Extramural English in the Global ESL Classroom

- A study of motivation, collaboration and learning in ESL

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**Abstract**

The purpose with this essay is to research the correlation between students’ motivation in activities and their English language learning. Since there are growing demands on young learners in Sweden to learn languages and a growing need from the global society of a shared means of communication, there is also a need to reevaluate the ESL classroom activities. This essay is written as an argumentative text with support of recent studies and concludes with some suggestions for classroom activities for the ESL classroom, with the goal to create a more authentic learning environment for the students. The most important argument in this essay is that the teachers need up-to-date knowledge of the subject and of the different activities students use in their spare time to be able to create more authentic learning environment. Another argument is that there is a correlation between students’ motivation, their learning, and the students’ collaboration in the learning process.
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Introduction

The learning of English has taken place outside the classroom for many years, but ever since computers have become more common in most homes, students meet the English language more in their home environment than in the classroom. Most technology and internet websites are based on the English language, so the more common internet, computers and other media become, the more English most children encounter in their home environment, even at a younger age. But why is it that students learn so much English? Does this happen as they are exposed to English through video-games, music, films, books and chatting? Or is there something more behind it?

Most Swedish children also speak and interact with the Swedish language every day, but it is still the English language that cause more surprise in the grown-ups when children know complicated words, phrases. Sometimes they even say something in English, but do not know how to describe it in Swedish clearly. The difference in language skills between Swedish and English is something that clearly separates the generations, with the English language getting a larger role in modern times than before. In a globalised society with endless possibilities of communicating with other people worldwide, the need for a shared language grows stronger, and since the English language is so widely spread around the world it is only natural that most people communicate through the English language when they interact with different nationalities.

As I was searching for studies on English as a Second Language (ESL) and Extramural English (EE) activities, many of the hits were degree papers. The sheer number is an indicator that many student teachers consider this subject important, and also that the field of teaching English in Sweden is a relatively young subject. Most of the research done in the field concerns Swedish primary-school and up. It is my belief, however, that these theories and this research could be adapted to even younger learners, as the more technology develops, the more globalized children become even at age 6.

Many younger children grow up today with phones, computers, games or other media, most often in English. Therefore I believe that it is important to develop a connection between the English education the students get from school and the mediations of an extramural nature, such as video games, books, films and chatting. Since technology and research develop every day, this also means that the field of extramural English (EE) i.e. the English that children learn outside the classroom, and English as a Second Language (ESL) i.e. how children learn the language when it is not their mother tongue, needs to be addressed from a recent
point of view with research done in the recent five years. The field of EE and ESL face a big challenge in keeping the research up to date.

**Purpose and structure**

In this essay I will claim that by relating English language teaching in Sweden to the students’ extramural activities, the students will become more motivated to engage in English literacy and also to expand their vocabulary. Furthermore, I will draw on previous research in EE and in motivation to suggest some methods how to integrate EE activities into the classroom.

Before proving my thesis I will present a background with some of the research that has been done in the field of EE. Also, I will present some of the research in the field of ESL. In the discussion section of this essay I will present the arguments for why EE needs to be addressed even in the classroom, basing my arguments with theories from language acquisition and literacy. I will then address the question of how a teacher can work with students’ language learning, and how it may be connected to the students’ motivation. I will also attempt to suggest some activities that may enhance students’ motivation in language learning and to raise their awareness of their own learning, so that they will be inspired to learn more.

**Background**

In this section I will define EE and give a short account of ESL and explain how it will be further treated in this essay. I will also give a short history of the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) method to give some support for the discussion in the later part of the essay.

Even as early as the 1950’s, CALL was believed to be the future tool for language learning. In 1997 the theory of CALL was redefined as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (Chick, 2013:835), implicating that the focus of the research should be learning and teaching a second language. In 2005 the theory of CALL was redefined once more as “using computers to support language teaching and learning in some way” (Chick, 2013:835). This redefinition already suggests that CALL was no longer limited to programmes specifically designed for pedagogical purposes could be used in second language teaching. Finally, in 2010 the theory of CALL was redefined again as “any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improve his or her language” (Chick, 2013:835). This latest redefinition of the CALL theory implies that computers are such a normalized tool that the question is not if the
computer helps develop the language, but how to best use it in the language learning process (Chick, 2013:835).

EE is defined as “linguistic activities in English that learners do or are involved in outside the classroom in their spare time” (Sundqvist, 2009: i). With this in mind I will refer to EE activities for example, video-games, reading books, watching films, listening to music, chatting etc. as long as they happen mostly in English. There are two major differences which separate the EE activities: if they are active, i.e. video-games or internet search, etc. or passive, i.e. watching films or listening to music, etc. In previous research it has also been suggested that since it is more common for boys to engage in more active EE activities, for example video-games, and for girls to engage in more passive activities, such as listening to music, there is a gender difference in how much EE helps boys and girls respectively, where the more active EE activities helps boys more, since they spend more time with those activities, whereas passive activities that girls spend more time with do not help equally. Also no differences have been found between different sociocultural categories such as ethnicity and social class (Sundqvist, 2009).

In this essay I will use ESL rather than EFL (English as a foreign language) since English as a second language implies that the learners interact with the language in a more genuine environment, often used in countries with two main languages of communication. Foreign implies that the language is mainly accessed in the classroom and not used mainly in the surrounding society. English is indeed so easily accessed in most Swedes’ spare time that it would be difficult to treat English as a foreign language to the students in Sweden (Sundqvist, 2009:10). In recent years it has been made clear that in our modern age there is no longer a need to differentiate between languages as foreign or second, since the globalisation actually makes all the languages accessible through the internet and other media. Even though the languages are taught/learned with different methods and for different purposes the main goal for learning the language are the same (Sundqvist and Sylvén, 2016:25-26).

Furthermore I will in this essay make a distinction between language acquisition and language learning. Language acquisition refers to acquiring something subconsciously, not with an intention of learning, and learning being defined as a process, where the learner/student is aware of what s/he is supposed to learn (Sundqvist, 2009:10).

In light of these previous definitions in the field of ESL I will also treat any reference to language learning other than the mother-tongue language as second language learning or acquisition. Furthermore, I will make a distinction between learning a language consciously and the unconscious acquisition of the language.
Discussion

EE activities in the ESL classroom

Both of the two leading researchers in the Swedish field of EE and ESL, Sylvén and Sundqvist (2016), find that there is a positive correlation between EE activities and students’ vocabulary and literacy proficiency, and even though they do not explicitly state that there is no reason why EE activities should not be used in ESL education, one might still get that impression when reading their work. In the discussion section of this essay I will present some of the EE activities and their correlation to ESL motivation and discuss why they need to be taken into consideration in the ESL classroom.

In ESL learning the learners learn best if they get to use the language in a genuine way, in genuine activities, so the learner learns how to interact with, rather than just mimicking the language. Research in the field of ESL suggests that a learner of a second language needs to use the language in genuine environments and to get the opportunity to produce and interact with the language to fully master it (Sylvén and Sundqvist, 2012:305). There is even more extensive research which suggests that the more active the students are in their activity, the more they learn, since they use the language more and get to interact with it. We know, however, that it is not just the language that the students interact with: it is other people too (Sundqvist, 2009; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). One example of the more passive EE activities that Sundqvist and Sylvén (Sundqvist, 2009; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016) mention is listening to music, an activity where there is hardly any interaction with the people using the language and, more importantly, most people do not analyse the lyrics of the songs they hear but rather listen for enjoyment. The students mostly learn to mimic the words, pronunciation and sentence correlation, but not how to use the language or produce the language themselves. When the students engage in a more active EE activity they interact not only with the language, but also with people using the language - in a more genuine and authentic way, a trait supported as an important part when learning a new language (Draper, 2010). One of the more active EE activities suggested in the studies is playing video-games. As different studies show, the more the students interact with others, the more the language develops (Bergstrand & Fritzon Sund, 2016; Cabraja, 2016; Sundqvist, 2013; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). Therefore one important aspect to keep in mind in the ESL classroom is the opportunity to interact with the language in a genuine way, for example through the activities that the students meet English in their spare time.

The ESL learning process is not only connected to the pre-knowledge that students
have, but it also correlates with how motivated the students feel towards the activity. This was shown by studies made in 2015. One of the leading researchers in the Swedish field of EE (Sundqvist, 2015) did an in-depth interview with a boy who could not find the motivation to learn English in the ESL classroom. He found it in the video-games, however, through his own motivation to learn the language; he learned enough English to pass at second-semester university level through video-games. Motivation is not always found through oneself but for most people through collaboration, in a learning process shared with others. In a study made in 2016 results shows that students get more motivated to learn a new language by writing collaborative texts rather than writing individual texts. As the students were divided into two groups, those writing individually and those writing collaborative. The students were instructed to use google-docs, showing that students improved their English language skills more in a collaborative text rather than in individual ones. Furthermore, the students were more likely to correct and learn from different spelling errors when learning as a group rather than when learning individually (Liu and Lan, 2016:177-178). The study also shows that students working collaboratively developed more critical thinking than the students who wrote individual texts did (Liu & Lan, 2016:181). This correlation has also been seen in different studies on computer-games. In a study made in 2012, results show that the games that are more interactive, and more collaborative, are preferable when learning a second language (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012:305). In a study made in 2016 results also show a correlation between games with a more collaborative nature and language acquisition, than in those games where interaction with others and collaboration were not the main focus of the game (Cabraja, 2016:14). Therefore we see that motivation is one important aspect when students are learning a new language, and also that if the students collaborate functionally they learn more together than individually.

In 2013 Sundqvist (2013) – one of the leading researchers in the Swedish field of EE, as noted above - categorizes video-games based on their different levels of social interaction, the first category being single-player games where there is little-to-none social interaction with others. The second category she mentions is Multiplayer games, where there is more focus on the social interaction since the game is built to play with other players. The third category of games she mentions is Massive multiplayer online games, where gamers are probably spread around the world (Sundqvist, 2013:231). The study suggests that the more global the games are, the more likely the learners are to interact with different cultures and nationalities and therefore get more dependent on a shared language to communicate i.e. English (Sundqvist, 2013:235). Furthermore, the study acknowledges the fact that it is not as simple as to just di-
vide all the games into any number of categories. However, Sundqvist mentions that from a sociocultural perspective these three categories will suffice for the measurement of social interaction (Sundqvist, 2013:232).

Since we have seen, in the above discussion, there is a correlation between how motivated students are and how well the students learn the new language, we could also assume that the more the students learn a language, the more motivated the students become. With that in mind we should try to promote every student’s own learning as much as possible, and maybe also make the students own their own learning as much as possible, by making their learning visible for the students.

As previously shown, there are examples of out of school learning, one student even having learned a whole language proficiently as the student could not find the motivation in school (Sundqvist, 2015), which should suggest that motivation is the key to learning a language. However, the study also show that the boy felt more motivated as he became aware of his own learning progress, which gave him more motivation for the ESL learning. This should suggest that they are connected: the more language one learns, the more motivated one gets, and the more motivated one feels, the more one learns.

Through my investigation in this field I believe that I have found a third aspect of the relation of learning a new language, which is collaboration. It is, as we have seen in the above example, very possible for someone to learn a whole language by him/herself. However, there is almost always some sort of collaboration in a learning process, either voluntarily or involuntarily, and there we might identify the third key to unlocking one’s learning. As Liu and Lan’s study suggests, we have seen that the students learn a new language better through collaborative work rather than through individual work (Liu & Lan, 2016). The study also show that students felt more motivated through collaborative work rather than individual work, which correlates with the study showing that the more motivated the students feel, the more they learn, and vice versa (Sundqvist, 2015). Thereby we need to look at the correlation between, motivation, learning and collaboration which will be discussed in the next section of this essay.

The integration of EE in the ESL classroom

In the previous section of this essay we have seen that the EE activities develop plenty of useful skills for ESL language learners, and therefore it has an important role in the students’ language learning. We should therefore consider that students might even learn more English from EE activities than they do in school in some cases. Therefore we should try to make use
of these activities, and their positive effects in the ESL learning process, even in the classroom. The focus in this section will therefore be to analyse what it takes to successfully integrate EE into the classroom.

Firstly we need to address the importance of how well empowered teachers are, since the teachers need to be well educated in the modern technology and how it can be used optimally in the classroom. As is commonly known, some teachers feel overwhelmed by the different types of responsibilities and administrative tasks they have today, and most of them probably do not have time to plan the lessons as it is today, let alone integrate the student’s spare-time interests into the classroom. Therefore it is important for the different schools to give the teachers opportunity for in-service training. Even more importantly, most teachers probably do not feel that they have time to learn about the different games, books, and music and so on that kids engage themselves in today. However, studies (Fogelqvist, 2006) show that it is not only the students that need to be motivated in integrating EE acquisition into the classroom. The teacher also needs to be motivated and they also have to have competence and proper education on the subject of EE and how it could help in the classroom (Fogelqvist, 2006). When it comes to trying to use CALL in the classroom especially the use of technology, teachers’ knowledge need to be up-to-date. The correlation between how well empowered and educated the teacher is in the subject, in this case computer use in English as a second language teaching, and how well the teacher feels that s/he can help the students, is something that need to be taken into consideration in order for the activities to be effective. Previous studies of teacher competence student’s results, and effective methods, show a need for further education of teachers, since they have an important role in the students’ success in English as a second language (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016:92, 98-99).

As we have seen, in the above discussion, using CALL in the ESL classroom might be tricky (Chick, 2013). This also places a higher demand on the further education of teachers to be up-to-date on the subject. Therefore, as previously mentioned, the research on the subject of computer use for educational purpose needs to be approached with a fresh perspective since the technology changes. Bergstrand and Fritzon Sund suggest that in its current state, today’s video-games are not ready for use in the classroom for educational purpose since they are not created for educational purposes and are too ‘‘raw’’ (Bergstrand & Fritzon Sund, 2016). Bergstrand and Fritzon Sund also claim that students with a limited knowledge of the English language do not get the same help from video-games as those with basic knowledge of the English language. However, as we have seen in this essay the activities themselves are not necessarily the problem but rather the lack of relevant methods for the teachers.
One important aspect mentioned in research on second language learning is the correlation between authentic learning methods and situations that let the learners genuinely interact with the language. For example, in 2013 a platform called Mingoville.com was studied by Miller (2013). The platform is actually designed for the use of language learning in younger ages. The platform could be used in a classroom as a teaching tool (Miller, 2013). However, we could also imagine that if a game-based language platform should be used in the young learners’ classroom it could also mean that students with a limited language knowledge, as previously mentioned, could have trouble if they do not understand the assignment given in the game (Bergstrand & Fritzon Sund, 2016).

In the future field of CALL, video-games probably will be the next step to introduce into the classroom. Therefore it is important for schools and teachers already to start educating themselves in the subject of video-games and the different categories and implications on the different language skills in ESL related to the video-games (Chick, 2013:837-838). Even though many of the video-games might not yet be sophisticated enough to use directly in the ESL classroom as suggested by Bergstrand and Fritzon Sund (2016). I do believe that in a few years computer-games can be used in the ESL classroom and there is reason to assume that, as Chick (2015) suggests, the need for rephrasing the theory on CALL will probably soon include the usage of video-games as a standardized means of learning. Hopefully schools will fund the teacher’s education in these subjects so the students, schools and teachers all get the most out of the education.

Since Sweden has become more multilingual in recent years, it will probably be necessary for teachers to rethink how to integrate the students with another first language than Swedish, and the teacher will probably need to know how they use the target language could affect the students’ success (Draper, 2010:8-9). However, to be able to do this the teacher needs to know how students with different first languages learn a new language, the students chose one of their previous languages as a reference when comparing sentences, words etc. When teaching a class where every student uses the same first language it would be profitable for the teacher to include words in the first language as support when learning the target language (Draper, 2010). If the students use another language than Swedish as a reference when learning English and the teacher would use a first language in Swedish classrooms, the teacher most likely only knows Swedish and English, this could be a problem for those students (Draper, 2010:8-9). And it is therefore also important in multilingual classrooms to use the target language as much as possible so that everyone gets the same chance to learn the new language.
As mentioned above, studies show that the more active students are in their activities, the more they learn, in playing video-games, surfing the internet and reading etc. When the students do more active activities they are challenged and forced to use and interact with the language and thereby they have to rely on their language skills more than when they do the more passive activities, such as listening to music or watching films etc. (Sundqvist, 2009:203-204). Sundqvist’s study also suggests that boys and girls are interested in different kinds of EE activities, which is evident in the analysis of the results between boys and girls. The gender difference noted is thereby not that boys are more receptive to language acquisition, but rather that they more often engage in more active EE activities than girls who spend more time with the more passive EE activities (Sundqvist 2009:203). Therefore, this needs to be taken into consideration when trying to teach the English language, to best adapt the teaching environment to the students’ background, and how to engage the students in activities, and what sort of activities could be appropriate to each student (Sundqvist, 2009:205). Furthermore, there is not only the gender differences to be addressed but also what exercise is best suited for what age, one example being that “explicit grammar instruction is, for several reasons, pointless in classrooms filled with eight-year-olds, most obviously because the great majority of eight-year-olds lack the cognitive ability to deal with abstract thinking, which is a prerequisite for successful processing of explicit grammar instruction” (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016:94). For the teacher to design effective activities, it is not enough for them to be competent in the subject. As we seen, it is also important for teachers to know factors that affect language learning, such as how age affects learning (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016), how different activities motivate boys and girls differently, and the importance of active learning (Sundqvist, 2013; Sylvén & Sundquist, 2012). It is therefore important not to just mimic the language that a student is trying to learn, but also to put it into a situation where the student actually are able to use his/her language skills, and to make genuine use of those skills.

To be able to design effective ESL classroom activities, it is important to consider the correlation between learning, motivation, and collaboration. They form the basis for a functioning means of communication. For students to be able to communicate effectively, they may for instance need a shared language when playing video-games (Sundqvist, 2013). They may need to be on the same level, and they also need to feel that they contribute to each other’s learning. The relation could be described by the following
I would like to discuss the relation between motivation (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016; Liu & Lan, 2016) and collaboration (Draper, 2010; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). In order for students to learn English effectively, they need to be motivated. In order to be motivated, they need to see what they can learn, as seen by the example from Sundqvist quoted above. In order for students to be motivated to collaborate, they need to feel included, as we have seen above; collaboration enhances learning and motivation (Liu & Lan, 2016; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). But for everyone to feel included, a means of communication is needed, otherwise the risk is that the different participants may continue to work individually. The students need to learn something from the collaboration, which can only happen if they can, indeed, communicate. This is a challenge, particularly in the multilingual classroom, as previously mentioned. Most of the foreign languages, the teachers do not master themselves. As studies by both Draper and Sundqvist and Sylvén stress, it is important that instructions are accessible for everyone in the ESL classroom, both teachers and students. The best way, as mentioned above, is to use the target language as much as possible. (Draper, 2010; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016).
**Suggestion for classroom activities**

We can see that the integration of EE activities, such as video-games to and music, is not an easy task, especially not in a classroom with mixed interests, various languages or preferences. However, I want to apply the didactic aspects above to lesson plans, with the goal of creating a more genuine classroom environment for English language learning.

In light of the discussion above, the ESL teacher need to be up-to-date in many areas to provide effective activities for the students. There is no doubt that every teacher wants every student to get as much as possible out of the their lessons and, as we have seen, that it is not an easy task in a subject that is constantly changing and developing, especially in view of the EE activities. But with a base in the aspects of ESL learning discussed above, I will suggest some classroom activities that could integrate some students’ EE activities into the ESL classroom. I understand that these activities will not work in every ESL classroom.

There have been increased demands on the language education in Swedish education even in younger ages, as the country is getting more multicultural, and with the increasing demands relating to the national tests, such as PISA. With that in mind it is important that activities include everyone, even those with another first language than Swedish. The first activity, then, starts with the teacher giving everyone a pencil and a paper to write their names which they show each other. Then the teacher starts by saying: “My name is…, what is your name?” The students continue to ask each other. This first part is mainly for everyone to get the idea of what to do, it would be optimal if this is done in L2, as we have seen in the discussion about the multilingual classroom. Then the teacher writes and paints a simple picture of what students like, or want to do in their spare time, or in the future, e.g. working as a teacher, riding a horse etc. After saying what s/he likes, the teachers asks the class: “What do you like?” If a student doesn’t know how to say it s/he may try to describe it with body language or charades, or ask if another student can explain what it is they like. This exercise is supposed to partly activate the communication in a fun and genuine way, but it also takes into consideration that the students may have different first languages. Therefore it focuses on using the target language as much as possible. Probably there will be students that can relate to what the other students like, they may find a shared interests, and this may strengthen the communication and collaboration between students. Questions may be used, for example, the teacher asks: “I am in school, how do I get to the bank?”, using as many words as possible that sounds like the Swedish equivalent, or common words on signs, like “stop”. This will engage most students in trying to explore the language in different ways. If the students are
too young to write, or have not yet learned to write, this could be a challenging exercise and they can try to paint a picture of what they want to say at least or maybe get the option to pass on, letting another student try.

The second exercise relates to different music tastes in the class. The students are either separated into different groups, based on music genre, or get different parts of a popular song, such as a melody festival song. With the help of a dictionary they may try to translate the song lyrics, mainly into Swedish. But if the class is multilingual this can provide an opportunity for those with another first language than Swedish to translate into his/hers first language if the student has access to a teacher in that language. The teacher could make it clear for the students beforehand that they probably need to shift the word order in some sentences. Even though Swedish and English, are both Germanic languages, they do not have the same word order or sentence structure. This exercise is meant to relate the students’ interest in different songs into language learning, probably bringing forth some questions from the students to talk about, and hopefully developing the language through a collaborative processing of common songs. The teacher could present the translations for the class, or the class could try to sing along in the translated version of the song.

A third exercise suggestion is that the students be divided into pairs or groups and then they get to write down or say where they meet English in their spare time, and through which senses they interact with the language. Is it through listening, reading, watching or writing etc. Then the class can show it on a whiteboard. This will inspire more students on how they can meet the English language in their spare time. Perhaps they can also tell if it is only boys or girls or mixed that do the activity. This may inspire more students to use different EE activities, and also make them aware of how much English they acquire in their spare time. As previously mentioned, this is one way of making the students more motivated, an also to to make them more aware of their learning progress.

A fourth activity that can be used is one already practiced in some schools, the use of different I-pad applications with different pedagogical goals or, if the teacher knows what the students like in their spare time, some applications related to their interests. Today some schools have access to I-pads in the classroom, with different applications with a mathematical theme or language theme or so. However as discussed above, some teachers might feel too busy with other responsibilities and will not have the time to get familiar with the different applications. This problem could be addressed by giving the teachers opportunities to further educate themselves in the applications.
Conclusion

As discussed in this essay, the task of integrating the students’ different EE activities into the classroom is a challenging one for the ESL teacher: however, it is also an important task, as technology develops and as the need for a functional means of communication grows, especially due to the globalization through internet and other media. There is also a growing need for teachers’ to get further education, in order for them to use activities based on EE in the classroom.

There is a correlation between collaboration, motivation and learning, as I have shown in this essay, which has to be considered when constructing activities that develop the students’ language skills. As suggested by scholars, further education, and especially in video-games music, and other areas of EE skills, would enable the teachers to teach students in genuine situations. In real-life situations students will not have translation possibilities for every word or subtitles, nor in a conversation. Therefore it is important for the students, even at a young age, to learn how to interact in the target language, and produce it by themselves. We have also seen that probably video-games might be integrated as a learning tool in a few years, as research in CALL shows. Therefore, teachers should get opportunities for further education in recent research and in subjects related to Extramural English.
References


