Using Students’ Interests and Experiences in English Teaching

A Study of Teachers’ Approaches and Attitudes to the Choice of Content in English Language Learning

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Abstract

This study examines teachers’ approaches and attitudes towards their choice of content in English language teaching and learning. The study identifies if, and in what amount, teachers use students’ interests and experiences in English language learning. To examine this, interviews with teachers, material and lesson plan analysis and ethnographic observations focused on the teachers’ actions were conducted. The results reveal that some teachers attempt to use students’ interests and experiences when planning English lessons, but in diverse amounts. Because of the time constraints of the English subject in Swedish primary school, the aspect of using students’ interests and experiences is often set aside.

Keywords: English, experiences, interests, second language learning, primary school.
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1 INTRODUCTION

In the *Curriculum for the Compulsory School, Preschool Class and the Recreation Centre* and in most of the research on English as a second language, it is said that the education should be based on students’ earlier experiences and interests (Skolverket). This leads to increased motivation and effectiveness among students, especially in English language learning.

Since the usage of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) increases in society, it also increases in school. This results in an extended usage of ICT among younger children, as they often use computers for social media, blogging, watching videos etc where they meet diverse languages. Most children are exposed to language to an greater extent than before, more specifically the English language (Olin-Scheller, 55). Therefore, teachers must find out students’ usage of ICT outside of school and implement it in the teaching, since ICT is a great interest among students. Students’ earlier experiences and knowledge within English language learning settles at various levels and many of the students’ linguistic skills improves as a result of their increased usage of ICT. Because of that, English language learning in school is affected.

Even though English is a core subject in primary school and the exposure to it increases in students’ leisure time, the subject has a limited space in school. The English subject in primary school (from preschool class to third grade) is only given 60 hours, while mathematics is given 420 hours and Swedish 680 hours. In middle school (from fourth grade to sixth grade), English is given 220 hours (Skolverket). This problem affects what teachers can accomplish in English language learning in primary school.

Since the Curriculum for the Compulsory school and earlier research state that teachers should use students’ experiences in teaching English, it becomes problematical considering the time constraints when teachers also need to implicate other parts of the
core content in the teaching. Because of the importance of using students’ interests and experiences in English language learning, this study aims to examine if teachers are really using it in their teaching.

1.1 Aim and Research Question

The aim of this study is to examine if, and to what extent, teachers use students’ earlier experiences and interests in English language learning.

The research question of this study is:

- What do English teachers in Swedish primary schools do to use students' interests and experiences in second language teaching and learning?
2 BACKGROUND

Previous research related to the subject of this study is presented below. In the first section, students’ interests and experiences from the Curriculum are presented. After that, a section of research about how students’ exposure to English outside of school affects the English language learning in school will be presented. Lastly, a section of teachers’ approach and attitudes toward English language learning is highlighted.

2.1 Students’ Interests and Experiences

In the curriculum, the words “interests” and “experiences” appear multiple times. This means that the use of students’ interests and experiences in teaching is considered important.

This is what the curriculum states regarding using students’ interests and experiences in teaching in compulsory school:

- Teaching should be adapted to each pupil’s circumstances and needs.
- It should promote the pupils’ further learning and acquisition of knowledge based on pupils’ backgrounds, earlier experience, language and knowledge (Skolverket 23).

According to Skolverket (5) it is every schools’ responsibility to promote students’ learning and that the students are stimulated to gain and develop even more knowledge. To reach that goal, it is essential that the teaching is interesting and motivating for the students, in order to stimulate them (Skolverket 5).

For that reason, it is essential that teachers base their teaching on students’ interests and experiences.
2.2 English Language Learning Inside and Outside of School

In recent years, students’ usage of ICT-tools in their leisure time, like computers, has increased (Håkansson & Sundberg 241). The result of that is that students are exposed to language through social media to an larger extent than before.

Sundqvist and Olin-Scheller (55) composed a study about students’ exposure to English outside of school (extramural English). They found that young people are exposed to English through various extramural English activities: social media, blogging, playing digital games, watching TV/films, listening to music etc. The researchers highlight the issue about the differences of the English used in school and the English used outside of school. The study also focused on how English teachers can bridge the gap between English used in school and English used outside of school, which should lead to increased motivation among students regarding the English language learning in school, according to the researchers.

Sundqvist and Olin-Scheller’s (60) conclusion is that students do not feel motivated towards English language learning because they have to be more challenged. According to the researchers, the language teacher is responsible for two thirds of the student’s demotivation. Therefore, the researchers state that it is essential that teachers observe the students’ extramural English activities, since they increase students’ motivation to English language learning, and implement them into language learning in school. The results also show that teachers need to improve their didactic skills in English so that they know how to use the students’ interests and experiences, to increase students’ effectiveness. For example, by increasing the usage of ICT in the English language learning. To improve their didactic skills, many teachers have participated in the training
programme Boost for teachers (Lärarlyftet) where some of the aims were that teachers should “involve the students in their learning process”, “increase the usage of ICT in language learning” and “plan the assignments so that students increase their motivation in learning a new language” that would lead to the students’ increased attainments in English language learning. The training programme Boost for teachers led to the fact that teachers started to use a strategy that was effective for students’ motivation, to base English teaching on using students’ experiences (Sundqvist & Olin-Scheller 64).

2.3 Teachers’ Approach in English Language Learning

To benefit an effective English language learning, teachers’ management, attitude and approach should be highlighted. The students’ demotivation towards English language learning is a common problem in this subject. Hattie’s (42) position is that teachers cannot change the students, they can only change themselves and their attitudes towards the learning process. Therefore, the teachers should re-modify and adapt their teaching or attitudes. Hattie (42) states that it is common for teachers to start focusing on how to change the students if a problem in their learning process appears, which is the wrong way to start from.

The teachers’ attitudes and approaches are important aspects in the effectiveness of English language learning and teaching. Mansor, et al.’s study identifies certain characteristics that a teacher should have in English language teaching. First, they declare that a teacher should love his or her profession since it results in higher quality in their work and the teaching becomes more meaningful. Second, researchers state that teachers should go beyond the teaching hours, be committed and interested in the content of what they teach, to make the English language learning more effective. Mansor, et al. (40) also state that effective teachers should create a comfortable teaching environment, increase
the use of scaffolding and implement the importance of values, leadership and cognitive
skills in the class. Another important aspect in how to be an effective teacher in English
is that teachers should make the teaching more interesting for the students (Mansor, et al.
40).

Wedin (14) also focused on teachers’ management, attitudes and approach towards
English language learning in her study. The researcher discovered that teachers often have
low expectations for the students’ learning skills and hardly ever use methods that could
lead the students to an extensive abstract thinking. This limits students’ learning process.
Wedin (13) stated that teachers should encourage students to want to learn by increasing
student interactions and involving them in the teaching and learning, especially in English
language learning, since it results in higher motivation. Having low expectations for the
students rather leads to decrease in motivation.

2.4 ICT in English Language Learning

Paraeja-Lora et al. (2) state that nowadays teaching moves away from the traditional
face to face-learning to an ICT-based learning with new teaching methods like blended
learning, e-learning, social learning and autonomous learning. The new methods contain
more computer-mediated environments rather than traditional classroom environments
and more electronic teaching combined with film, photo and sound. For instance, many
teachers use diverse learning platforms and programmes like Microsoft Word, Google
and PowerPoint in their teaching.

According to Paraeja-Lora et al. (86), ICT has a positive effect on second
language learners’ communicative skills in English language learning. The researchers
claim that the traditional English textbooks cannot teach the students how to pronounce
English words and sentences. Instead, that is why ICT, in this case videos, becomes a significant tool for English language learners.

According to Sundqvist and Sylvén (15) students’ exposure to English outside of school in the using of ICT was about seven hours per week during a regular school week. The English in school corresponded to less than a half of that. The researchers state that this affects the English learning in school and that it is advantageous for teachers to discover students’ interests and experiences of English, for example their usage of ICT, to make the English language learning effective. In that way, ICT is an effective and important example of including students’ interests and experiences, according to the researchers.

In the Curriculum for the Compulsory School, the aspect of using digital tools in school appears multiply times. For example, it demands that teachers should use digital tools to promote students’ development of knowledge (Skolverket 13) and in the core content it says that students should use and learn about diverse digital tools (21). Since students often use digital tools in their leisure time and both teachers and students should use digital tools in diverse contexts in school, it is essential that teachers implement it in the teaching. It is also positive by the fact that using students’ interests and experiences in teaching, in this case digital tools, the students are more likely to increase their motivation in learning, according to research.
3 METHOD

This is a qualitative study since the researcher interprets the results of a context in what, how and why some things occur. Theories are created during, or in the end of, the process of the study, instead of testing existing theories. This makes this study qualitative and not quantitative (Bryman 40). An inductive research strategy is used since the gathered data in this study resulted in theories and conclusions (Bryman 26).

The research question will be examined in diverse settings. First, by structured interviews with English teachers to determine their perspectives regarding the planning of English teaching and learning as well as the teachers’ selection of materials in English learning. Second, by ethnographic observations during English lessons and third, by collecting the teachers’ planning and materials in English. The collected data will then be analysed.

3.1 Participants

The participants in this survey were five teachers all working in primary school from year one to year three.

The teachers are named Teacher A-E in this study, because of ethical aspects and to respect teachers’ anonymity (Bryman 132).

Teacher A is 42 years old. She is a teacher in Swedish and Social Studies in grades 1-7 and she also has English as an elective subject. She has been a teacher for eighteen years and is currently working in grade 2. In Teacher A’s class, they have English lessons 30 minutes per week. Teacher A was interviewed in person and on another occasion observed during an English lesson.

Teacher B is 45 years old. She is a teacher in compulsory school and grade 7 and she also has mathematics in year 9 as an elective subject. She has been a teacher for twenty-two years and is currently working in grade 2. Teacher B also has English lessons
30 minutes per week in her class. Teacher B was also interviewed in person and on another occasion observed during an English lesson.

Teacher C is 25 years old and is a primary school teacher. She has been a teacher for approximately seven months and is currently working in a mixed group of students in second and third grade. Teacher C has 35 minutes of English in her class per week. She was interviewed in person and on another occasion observed during an English lesson.

Teacher D is 32 years old and has been a teacher for nine and a half years. She is a compulsory school teacher, preschool teacher and after-school teacher. However, she is not a certified teacher of English. Teacher D is currently working in grade 2 and they have 20 minutes of English per week. She was interviewed in person and on another occasion observed during an English lesson.

Teacher E is 47 years old and a teacher in Swedish and Social Studies in grade 1-7. She has been a teacher for twenty-two years and is currently working in grade 1. According to the time schedule, she is supposed to have 20 minutes of English per week, but instead of having a coherent 20-minute-lesson, the teacher has chosen to teach English five minutes per day. For that reason, teacher E was interviewed in person but not observed.

Teacher A, B, D and E work at the same school but in separate grades and teacher C works in a school in a different county.

3.2 Materials

Lesson plans were collected from Teacher D and Teacher E (See Appendix 2 and 3). Teacher A and B did not use any lesson plans in their teaching and Teacher C had not yet started to develop a lesson plan. The materials that Teacher C used in English language learning were also collected (See Appendix 4).
The materials and lesson plans were compared with the results of the observations and interviews. For example, the lesson plan from Teacher D and the materials that she mentioned in the interview were compared and analysed with the observation during her English lesson. The materials that Teacher A and B mentioned in their interviews that they used in English language learning were compared with the observation during each of their English lessons. The materials that were received from Teacher C and the ones that she mentioned in the interview were compared and analysed with the observation during her English lesson. Teacher E’s lesson plan was compared and analysed with the results of her interview.

3.3 Structured Interviews

The interviews with the teachers were structured and aimed to study the teachers’ perspectives on teaching English as a second language. According to Bryman (202), the purpose of structured interviews, or standardized interviews, is that the differences between the interviews in the study should be as small as possible. That is why the teachers in this study were given the same opportunities during the interviews, by the order that the questions were given to them and by the same attitude and responses from the interviewer. Before the interviews, the teachers were given information about the study and its purpose. They were also given the opportunity to ask questions about the interviews or the questionnaire, before, during and after the study.

The questionnaire was prepared beforehand and sent to all teachers before they were interviewed. In that way, the teachers could prepare themselves for the questions and were given the opportunity to ask if they did not understand a certain question.

When the teachers had read the questions and prepared themselves, they were interviewed in person and recorded to collect data. During the interviews, a script was
used as a template (see Appendix 1 – Interview Questionnaire). The questions were both open-ended and closed and were presented in the same order to all teachers to facilitate the interviews and data analysis. The interviews began with closed questions, like “How old are you?”, “What education do you have?”, “How long have you worked as a teacher?” and “In which class do you teach now?”. The remaining questions were open-ended and related to this study’s research question, with questions such as “What materials do you use in English language learning and teaching?”, “Are the students involved in the planning of English? If yes, how? If no, why not?”, “What governs your choice of assignments and materials in English language learning and teaching?” and at last, “Have you encountered any challenges regarding the planning of English language learning and teaching?”.

Some teachers were given follow up-questions, but only when they needed to develop and clarify the answers they gave, since the interviews should be as standardized and similar as possible (Bryman 202).

The interviews were later transcribed. The main results from all the interviews were compiled in a table (See “Appendix 5 Table of a Summarized Compilation of the Interviews with Teachers”). Since the interviews were highly structured, the data were easy to compare and analyse (McKay 52). The data from the interviews were categorized into different topics about three of the questions from the interview. The themes were: “Students’ involvement in the planning of English language learning”, “The choice of materials in English language learning” and “Challenges in the planning in English language learning”.

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3.4 Ethnographic Observations

The components that were observed during the ethnographic observations focused on the teacher perspective rather than the student perspective. This was a nonparticipant observation since there were no interactions with the students or the teachers (Bryman 389). The observations were accomplished without any biases and all the events that were believed to be important for the study were noted (McKay 79).

The observations were approved by the principals, the teachers in this survey and the students. During the observations, detailed field notes of the events and teachers’ actions were taken.

After each observation, more detailed comments were added to the notes to provide a fuller description of the events. This is, according to Bryman (397), an efficient method within the ethnographic field. When all the observations were completed and transferred into documents, they were analysed. The analysis focused on finding patterns in events and actions.

3.5 Method Discussion

Bryman (202) states that structured interviews, with a questionnaire prepared beforehand, generates a superior method for the assembling of the material collected. Because of that, the analysis facilitates comparing the interviews with each other.

The ethnographic observations were performed on one occasion per class and not for a longer period as McKay (78) and Bryman (378) recommend. That is why the results from the observations cannot be fully reliable. Instead, ethnographic observations over a long period would have been more reliable. The results of the ethnographic observations in this study are based on one occasion and might not be identical on another occasion. During the observations, field notes were taken. But as Bryman (397) says about field
notes, it is hard to keep up and note all the occurrences, impressions and experiences that take place. The results of the ethnographic observations are described in a general overview with many different examples so that the readers can determine for themselves what conclusions to draw (McKay 83).

This research can be replicated by using the presented methods structured interviews, ethnographic observations and material analyses but it cannot have the same results with other researchers, teachers and students included in another context. The teachers in this study with their knowledge and experiences are not like any other and that is why this study cannot be replicated with the same results. Bryman (371) states that reliability is easier to achieve in quantitative research rather than qualitative research and that is why it is difficult to achieve full reliability in this study.
4 RESULTS

In this section, the results of the materials, interviews and observations will be presented regarding what teachers do to use students’ experiences and interests in English language learning. In each section the teachers who participated are presented, since all teachers did not participate in all parts of the study.

4.1 Materials

Materials were collected from Teacher C (See Appendix 4) and lesson plans were collected from Teachers D and E (See appendix 2 and 3). The other materials presented were collected from the results of the interviews with the teachers.

Teachers A and B based their English lessons on oral assignments, like listening to spoken English and communicating in English. Teachers A and B used the TV program “Pick A Colour” from UR Skola as a focal point. Sometimes, they also used the teaching platform called “Bingel” which is a site where the teachers can upload assignments for the students. Teachers A and B used this site to upload simple assignments where the students were supposed to listen to spoken English and create minor writing assignments. They also used the site “Super Simple Songs” for the English songs that they sang at some occasions during their English lessons.

Teacher C created her own materials for English or she gathered materials from books and modified them into new material. Teacher C usually modified the material by, for instance, translating Swedish into English. She often gathered materials from “Tummen Upp! Engelska Kartläggning åk 3” (“Thumbs up! English Mapping Grade 3”) at Liber.se and from the sites Gleerups and Lektion.se. Teacher C also used different Facebook groups such as “Engelska årskurs 1-3” (“English year 1-3”) when gathering
materials. In her English teaching, she also used the TV programme “The Game” from UR Skola and questions to that programme.

Teacher D had limited materials in the English subject as she mostly used copies of English assignments, materials such as paper sheets, with various assignments, from other teachers and took materials from different Facebook groups for English teaching. She also took ideas from a textbook called “Majema – Learn English” and films available on the internet for free such as Pick A Colour and Kids English Zone. She also used a radio programme called “Meka med engelska” (Tamper with English).

Teacher D used a planning for the fall semester and spring semester (See Appendix 2) that she had made for the English which included themes such as numbers, colours, animals, weekdays, fruits and the alphabet. According to Teacher D’s planning, she used Bingo, films, games, writing assignments and songs in her English lessons.

Teacher E said in the interview that she did not have English lessons in her class in a coherent lesson. Instead, she had English language learning for five minutes per day during the school week. She said that she used various assignments from textbooks and the internet, also bingo, games and songs.

According to Teacher E’s planning (See Appendix 3) between grade 1 to grade 3, her English teaching consisted of teaching the students about colours, numbers, animals, body parts, clothes, fruits and vegetables, rooms and furniture, phrases, weekdays, weather, prepositions, commands, communications, holidays and family. During the interview with Teacher E, a dusty box with several English games was presented.

None of the teachers used textbooks for the students in the English language learning.
4.2 Structured Interviews

All teachers participated in the interviews.

4.2.1 Students’ Involvement in the Planning of English Language Learning

The results of the interviews showed that only one out of the five teachers involved the students in the planning of English language learning.

Teacher A said that she did not involve the students since there is no time for it, when they only have 30 minutes per week dedicated to English language learning. However, she also said that if the students wished to learn something specific out of interest or curiosity, she could let them be a part of that decision. Aside from that aspect, the students did not get the opportunity to be involved in the planning.

Teacher B also said that if the students wished to learn about a specific subject out of interest, she involved them or listened to them and brought their ideas into a further planning. However, she stated that she is the one that sets the margins.

Teacher C said that she did not involve the students in the planning at all. However, she mentioned two students in her class that needed to be more challenged in the English subject, since they felt that the assignments were too simple for them. For that reason, she involved those students in the planning of their assignments during English language learning. For example, one student wished to develop her writing skills, so they decided together that the student was going to improve her writing skills by writing diverse narrative texts.

Teacher D involved the students in the planning since she noticed that the students turned out to be more motivated and interested to learn the English language by doing so. She took one English lesson to find out what the students wanted to learn in English. The students in her class decided which theme to learn more about; for example, she said that
a student wished to learn the English alphabet and that is why the next theme in their lesson plan was about the alphabet. However, Teacher D said that she decided in what way they were going to work with the theme.

Teacher E said that she, like Teachers A and B, paid attention to the students’ interests in the planning of the English language learning but generally they were not involved. She claimed that the students were too young to understand what they were supposed to learn according to the syllabus and knowledge requirements in English language learning and that is why she decided what they should learn in the English classes.

4.2.2 The Choice of Materials in English Language Learning

The participating teachers in the interviews of this study answered a question about their choice of materials and assignments in the English subject. Four out of five teachers said that they did not have much materials and that they focused on oral assignments rather than written assignments in primary school, since students’ writing skills are not yet developed.

However, Teacher C said that she had a lot of materials in the English subject, but not any textbooks, and that she often created her own material. She thought that the major aspect that affected her choice of assignments and materials was the Knowledge Requirements in the Syllabus for the English subject since she usually planned her lessons after that, so that the content in the lessons would not be too difficult or too easy for the students. Another aspect that affected her choice of materials is that the scheduled time for the English subject was not enough to create valuable and content-rich lessons. She said that she wished to use computers to a greater extent in her teaching, but that it took too much time to pick up the computers and log on.
Teacher A stated that since the English subject had a limited space in primary school compared to Mathematics and Swedish, which resulted in less money to the purchases of study materials and textbooks. For that reason, she focused on oral assignments, printed stencils and TV programmes available for free on the internet, since there are no other materials for her to use.

Comparable to Teacher C, Teacher E also thought that the major aspect that affected her choice of materials was the lack of study materials and textbooks; therefore, her teaching also included oral assignments rather than written assignments, since oral assignments normally do not require any materials. Teacher E also said that the students’ interests affected her choice of materials and assignments even though she decided what they would learn with the English syllabus and knowledge requirements in mind.

The aspect that affected Teacher B’s choice of materials was mainly the current subject area that she and her students focused on since the materials are concentrated on the actual subject area. She wanted to vary her teaching with different types of methods like movies, songs, communicative tasks and assignments. For example, they worked with different subject areas that appeared in the series “Pick A Colour” and this affected her choice of materials. Her focal point was that the students should develop their communicative skills. Therefore, the students practiced diverse phrases that the series “Pick A Colour” brought up. The teacher also said that for her it is important that all students had the opportunity to speak and to be active in the discussions during the lessons; for that reason, she focused on having many discussions so that the students could communicate with each other in pairs.

Teacher D was the only one that mentioned one of the factors that affected her choice of materials and assignments was that learning the English language should be fun for the students because in that way, the learning becomes motivating and inspiring.
She also stated that learning must not be too difficult for the students, otherwise learning English becomes negative for them. For that reason, she adapted the content after the students’ different levels.

4.2.3 Challenges in the Planning of English Language Learning

When it comes to the challenges in planning of English language learning, all the participating teachers in this study declared that the biggest challenge is the time constraints. The English subject in school is given an insufficient amount of time in the curriculum. Teacher A said that the time constraints resulted in her not having the opportunity to repeat the content that the students had learnt. Because of that, the students are more likely to forget what they have learnt as they learn new things all the time, she said. The teacher wanted the students to be introduced to many different areas in the English subject, but they did not have enough time for the deep learning of the subjects simultaneously. Teacher B said that because of the time constraints in the English subject, one does not prioritize it as much as the other subject, like Mathematics and Swedish. She also said that if you are a new teacher, one challenge is that the planning required more of your time since there was usually no existing material in English. In that case, it is good if you have worked as a teacher for a while since you have more collected materials to use.

Teachers C and E thought that the students differed widely in terms of knowledge and experiences of English. Teacher C said that because of this, the planning of the content was problematical for her since she had to challenge the students in their learning and that challenged her. Teacher E stated that the students’ different levels in terms of knowledge and experiences occurred in all subjects in school, but it was more noticeable in the English subject because of the students’ different experiences and
linguistic skills, since some students are exposed to the language outside of school more than others.

Teachers C, D and E thought that the schools’ lack of money for purchasing study materials and textbooks for the English subject make the planning problematical. For Teacher D, the consequences of that was that she had to find and print new materials for every English lesson and that took a lot of her time.

Teacher E also said that a challenge for her in the planning was that even though the English subject is a core subject, there are no clear directives for the teachers in the curriculum of what the students in primary school must learn, while there are such indications in all the other subjects in school. She said that the Knowledge Requirements for the English subject did not appear in the syllabus until 6th grade and that made her insecure in the planning of the English language learning.

4.3 Ethnographic Observations

The ethnographic observations during English lessons were performed in Teachers A-D’s classes.

In the observation of Teacher A’s class, the lesson consisted of watching an episode from the TV programme “Pick A Colour”. The current theme was friends and in the episode the characters talked about what characteristics you should have to be a good friend. The spoken language in this episode was English but there were Swedish subtitles. The episode lasted for 15 minutes and after that the students practiced the words and phrases that the figures in the episode talked about, in pairs.

First, the students sang a song from the episode about friends. The teacher rewinded the episode so that the students could sing the song twice and instructed them to try to keep up in the song even though it contained a lot of English words and sentences. While
the episode was shown, the students tried to keep up and they often repeated and imitated what the characters said.

After the episode was finished, the teacher began to ask questions about what the episode was about, and a discussion began. The students said Swedish words about how to be a good friend and the teacher wrote the English words for them on the whiteboard. One word in particular, “considerate”, was a hard word to pronounce, according to the teacher. The teacher told the students to repeat all the English words after her, in unison. She often gave them positive feedback and encouragement like “good job!” and “very good!” She added a few more words to the whiteboard so that the students could use them in sentences. The phrases were later the ones that students practiced and told each other in groups of two. The teacher mentioned a grammar example that was difficult, about why you should not put “is” in a sentence with “cares about me”. For example, she said that you do not say “my friend is cares about me”. Instead, she said you should say “my friend cares about me”. She explained the problem in Swedish. She also mentioned that that kind of grammar knowledge is too hard to understand in second grade.

Through the entire English lesson, the teacher often instructed the students to repeat the words in unison, which the students did; they even had the same tone as she had. The teacher also spoke in Swedish the entire lesson, except when she said the English words. When they had practiced pronouncing the English words, the students were told to sit in pairs and repeat the sentences to each other, “my friend is…” and so on, as the teacher walked around listening to them. After 15 minutes the lesson was over.

Teacher B’s English lesson was nearly the same as Teacher A’s. The students watched an episode from “Pick A Colour” about friends and after that the students discussed and practiced the words and phrases from the episode in pairs. The teacher explained in Swedish what they were going to do during the English lesson, so the
students understood. Teacher B also let the students repeat the English words and sentences in unison.

Compared with Teacher A, Teacher B’s lesson went a lot faster and the teacher seemed stressed about the fact that the students should learn and practice as many words and phrases as possible. Instead of saying sentences about what positive characteristics the students’ friends had to each other, like Teacher A did, Teacher B focused on the fact that the students should say nice things about each other. For example, “say a nice thing about me” and the other student responded: “you are…” and then he or she chose from the different types of characteristics that they had learnt.

As the students were supposed to say the words and sentences in unison many times, they eventually stopped listening and lost their focus. By that time, the teacher said that the students should say nice things about each other in pairs.

Unlike Teacher A, Teacher B did not say as many positive things or gave as much positive feedback and encouragements. When the students practiced the phrases in pairs and even when the students practiced the phrases with each other, it went very fast. After a while, the teacher clapped her hands as a sign for the students to be quiet. Then she gave them positive feedback, requested and inspired them to use the English phrases outside the English classroom, for example on the students’ recesses, since it was funny and nice to hear that you are a good friend, she said.

Teacher C’s English lesson was a listening comprehension task that the students would work with. The teacher used a projector to show the students a picture of “People and their pets” (See Appendix 4.1 “People and their pets”). The teacher began with telling the students what they were supposed to do, and she explained in English. The teacher involved the students in the review by letting them answer questions that the teacher asked about the picture. For example, what the animal is called in English and if the teacher said that the snake belongs to Sarah and where she should draw the line in that case. Most of
the students raised their hands and wanted to answer the questions that the teacher asked; the students also responded in English.

When Teacher C explained what they were going to do during the lesson, she often used signs and pointed at her body parts. For example, she said that they were going to listen (she pointed at her ears) to an audio clip twice (she held up two fingers) and so on. In the audio clip, they described which animal that belonged to whom and the students’ task was to draw lines on their paper sheets between the animal and the accurate person.

When the students had heard the audio clip once, the teacher stopped and asked them if it went too fast, if everybody understood what they were supposed to do, if anyone had a question and so on. Then the students listened to the audio clip one more time. After that, the following text appeared on the projector: “What does the result show? Talk to your friend in English”. Teacher C explained in English what the students were going to do, she pointed out that they should speak in English, in pairs, to compare their results in the assignment.

When the students discussed their results, the teacher walked around in the classroom listening to them and helping them pronounce words when it was necessary. After that, the teacher said: “please be quiet when you are finished”, and the students became silent. The teacher began to close the loop by letting the students present their results. Again, most of the students raised their hands and seemed positive to present their results from the assignment. The teacher often spoke with enthusiasm and with a varied tone. She also said positive and encouraging things to the students like “good job!” and gave a thumbs up.

Lastly, the teacher gave the students an English Memory about fruits and let the students play in groups while she called, in Swedish, to some of the students to put their paper sheets in their binders. When the other students who played with the Memory began to speak Swedish, the teacher reminded them, in English, to focus on speaking English
while playing. After that, the students began to speak English with each other again. The teacher walked around in the classroom and helped the students, for example with the pronunciation of the English words for the fruits. When the discussions became too loud, the teacher reminded the students, in Swedish, to think about the volume and that it should not be too loud. The teacher often used signs during the lesson, for example thumbs up and the students often listened to her when she talked. She ended the lesson by saying that they had done a good job during the English lesson.

Teacher D began her English lesson by telling the students what they were going to do during the lesson and held up a paper sheet, with fruits on, so that the students could see it. She asked questions, in Swedish, about what the fruits were called in English and some of the students raised their hands and answered the questions. The end of the assignment contained a lot more text than in the beginning of it, which the teacher said could be a bit difficult for them. When she read what they were supposed to do, few students seemed to understand. The teacher tried to explain it in Swedish instead. As soon as the students got the paper sheets they started working with them, and the teacher said that if it was too difficult, the students could ask their classmates sitting beside them.

After a while, the teacher interrupted the lesson by saying that she needed to explain something that the students had been doing incorrectly. In the assignments the students were supposed to fill the blanks with the names of fruit; every word started with “A” or “AN”, for example: “AN A _ _ _ _”, where the students wrote the correct answer “AN APPLE”. The next one was “A P _ _ _”, where the correct answer was “A PEAR”. Since the letters started with an “A” and “P” the students made a mistake and wrote “APPLE” again. The teacher said that the word was supposed to be “A PEAR”. When the students had corrected the mistake, they kept on with the paper sheet.

Teacher D walked around in the classroom and helped the students. In some cases, she pointed at a fruit on the students’ paper sheets and said: “What’s that?” to show that
the student had made a mistake or to make them keep on with the work, she also helped them spell some fruits and said what some English words meant.

When the students had finished the sheet, the teacher told them to put it in their binders. Some students went to the teacher to correct the paper sheet and when the teacher discovered an incorrect answer by a student she immediately corrected it. While the teacher corrected the answer, the other students went out for recess without any reassembly.

All the teachers, except for Teacher C, focused on speaking Swedish during the English lessons apart from when some of the teachers said an English word that the students would learn. The teachers, except for teacher D, focused on having oral discussions and communications during their English lessons. Teacher D focused more on the fact that the students should accomplish the assignments correctly. Teachers A, B and C also gave the students positive feedback and encouraged them; Teacher D did not give any positive feedback.

All the teachers except for Teacher D used ICT in the English lesson, which is one example of using students’ interests and experiences. For example, Teacher C used PowerPoint on a projector and both Teachers A and B used their computers to show an episode of the program series “Pick A Colour”.
5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Method Discussion

To answer the research questions, if teachers used students’ experiences and interests in second language teaching and learning, diverse methods were used in this study; structured interviews, ethnographic observations and material analysis. Generally, it was difficult to answer the research question with only five teachers involved. The structured interviews studied the teachers’ perspectives in a wider area and that was a benefit to this study, rather than the observations that showed only results from that very occasion. Because of the fact that the ethnographic observations took place in one occasion and for 20-35 minutes per one class, the results could not be fully reliable. Therefore, the research question was also difficult to answer. However, the ethnographic observations in this study were beneficial to answer the research question with the other methods used in comparison, even though the results of the observations would be more reliable if they were accomplished in a long-time-period. As the observations were ethnographic and all the occurrences were studied, the analysis was problematic since the researcher had to find patterns related to the research question and that part of the analysis was difficult since the relations to the research question was not very clear in the observations. Another disadvantage with the method of using ethnographic observations was that it was hard to keep up with the events and taking fieldnotes simultaneously (Bryman 397). Therefore, some occurring events that were not observed and noted could have been beneficial for this study.

The advantages with the interviews was that they studied teachers’ perspectives in English teaching to a greater extent and that the teachers’ answers were more
straightforward instead of the observations, where only the researcher analysed the occurrences.

The table (Appendix 5) of the compilations of teachers’ answer was easy to accomplish since the interviews were structured and that was an advantage in this study. Another advantage with the interviews was that the questionnaire was prepared beforehand and that the respondents had time to think about the questions before the interview took place. In that way, the teachers were prepared with the answer and could motivate for them, rather than having the question during the interviews and they had to think about what to answer. The disadvantage with structured interviews is that they in fact are structured and that the respondents could feel less comfortable since the situation of the interview can be distant and impersonal. The structured interviews could also lead to that the respondents answer questions that are eligible for the interviewer and that can make the results less reliable (Bryman 224).

The analysis of the materials was difficult to accomplish since the teachers did not have any lesson plans and they had a lack of materials in the English subject. Therefore, the results were not comparable. However, the collected material was a benefit in this study because it was comparable with the results of the ethnographic observations and structured interviews.

5.2 Result Discussion

The research question was: What do English teachers in Swedish primary schools do to use students' interests and experiences in second language teaching and learning?

In this section, results from the interviews, observations and material analysis will be presented to answer the research question.
5.2.1 Structured Interviews

The results from the structured interviews showed that one out of five teachers involved their students in the planning of English language learning. Two teachers, Teachers A and B, said that there was no time to involve the students. On the other hand, when the students asked to learn something specific the teachers listened to it. Teacher E said that she usually did not involve the students in the planning since she thinks that they are too young to understand what to learn. The argument that Teacher E gave, appeared to be about her low expectations on the students and according to Wedin (13), that can lead to decreased motivation towards the language learning among the students. Teacher D said that she took one English lesson to listen to what the students wanted to learn in the English language learning with the justification that in that way, the students become more interested and motivated to learn the language. It is the teacher’s responsibility to make the learning interesting and motivating for the students, as Mansor, Eng, Rasul, Hamzah and Hamid’s (40) research showed. To achieve that, students should be involved in the planning.

The results of the interviews also showed that the English teachers did not use a lot of material in their English lessons and that most of the teachers focused on oral assignments to develop the students’ communicative skills. Although the English lessons were focused on oral assignments and the fact that it gave the students the chance to share, the teachers did not ask them about their interests and experiences. The challenges regarding the English subject were that they did not have any materials since the English subject is, according to them, such a minor subject in primary school. That is why the teachers choose to focus on Swedish and Mathematics since they are the major subjects in primary school. Because of that, all the resources were put into materials in Swedish and Mathematics.
Teacher C stated that she did not have time to do what she wanted to do during English lessons because of the time constraints. For example, she wished for the students to use their computers, but with only 30 minutes per lesson, there was no time for them to use them. Teacher D stated that for her, it was important to pick materials and assignments that would be interesting and fun for the students, which also answers the research question. Because of the facts that the teacher used materials that would be fun for the students, it also led to increased motivation among the students, as Mansor, et al. (40) also confirmed in their research. In general, the participating teachers did not use students’ interests and experiences in English language learning as the results from the interviews showed and according to the teachers; the reason for that was the time constraints of the English subject. However, one teacher used one English lesson to find out the students’ interests and experiences and that proves that the other teachers’ arguments are questionable.

5.2.2 Ethnographic observations

Generally, Teachers A-D did not use students’ interests and experiences in their lessons other than that the lessons were about pets, friends and that they sang and played games, such as Memory, which the students can relate to. During the lessons in Teachers A and B’s classes, the students watched the TV programme “Pick a Colour” and then they had discussions about the programme. The students were supposed to say nice things about a friend and what characteristics a friend should have, but the words and phrases they used were from the TV programme. Teacher A asked the students about what characteristics their friends should have; in that way the students got the opportunity to share their own experiences of how they thought a friend should act, which could answer the research question of this study.
Teacher B on the other hand, did not let the students get the opportunity to share their own experiences in how to be a good friend or what they characterized as a good friend. She controlled the lesson and what outcomes it would be, rather than asking questions to the students. Although the programme was about friends and many of the students’ interests are friends, the discussions did not ground in students’ own experiences of friends. Teacher B said, in the interview, that she did not involve the students in the English teaching but that she listened to the students if they had any wishes to learn something specific. However, Teacher B did not ask the students of their interests and experiences, in this case; friends.

Teacher D did not use students interests and experiences other than the fact that the students had decided that they wanted to learn about fruits because they were interested in learning that. Because of the fact that the teachers hardly ever used students’ interests and experiences in their English teaching, the students will be less motivated to learn the language (Sundqvist & Olin-Scheller 64). In the observations, that aspect was confirmed when the students lost their focus in Teacher B’s lesson because she did not involve students own interests and experiences when discussing friends. As stated in the background, students are exposed to English language more outside of school than inside school and that it is affects students learning in school (Sundqvist & Sylvén 15). For that reason, it is important that the teachers find out the students’ interests and use them in the English teaching in school. That matter of fact could not be verified through the ethnographic observations.

As the researchers and the Curriculum for the Compulsory School state that one effective and important example of including students’ interests and experiences is to find out the students’ usage of ICT outside of school, since it is a large interest among students, and implement it in the teaching. During the ethnographic observations, Teachers A, B and C used ICT in their English lessons. For that reason, it can be
concluded the teachers used students’ interests and experiences in their teaching to some extent.

5.2.3 Materials

According to the syllabus in the English language learning, the students should learn words and phrases that appear in their surroundings and learn about subjects that are familiar to them (Skolverket 35). Generally, the teachers in this study used materials and assignments that included subjects that were familiar to their students and therefore something they had experiences of. For example, in the English lessons that were observed, the students worked on assignments that included words and phrases about friends and pets.

In Teachers A and B’s lessons, the students’ appreciated and were interested in the TV programme “Pick A Colour” because it contained humour and songs, which is a way to use the students’ interests. According to Paraeja-Lora, et al. (2) the usage of ICT (in this case videos) increases the students’ communicative skills since the students then could learn to pronounce English words and phrases. The assignments in Teachers A and B’s lessons is therefore an effective way to develop the students’ linguistic and communicative skills. However, the teachers did not take that opportunity to find out or implicate the students’ interests and experiences in English learning.

Teacher D said, in the interview, that her challenge was to find materials to use in the English language learning since she did not have so much materials and that it took a lot of her time. This is comparable with what Teacher B said in her interview, that a challenge for new teachers is to find materials and that it takes a lot of time. Although Teacher D had worked as a teacher for nine and a half years, she had not collected a substantial amount of material.
6 CONCLUSION

The importance of using students’ interests and experiences in teaching English as it leads to higher motivation among the students is a fact. To do that, teachers must involve the students in the planning of English not only by letting them wish to learn a certain subject, but also in using their interests and experiences when they learn it. Teachers must start with finding out what the students already know and construct the teaching after that. Teachers also need to use students’ interests to make the teaching motivating for them, so that they want to learn the language, by using teaching methods that will make the students interested. In that way, the learning becomes more effective. In this study, teachers did not use students’ interests and experiences because of the time constraints. However, all but one teacher used ICT during the ethnographic observations and that is, according to the research, one effective example of how to use students’ interests and experiences in the teaching.

This study examined what some teachers do to use the students’ interests and experiences in second language learning and teaching. In fact, it examined what the participating teachers do to use their current students’ interests and experiences. To draw further conclusions, more research and a more extended study must be carried out. For example, with more teachers included from all over the country and teachers that work not only in primary school, but also teachers in higher grades. Further research about the fact that English is a minor subject in primary school and larger in middle school, and the differences between them is also necessary. To examine how much this affects the teachers and students in primary school in relation to the fact that teachers should use students’ interests and experiences could also be relevant.
REFERENCES


Appendix 1 Interview Questionnaire

Intervjufrågor

1. Hur gammal är du?

2. Vad har du för utbildning?

3. Hur länge har du arbetat som lärare?

4. Vilken årskurs undervisar du?

5. Hur många minuter engelska har din klass i veckan?

6. Vilket material använder du dig av i engelskundervisningen?

7. Deltar eleverna i planeringsarbetet inom engelskundervisningen?
   a. Om ja, hur?
   b. Om nej, varför inte?

8. Vad styr ditt val av uppgifter och material i engelskundervisningen?

9. Har du stött på några utmaningar inom planeringen av engelskundervisningen?
Appendix 2 English Lesson Plan Teacher D

Hösttermin

Siffror
Genomgång 0-20
Bingo
Film
Lek
Learn English – skriv uppgifter

Färger
Genomgång
Film
Bingo
Lek
Skriv uppgift

Djur
Genomgång
Film
Skriv uppgift
Lek

JULLOV
Vårtermin

Repetition av Siffror, Färger och djur

Veckodagar – Sätter upp på tavlan
Genomgång
Film
Uppgift

Frukt
Genomgång
Film
Uppgift

Alfabetet
Genomgång
Sång
Bingo

Repetition av veckodagar, frukt och alfabet

3 tillfällen sedan SOMMARLOV
Meka med engelska
Go Yoyo go
Kidstv123
Magic English 1
Kida english zone
Muzzy
Pick a colour – handledning på mailen

What’s up
Learn English
Bingel
Appendix 3 English Lesson Plan Teacher E

English år 1-3

colours
numbers
animals
body parts
clothes
fruits and vegetables
rooms and furniture
phrases
weekdays
weather
prepositions
commands
communication (ask each other questions)
holidays (Christmas, Easter, Halloween)
family
Appendix 4.1 “People and their pets”

People and their pets

Look at the pictures.
You will hear people talk about their pets.

Pair them together and draw a line between them.

What does the results show? Talk to your friend in English!
Appendix 4.2 “Halloween”
Practise the words

Describe the witch:
Who am I?

1. I have a green face and a black hat. I am mean. Who am I?
   You are ____________________________

2. I am black and I can fly. Who am I?
   You are ____________________________

3. I am orange and you can put a candle in me. Who am I?
   You ____________________________

4. I am white, I am dead and you can find me at the graveyard. Who am I?
   ____________________________

5. I am black and I have eight legs. Who am I?
   ____________________________

6. I like blood and I like to sleep in a coffin. Who am I?
   ____________________________

Read and draw a picture.
Draw a picture of a graveyard with three gravestones. It’s in the night and it’s a yellow moon in the sky. Two bats are flying around. On the ground there is an orange pumpkin. Behind one of the stones there is a ghost and on top of one of the stones there is a spider who has made a spiderweb over the stone.
Appendix 4.3 “Put a circle around the right picture”
Where is the bed?

Where is the floor?

Where is the window?
Appendix 4.4 “Paint a big house”

Paint a big house

The house should have:

• A green door
• Two windows, one small and one big. A flower in the big window and a lamp in the small window.
• The roof is rainbow-coloured.
• The colour of the house should be grey.
• A boy and a girl lives in the house. The girl has blond hair and a dark blue dress. The boy has brown hair, an orange t-shirt and light blue pants. The girl and the boy have black shoes.
• Paint three yellow flowers and four blue flowers in front of the house.
• A red swing beside the house.
Appendix 4.5 “Christmas”
Write the hidden words on the line
Skriv de gømte ord på linjerna

SantaClauselfstockingchristmasgifts

Reindeermerrychristmasgingerbreadssleigh

Christmastreeporridgesnowmanangel

Read and draw a picture.
Draw a picture of Santa Claus, his reindeers and the sleigh flying in the sky. The moon is yellow and it's snowing. There is a red house. Beside the house there is a snowman with a blue hat and a carrot as a nose.
Practise the words

___________________________

___________________________

___________________________

___________________________

___________________________

___________________________

___________________________

___________________________

___________________________

___________________________

___________________________

Describe Santa Claus:

___________________________

___________________________

___________________________

___________________________
Tell me about yourself and write a text on your computer...

**Jag...**

**BERÄTTER OM MIG SJÄLV...**

och skriver vad jag heter, hur gammal jag är och var jag bor

enkel och begripligt med fraser och överningar


enkel, rolig och slutet och allt som det sammanhänger...

enkel, rolig och slutet och allt som det sammanhänger...
The first step

- My name is…
- I am ... years old
- I live in ...
- I live with ...

The second step

- My favorite colour is…
- My favorite food is...
- I like playing…

- The colour of my hair is…
- The colour of my eyes is…
- I have long/short hair…
The third step

- My favorite place is...
- My favorite candy is...
- I think I am a ... person because ...
### Appendix 5 Table of a Summarized Compilation of the Interviews with Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher A</th>
<th>Teacher B</th>
<th>Teacher C</th>
<th>Teacher D</th>
<th>Teacher E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Hur länge har du arbetat som lärare?</td>
<td>18 år</td>
<td>22 år</td>
<td>Ca 7 månader</td>
<td>9,5 år</td>
<td>22 år</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Vilken årskurs undervisar du?</td>
<td>Arskurs 2</td>
<td>Arskurs 2</td>
<td>Arskurs 2-3</td>
<td>Arskurs 1</td>
<td>Arskurs 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hur många minuter engelska har din klass i veckan?</td>
<td>30 minuter. Men har lite engelska varje dag, vid tex samlingen och veckodagar.</td>
<td>30 minuter</td>
<td>35 minuter</td>
<td>20 minuter</td>
<td>20 minuter. Men enligt läraren orkar inte eleverna 20 minuter så hon har valt att lägga</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Vilket material använder du dig av i engelskundervisningen?


7. Deltar eleverna i planeringsarbetet inom engelskundervisningen?


olika delar men de hinner inte riktigt lära sig eftersom det är nya saker hela tiden.

mycket material att plocka från.

sätter för höga förväntningar på sig själv. Finns inte så mycket material till engelskan, skolan har inte råd med det. För lite tid till engelskan i timplanen, kan inte göra det man vill göra (som att använda datorer tex)

Undvikar vissa skrivuppgifter som innehåller mycket text eftersom vissa inte riktigt kan läsa det på svenska, då blir det ännu svårare på engelska.

man nu vill ha lärobok så tycker läraren att det finns inga läroböcker som är helt bra. Stor spridning på eleverna i hur de ligger till och vad de kan kunskapsmässigt. Att alla elever ligger på olika nivåer kunskapsmässigt finns i alla ämnen men är väldigt tydligt i engelskan. Alla elever har olika bagage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Övrigt</th>
<th>Intervju först, observation efter</th>
<th>Intervju först, observation efter</th>
<th>Observation först, intervju efter</th>
<th>Observation först, intervju efter</th>
<th>Enbart intervju</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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