be made. This method can lead to results that show how the students in upper secondary school truly perceive their own language learning, something that a quantitative method would not do as well. The qualitative method is used when there is an interest to know why people react in certain ways and the reason behind it. A study was made by Rubensson & Strandberg. (2011) that describes the qualitative method as follows: "The qualitative method tries to convey a bigger picture of reality where you try to describe, interpret and understand rather than explain, predict and quantify" (p.8).

3.1 Data collection

This study is based on interviews. "An interview conveys knowledge, events, experiences, opinions, attitudes, values and other things that the interview object wants to convey to the crowd with the interviewer as middle hand" (translated from Jacobsen Krag. 1993). There are different methods that can be used when you conduct an interview; in this case a qualitative interview has been used. This method works as a tool to collect information that is difficult to acquire in another way. Surveys would have given different results. The qualitative interviews are characterized by the use of simple and straight questions that can lead to rich and also sometimes personal answers. When a qualitative interview has been used, the compilation done afterwards can help the researcher acquire a result full of information and opinions but also makes you able to find a pattern between the people that you have interviewed (Troost. 1997).

3.2 The selection

Eight students who study English 5 during their first year at the art and design program on upper secondary level in Sweden were asked if they wanted to be interviewed about their own perceptions of their English language learning ability. A teacher was contacted by email and asked if she had a class who she thought wanted to be interviewed. She recommended a class who were taking the art and design course. It had a good number of students (20) and the time of their upcoming lesson would fit perfectly to meet them for an interview. Upon arrival, the research was introduced, presented and explained to the class. Four girls and four boys were needed for the interviews, and there were no problems finding enough voluntary participants

who wanted to help out. The reason why four girls and four boys were asked was because a comparison between the genders was to be made.

3.3 Procedure

When it was time to conduct the interviews the students were visited during one of their English lessons. The interviews were done separately with each student. The interviews were conducted in a private room next to the classroom, which meant that the interviews could be done without interruption from anyone. Each interview took about seven to ten minutes to conduct depending on how much they spoke on each question. The interviews were held in Swedish so that the students would be able to express themselves in the best possible way. Their skills in English could prevent them from expressing themselves exactly as they wished, and therefore Swedish was preferred during the interviews. When the interviews were finished, the answers were translated into English. Seven out of eight students were recorded on a dictaphone. Each student was asked if it was fine to be recorded and everybody except one approved it. He wanted to be as anonymous as possible. Jan Trost says that peoples integrity must be respected during the interviews no matter what the aim is with the study and no matter who the person is, old, young, child or adult (1997 p. 58). By the use of a dictaphone the interviewer can concentrate more on the specific subject and the dynamics of the interview. The words, the breaks, the tone and similar things register on the dictaphone which makes it possible for interviewer to listen to it later (Kvale & Brinkman. 2009).

3.4 Reliability

Only eight students participated in this study. The reason why more students were not interviewed was due to the time limit. This study cannot be used to generalize how first grade students in upper secondary school look upon their own perception in language learning in general, but rather gives an example of it. Even if the reliability is not high if a general result wants to be reached, the answers from the participants can show some patterns and similarities that can be worth thinking about when teaching students in English.

The reliability in the students' answers can be seen as most likely truthful. There is always a risk that the interviewer affects the dynamic of the interview, which can lead to that the participants give answers that do not entirely reflects their opinions (Jan Trost 2010 p.134).

The interviews have been carried out in the same way for all the participants. The same questions have been asked to all students and have also been asked with the same type of

tone. The questions have been asked in the same order to everyone since the students' attitude towards some of the questions otherwise can change, which will affect their answers, which further might affect the reliability of the whole study (Jan Trost 2010 p. 131).

The study can be useful for teachers who teach language at the upper secondary school level and other people who want to get a view of how students think of their own language perception.

4. Result

In this section, the study will describe the answers that have been received from the interviews. The answers will show how the students feel about their own perception of English learning. The result will be presented in the same order as the interviews have been conducted which means that this section will contain three headings: *motivation, education and acquisition*. Under each heading, sub headings will be used to guide the reader through the text. Some quotations will be used to strengthen some of the answers where the students seem to generally agree, but it will also be used to show exceptions from the general understanding. Some information that will be presented under each topic might seem similar to what has already been presented. The reason behind this is that the same answers have been given by students on different questions, and in order to stay as true as possible to their opinions, I have decided to present it anyway.

4.1 Motivation

4.1.1 Motivation to learn a foreign language

The general response from all the first year students in upper secondary who attended the interviews conducted for this study was that everyone was motivated to learn English because it is an international language. All the students think of the English language as something that is needed to have knowledge about in order to make themselves understood when they need to. Another common answer to the question was that they wanted to learn English in order to be able to communicate with people all over the world. Some quotations from the students explain this: “Well, in general the main reason is because the English language is a very important language in the modern world” says one student while another one says “You won’t survive without knowing the English language”.

The class that was interviewed read the art and design program and therefore some of the participants in the interviews said that it was motivating to learn English because they feel that they will need the language when they start working. They said they have to learn English in order to be able to communicate with people they are going to work with since they have plans to work abroad, as one student explains it: “It is very good to know the English language, it will help me when I begin to work abroad...cause that is what I want to do after school..”.

Three of the students said that one of the things that motivate them to learn English in school is to get a good grade. They want to have a grade as good as possible in order to get

the points they need to be able to study at the university they want, as one student said: “For me it is important to get a good grade, because it is hard to qualify for the university education I want to attend”.

Some students were not as motivated as others were though. One of the students even said that the main reason why he went to English class was that he had to. He felt that he was not motivated to learn English; he only went to English class because he felt that he was obligated to do so, which he explains: “ehh I go to my English class because I have to.. to get the grade I need.. .ehh.. there is nothing special that motivates me to learn English”.

4.1.2 Motivations in the classroom

During class, a general understanding among students is that to communicate in English is what motivates them the best. They get motivated to be a better English speaker. They also mention the word fun, they think it is fun to speak English. Another thing that some of the students considered motivating was writing. They enjoyed writing and found it motivating to work with projects that included a writing assignment, as one of the students says: “The most important thing is to be able to speak and to make yourself understood. Writing and speaking are the things that I found most important when it comes to language”

One student said that it sometimes was motivating to learn grammar, but the explanation behind it was that she wanted to be able to brag to her friends that she was good at grammar. She also thought that knowledge of grammar would give her a better grade.

Reading was also something that a few mentioned as motivating. They found reading as something inspiring because they thought reading a good book would improve their English skills. One answer that differed from the rest was the answer a boy gave: “I want to be able to use different dialects... because it is funny”.

Another thing that came up was the great thing about working in groups. One of the students felt that he liked working in groups since he then could get help from his classmates. He said that if there was something that he needed help with, he could ask them. He also mentions the opposite, that maybe he has some knowledge in a subject that one of his group members does not have.

Finally, one of the students said that she liked to work without any frames; she wanted to have an open mind and be creative when working with her English assignments.

4.1.3 Expected area of future usage

Five out of eight students said that they wanted to use their English when they start working. These five students wanted to work abroad and aimed at becoming an international artist. Another answer that was common among the students was the wish to become a good English speaker so they could communicate with people. One of the girls said that she wished to develop her knowledge in the language so that she can help other people if they need help. She wants to be able to understand people from other countries, and to be able to communicate with them. She says it in her own words: “I am planning to move to England or something like that.. sometime.. just to live there and improve my English and experience another culture”. She continuous to explains it: “I want to become an international artist and therefore I want to be able to communicate with all the people that I meet...I do not want there to be any misunderstanding between the people I have a conversations with”.

Two of the students mentioned that the main reason for them to be motivated was to work with assignments that felt rewarding and stimulating, for example to work with grammar, their oral speech and vocabulary.

4.2 Education

4.2.1 Expectations and experiences

One of the questions that the students had to answer was how they experienced the difficulty level of their English lessons. Do the students feel that it is too easy to participate during class or do they feel that it is too hard for them to get along? To get an easy overview of the results I presented them in a table:

Difficulty level	Females	Males
Very easy		1
Easy	1	1
Average	2	2
Hard	1	
Very hard		

Table 1. Shows what the female and male students think about the difficulty level of their English lessons. The numbers symbolizes the number of students that have answered each level as their answer. There were four girls and four boys participating.

Of all the students that were asked there was only one girl who thought that their English lessons were difficult to understand, but at the same time, the student said that this was

something good. She said that if she would not feel it was difficult, she would not be able to learn something during class. All the other students felt that the English lessons were easy or average. Even though they felt this way, most of them thought that they were learning something. However, one of the students said: “It is too easy; this is something that we would have done in seventh grade. It might be me who has developed too fast but I feel that I want to have bigger challenges than this”

The students experience that there are some parts during class that motivate them more than others. Most of the participants asked for more oral speech during class. They felt that it was not enough of it during their English lessons. One student said that he wanted to have a better balance between the different areas, such as oral, writing and reading.

Grammar is something the students also mentioned. The students felt that it was good to have grammar occasionally because that would lead to them remembering some important structures of the English language. Even though most of the students felt that grammar was boring, they thought it was important to learn.

One girl said that she felt she was missing education in the history of the English language. She explained that it would be a great subject to have knowledge about since it would give her a better understanding of the language. She thought that this would give her knowledge of how the language has developed over the years.

The students’ expectations of what they are learning during their English classes are quite similar to each other. Three of the students said that they thought that their English class contained what they expected it to contain. Some students thought that they spoke too little English during class and focused more on other areas, such as writing, but they expected more speaking to come in the future. One of the students explains it like this: “I do not want to add anything into the English education and I do not feel that I want to replace something either because I guess that we will be in contact with all the areas eventually”. You can say that they generally wanted a better balance between the different areas, but other than that, they were quite satisfied with what their English classes contain.

One interesting answer that stood out from all the others was an answer from a female student, she said:

I want our class to cooperate with a class from a foreign country...another country...because then it will be quite different. If this would be the case it would lead to that we have to work much harder with our English skills since here in Sweden we can always talk

Swedish if we do not understand each other. This would lead to a better understanding of the English language and you would also experience the language in a different way compared to when talking to your classmates.

Two of the students experience that it is rewarding to work in groups or pairs during class. They felt that they learned a lot from it and that they could learn from each other as well as from the teacher. One of the students said: “I have experienced that I learn a lot from working in groups or in pairs since I feel that I can develop much more from this than from working individually”.

4.2.2 Expectations on the teacher

The students had many interesting and different opinions about how they wish that their English teacher should act to motivate them. One of the students explained his opinions like this: “I want the teachers to have good knowledge in the language...feel secure...the teachers must have a willingness to teach”. Another student describes it as follows:

I think the teacher should be stricter, since that would probably lead to a better working climate in the classroom, no classmate would fool around and disturb. I also think that the teacher only should use English during class. I feel that most of the English teachers are using the Swedish language when they feel that they want to say something that is extra important.. better if they tried to explain it in English instead.

Many of the students said that they expected their teacher to be nice and not too strict, but they also pointed out that they did not want the teacher to be too nice either because that could lead to less respect towards him or her. Both the male and female students mentioned that one of the most important things for a teacher is to be capable of motivating his or her students during class. The teacher is expected to be able to help the students in a pedagogic way so they can develop their English skills. Six of the eight students mentioned that it was important for the teacher to adapt the language to the students' level and not speak on a level that will be too hard for them to understand. Another thing that was brought up was the positive energy

that the students want the teacher to have. The teacher had to be positive and be able to spread joy in the classroom since it inspired the students to learn more. They all wanted a teacher who could give them feedback, both positive and negative. They said that the feedback would lead to a better understanding of what they needed to improve. The positive feedback is important for self-confidence; it is always nice to hear that you have done a good job. A positive teacher, with good knowledge about his or her subject and that is able to educate with variation is what defines a good teacher according to the students' that were interviewed, characteristics that all teachers want to have.

4.3 Acquisition

4.3.1 Students' language development

All of the students mentioned during the interviews that the largest source to learn English is through media, for example Internet and movies without Swedish subtitles. Most of the students said that they spent a lot of their spare time in front of the computer, and therefore many of their English language skills have improved since they started to speak with friends with another mother tongue through the Internet. One of the students explains: "The media, I use different medias such as Internet and watch movies. I have a lot of friends who live in North America and Great Britain, we communicate everyday through Skype".

Some of the students also read a lot of books in English and that improved their understanding of the language as well. One of the students mentioned that she travels a lot and that this was something very rewarding that helped her improve her English skills.

4.3.2 Self-evaluation

One of the questions the students had to answer was how they evaluated themselves in different knowledge areas in the English language. To get an easy overview of the results, they are presented below in a table.

	Very Bad	Bad	Average	Good	Very Good
Grammar	1	1	2	3	1
Speaking	0	0	2	3	3
Reading	0	0	1	4	3
Writing	0	0	2	4	2
Listening	0	0	3	3	2

Table 2. Shows how the participants evaluate their own English language skills. The numbers give information about how many of the students that think they have very bad-, bad-,

average-, good- and very good knowledge in the English language. The total number of participants was eight students.

The result of how the students look upon their own skills in different English areas, such as grammar, writing, reading, speaking and the understanding of the language showed that most of the students felt that they in general had good knowledge of the English language. The results also showed that most of the students felt that grammar is something that they are not as good at, as they are in other areas. Only one of the students gave himself the highest score in grammar. The area that the students considered themselves to perform best in was reading, where four students thought they were good and three answered that they were very good.

The answers from the girls and boys differed from each other and therefore their results have been presented in two separate tables. The girls' answers are presented first here below.

	Very Bad	Bad	Average	Good	Very Good
Grammar	1	1	2	0	0
Speaking	0	0	1	2	1
Reading	0	0	1	1	2
Writing	0	0	1	2	1
Listening	0	0	2	2	0

Table 3. Shows how the female students evaluated themselves in the areas mentioned above. Four girls participated.

When looking at table 2, we can see that the results from the girls' answers are similar to the result presented in table 1. They thought that grammar was the area they performed worst in, no one evaluated themselves to be better than average at it. They consider reading to be their strongest area. As we can see two of the girls thought they were very good at it. In general we can also see that the girls consider themselves to be at least average in all areas, with the exception of grammar. Here are the answers from the boys who participated:

	Very Bad	Bad	Average	Good	Very Good
Grammar	0	0	0	3	1
Speaking	0	0	1	2	1
Reading	0	0	0	3	1
Writing	0	0	1	2	1
Listening	0	0	1	1	2

Table 4. Shows how the male students evaluated themselves in the areas mentioned above. Four boys participated.

The boys answers differs quite a lot from the girls answers. To begin with, the boys consider themselves to be average or above in all of the areas. Everyone thinks that they are either good or very good at grammar and reading. Two of them also think that they are very good at listening. Speaking and writing are the areas where the boys consider themselves to perform the worst, but they still believe that they generally perform well in these areas.

The biggest difference between the genders is their self-evaluation about their grammar skills. The boys consider themselves to be quite good at it while the girls consider themselves to be barely average. Other than that, the girls and the boys have answered quite similarly to each other, with only small differences.

The results showed that many of the students were very aware of their language skills. One girl reflected on how she learned the English language:

When I study English, I have to pay extra attention to what I am trying to express. I have to concentrate extra hard on what kind of words that I am supposed to use and things like that. It is as I have to use many different thoughts at the same time, it can get confusing. It is not like that when I am using the Swedish language. When I do that the words and everything comes automatically.

A question was also asked regarding what area they wanted to improve mostly. Since the interview contains an equal number of girls and boys, three tables have been made. The first table will show what areas both genders wish to improve in and the second and third table will separate the genders to see if there is any differences between the female and male students.

Both genders	Number of students
Grammar	5
Speaking	2
Reading	1
Writing	0
Listening	0

Table 5. Shows both genders thoughts of what area they wish to improve. There were eight students participating.

Five of the eight participants felt hat they needed to become better at grammar. When these five students were asked what they needed to improve, they did not have to think of what to

answer, they said grammar right away. The other three students had some second thoughts before they could answer, but one of those three said reading and the other two said speaking. The answers from the female students are presented below:

Female	Number of students
Grammar	3
Speaking	1
Reading	0
Writing	0
Listening	0

Table 6. Shows what the females wishes to improve in. Four girls participated.

The results show that three out of four girls wished to improve their grammar. Only one girl answered speaking. The answers from the male students are presented below:

Male	
Grammar	2
Speaking	1
Reading	1
Writing	0
Listening	0

Table 7. Shows what the males wishes to improve in. Four boys participated

The results showed that two boys wished to improve their grammar while the two other boys said speaking and reading.

When comparing the genders, the results shows that females and males want to improve their grammar mostly. There was one boy who wished to improve his reading, the rest of the students answered grammar or speaking.

5. Analysis

In this section, the results that were brought up in the last section will be analyzed. The analysis will combine the interview results with the theories that have been brought up in section 2. The structure and the headings will be the same as in the result section. The headings are: Motivations, Educations and Acquisition.

5.1 Motivation

What drives the students?

When the eight students on the art and design program were interviewed, all of them said that the English language was something that everybody needed to be able to understand. It is an international language, they said, and most of them felt that they had to learn it so that they can communicate easier when they start working. The biggest motivation for these students was to learn the language for future usage, because they mentioned that they felt that they have to move abroad to make a career as a designer, which they wanted to become. The second thing that almost everyone mentioned was the need to learn English so that they can communicate with people from other countries. Once again, they wanted to be able to communicate with everybody they will meet during their job as a designer. The same thing was brought up when discussing what motivates them to learn English in the classroom. They felt that the greatest motivation was to communicate with each other in English. Simplified, spoken English was what motivated the students the most. This answer can be linked to Gunnemarks's research, section 2.5, where he writes that the main reason that motivates a person to learn a foreign language is usually the need to be able to communicate with people from different countries (p.13).

Another thing that was brought up during the interviews was if it was motivating for students to learn English just to get a good grade. Some of the students thought so, and they wanted to get a good grade so that they could pass the requirements easier and get into the university.

Of all the students, there was only one that said that nothing motivated him to learn English, he only went to the English class because he had to. Motivation problems like this one are a big challenge for teachers today, and further on in this analyze it will be brought up how motivations problems can be dealt with.

5.2 Education

Everyone brings different expectations and experiences from things they have gone through in life. The interview gave some answers about what difficulty level the students thought that their English classes were put on. The result showed that a majority of the students thought that their classes were at an average level, but two of them said they were easy. One male student even experienced the classes as very easy. Even though most of the students felt that the lessons were at an average level, or easy, they still felt that they were leaning during class. This means that their teacher has adapted the English classes to a level fit for the students, something that Krashen speaks of. He has created a theory called the monitor model. This model is founded upon beliefs that a person who speaks his or her first language to someone with another first language, adapts it to a level so that person understands it easier. In this case, the English teacher has adapted the language to an appropriate level so the students can better understand and learn from it. Not only did the teacher adapt the English level according to the different students' needs, this was also something they expected. More about Krashen's theory can be found in section 2.4.

Some of the students wanted to get a chance to practice their oral speech more often. When looking at the curriculum, it can be seen that the students should get a chance to practice their oral speech so that they feel more confident when speaking. This is a section from the curriculum: "Through education the students shall also be given the opportunity to develop their linguistic confidence in speech".

One interesting point that many of the students brought up was how much more they felt that they developed when they were working in groups. They talked about how much they could learn from each other. If someone had trouble with something, another classmate from the group most often could help. In Lightbown & Spada you can read about the socio-culture theory, that is founded upon the beliefs that interaction with other individuals will help persons to develop in many different areas, including language (p.47, 2011). The theory explains that when people work together they will help each other to reach a higher level. This can even be called a zone of proximal development (Lightbown & Spada, 2011, p. 47). Since this is something that the students seem to agree on, the socio-cultural theory can be considered relevant among the students that have been interviewed for this essay.

One of the greatest scientists when it comes to motivation in the classroom, is Zoltán Dörnyei. He has conducted many studies on what it is that motivates people to learn a language and how important the teacher's behaviour is and how it affects the persons he or

she teaches. Dörnyei highlights three different points that will affect the student's motivation to learn a language in class:

- Appropriate teacher behaviours and a good relationship with the other students
- A pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere
- A cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms

With Dörnyei's theories in mind, it is easier to understand the answers given by the students. The students explained how important it is for the teacher to act in a certain way, and the words positive, spreading joy, being nice and inspiring are just some of the words that were brought up during the interviews. All these words can be easily connected to the points Dörnyei brings up. A good relationship with other students and their teacher, and a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere are things that help motivate the students to be more focused during lessons, and therefore improve their chances of learning a new language well.

Another thing that the students expected was that their teacher spoke English during class. In the latest curriculum from 2011, it is written that it is mandatory for teachers to use English during class, so this is an expectation that should always be met. More about the curriculums in section 2.6.

During the interviews, the students also discussed that they wanted feedback from their teachers. This is something that can be related to the behaviourism theory. Scientists that developed the behaviourism theory say that humans develop their language skills through feedback. When a student has done something good, he or she should be rewarded, for example with a constructive compliment. The students said that they wanted their teacher to give them feedback if they did something good, not only when they had done something wrong, which proves the behaviourism theory to be true on this group of students.

5.3 Acquisition

There was no question about where the students thought that they learned most of their English. All of the students said that they spent a lot of time in front of the computer. The computer was their main instrument to get in contact with the English language. They mentioned how they spoke to people outside of Sweden by using their computer, and that was how they learned English in the best possible way according to themselves. Some of the students said that they spoke daily with their friends by using the computer. One of the female

students brought up how traveling to English-speaking countries developed her English skills. This is because she gets forced to speak English or else she will not get understood. When the students mention how important talking to people by using the computer and when traveling is, it gives an idea of how important social meetings are for the students to develop their English skills. The Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotskij is one of the main thinkers who have helped developed the socio-cultural theory. The theory is founded upon beliefs that personal development occurs when people interact with other people. The answers given by the students about English language development confirm that this theory is correct when looking at this specific group of students.

During the interviews, questions about how the students evaluated their own skills in different English areas such as grammar, writing, reading, speaking and the understanding of the language were asked. The result showed that the students, in general, thought that they had quite good knowledge of the English language. The area that they felt that they were worst in was grammar. One of the female students reflected on her vocabulary skills, which she felt that she had to improve:

When I study the English language I have to pay extra attention to what am trying to express, I have to put my mind to which kind of words that I am suppose to use and things like that. It is like I have to use many different thoughts at the same time, it can get confusing. It is not like that when I am using the Swedish language, when I do that the words and everything come automatically.

The cognitive theory comes to mind when analyzing this quote. The student is still on a level of understanding where she has to pay extra attention to different words and expressions in English. However, she is not totally unfamiliar with the language, she does not have to think hard about everything she is trying to tell, some things start to come automatically. This is because she has developed her knowledge within the English language enough to create sentences without thinking of every word she is trying to express (Lightbown & Spada, 2011, p.39-40).

The next question to the students was what areas they wanted to improve in. The students were quite consistent about what areas they wished to improve. Six out of eight students said that grammar was the area they thought they were worst in. Some of them said that they wished that grammar should appear more often during their English lessons, but at the same

time, a majority of the students wanted to practice their oral speech-skills more often. This is quite interesting since they answered that they wished to improve their grammar, but at the same time, they say that they wish to have more oral speech during their English lessons. One reason for this might be that they think it is more fun to practice their oral speech compared to having grammar lessons, but they are still conscious about that their skills in grammar need to be improved.

6. Conclusion

The headings that follow are the three different questions that were framed in order to answer the study's aim, as follows: What is it that motivates students to learn English? How do students learn English in the best possible way? How do students experience their education in the classroom? Finally, some points will be brought up that might be interesting for future research.

6.1 What is it that motivates students to learn English?

The main thing that motivates the students that have been interviewed to learn English is the ability to communicate with people from foreign countries. These students were enrolled in an art and design oriented education and most of the students had the ambition to work abroad after they had finished their education. Therefore, they felt that they needed to be good at English since it is an international language that they probably will use if they work abroad in the future.

In the classroom, the students also found speaking highly motivating. By putting these answers in context with what Erik V. Gunnemark has written on page 13 in his book, it can be argued that the main thing that motivates a person to learn a foreign language is usually the need to be able to communicate with people from foreign countries

6.2 How do students learn English in the best possible way?

All of the participants said that media, foremost the computer, was the main source they used to learn English. All of the students spent a lot of time in front of the computer. They communicate with friends from other countries by speaking through a web-based communications program called Skype and by writing to each other by using different chat programs.

In the classroom, many of the students felt that working in groups was something that helped the students to develop their English.

By looking at the socio-cultural theory that was brought up in section 2.3, it can be seen that the best way of learning is by communicating with other people, which clearly is along the lines of what the students thought as well.

6.3 How do students experience their education in the classroom?

The general answer from the students about what level they experience their English lessons to be at was that they were put on an average level. The area that they wanted the teacher to focus more on in the classroom was oral speech, but overall they mentioned that they thought there was a quite good balance between the different areas, such as grammar, speaking, writing, reading and listening.

Many of the students mentioned how important it is for the teacher to be aware of how he or she acts and behaves in the classroom. Zoltán Dörnyei has pointed out three important factors that will affect the students' motivation to learn a language in class:

- Appropriate teacher behaviours and a good relationship with the students
- A pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere
- A cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms

By looking at the answers from the participants of the interview conducted for this essay, it can be seen that these answers are well in line with the three factors that Dörnyei has pointed out.

Feedback from the teacher was also a thing that many students found important. They wanted to know if they had done a great job or if they needed to improve. Scientists and founders of the behaviourism theory believe in a reward system, which feedback is an example of. Therefore, this theory can be closely linked to the students' wishes of getting feedback.

One last thing that many of the students mentioned was how important it was for the teacher to adapt his or hers language level to be in line with the students' knowledge. They wanted the teacher to express his- or herself on their level so that they could better learn and understand. This could be linked to Krashen's theory, closely explained in section 2.4, where he expresses the importance of language adaptation.

6.4 Suggestions on further research

During the process of working with this essay, ideas on further research have come up. One approach you could take would be to interview students that have participated in studies about self-perception in language learning, just as the students interviewed in this study, in the future. A study like that would be a follow-up interview, were the students would be asked if their pre conceived opinions about their future use of the English language came true or not. Did the students get any use of the language and did they get to use it in the same ways as they thought they would? It would also be interesting to do a research to see if there are any differences in the student's motivation to learn two different languages. English is a mandatory subject in school while for example German, French and Spanish are electives. Does this have any impact on the students' motivation to learn the languages? There are of course many more approaches you could take when doing further research on the subject of self-perception in language learning, but the examples mentioned above are all easy to connect to this study and are therefore suitable choices.

7. Literature

7.1 Primary sources

Answers from the students on the questions presented below in the appendix.

7.2 Secondary sources

Arnqvist, Anders (1993). *Barns språkutveckling*. Lund: Studentlitteratur

Abrahamsson, Niclas (2009). *Andraspråksinlärning*. 1. uppl. Lund: Studentlitteratur

Gunnemark, Erik V. (1996). *Konsten att lära sig språk*. Göteborg: Förf.

Håkansson, Gisela (1998). *Språkinlärning hos barn*. Lund: Studentlitteratur

Johansson, Bo och Svedner, Per Olov. (2006). *Examensarbete i lärarutbildningen-undersökningsmetoder och språklig utformning*. Tryck:

X-O Graf Tryckeri AB, Uppsala

Lightbown, Patsy M. & Spada, Nina (2006). *How languages are learned*. 3. ed. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press

Sigurd, Bengt & Håkansson, Gisela (2007). *Språk, språkinlärning och språkforskning*. 2., [rev. och utvidgade] uppl. Lund: Studentlitteratur

Skolverket (2011). *Läroplan, examensmål och gymnasie gemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011*. Stockholm: Edita

Svensson, Ann-Katrin (2009). *Barnet, språket och miljön: från ord till mening*. 2., omarb. uppl. Lund: Studentlitteratur

Trost, Jan.(1997) *Kvalitativa intervjuer*. Studentlitteratur Lund.

8. Appendix

Interview survey

Motivation

1. What is it that motivates you to improve your knowledge in English?
2. When do you think/hope you can use your English language skills in the future?
3. What area in language learning motivates you to improve? For example, Writing, reading, communicate, grammar and so on.
4. What do you think is motivating to work with during your English lessons?

Education

1. How hard do you think the English lessons are? Too easy?, Easy?, Just right?, Hard?, Too hard?
2. What areas do you wish more focus was put on in class? Writing, reading, communication, grammar and so on.
3. What kind of language practicing do you consider most rewarding? Writing, reading, communication, grammar and so on.
4. If you were able to replace something or add something in the English education, what would it be?
5. How do you feel that an English teacher should act in order to teach and inspire you the best?

Acquisition

1. Do you use the English language during your spare time?
2. How do you experience your own English language skills on a scale from 1-5? Rate each category separately: Writing, reading, listening, grammar and communication.
3. Through which channels do you learn English the best? For example: media, school, friends, family and so on.
4. What area in English do you wish to improve the most? For example: Writing, reading, communication, grammar and so on.

