Degree Thesis I
Bachelor’s level
English as the target language

A literature study on teachers’ and L2 learners’ language use in the upper elementary classroom

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Abstract

Even though English is a subject where Swedish pupils do well compared to pupils in other countries, research indicates that pupils are not always motivated to learn in the English classroom. Therefore, the aim of this study is to find research relating to the use of the target language in classrooms for pupils at the upper elementary level, particularly language learners in Sweden. The focus of this thesis is to find out what benefits and challenges accompany the use of the target language during English lessons, as well as what pupils’ opinions are on the consistent use of the target language in the classroom. This literature review of five research articles shows that it is beneficial for pupils’ language development to have lessons where mainly the target language is used. It is for example beneficial for pupils’ ability to speak, their pronunciation, vocabulary and ability to use language strategies. The results show that there are challenges as well, especially for the teachers, since use of the target language presumes that the teacher has good language skills and is capable of scaffolding each pupil at their individual level and in their zone of proximal development. Furthermore, there are challenges like differences in pupils’ skill level, creating tasks that both motivate and stimulate, and creating a safe learning environment. Even though the results in this thesis are limited, it is still obvious that it is an important area, where more research is necessary in order to assist teachers in how to teach English as effectively as possible.

Keywords: Target language, L2 learners, upper elementary level.
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1. Introduction

English is a subject almost every Swedish pupil studies in school and where they are supposed to learn both the basics in that subject and much more as well with proper support. According to the Swedish curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011, pp. 8-9) all pupils should be motivated and stimulated to learn and are entitled to an education based on their individual needs and present skill level. Furthermore, it is mentioned that communication is an important ingredient in pupils’ development and for their linguistic ability and confidence. Therefore, they need many opportunities to be engaged in activities focused on developing their communication skills (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011, pp. 8-9).

In an international study on listening comprehension, reading and writing in English from 2011, Swedish pupils in grade nine tested in the top of all categories compared to pupils in 13 other European countries (Skolverket 2012, pp. 42-43). The same study presented important factors that were positive for pupils’ development in the target language. For example, input and output are mentioned as positive spare time activities, as well as useful activities in school. Teachers’ use of the target language during lessons is another factor. Furthermore, teachers who motivate why it is important to learn and who help and support their pupils to develop self-confidence are mentioned (Skolverket 2012, p. 40). According to Nikolov (2009), another study carried out among pupils in grade seven all around Europe showed that pupils’ interest in language studies have decreased, since instruction is often carried out using a textbook, a workbook and weekly vocabulary lists to learn, instead of using learning activities pupils find more interesting and which for example could be more connected to their spare time activities.

Lundberg (2010, p. 24) as well as Pinter (2006, pp. 38-39) emphasize a rich English input and output environment and also that English mainly should be taught in English. However, there are both advantages and challenges with this approach according to Lundberg (2010). Advantages could for example be that pupils tend to be more focused when teachers speak English. In addition, pupils benefit from hearing English and therefore develop their vocabulary, ability to think in English and language strategies (Lundberg, 2010, pp. 23-25). Lundberg mentions some challenges as well and mainly identifies low self-confidence among pupils as a problem. They tend to be afraid of speaking in front of others in case they make mistakes and this could inhibit their development as well as their desire to learn (Lundberg, 2010, p. 21).

It is the author’s experience that the positive factors mentioned above do not always characterize classrooms in reality. Memories of uninteresting lessons based on a textbook and workbook, as well as a teacher who mainly spoke Swedish, are tied in with current observations of uninterested pupils in similar classroom situations. These experiences have contributed to the choice of the current topic.

1.1. Aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to learn what previous research says about using the target language in English lessons in grades 4-6. The following research questions will be used to specify that aim:

- What are the advantages of and challenges with using the target language during English lessons?
- What are pupils’ opinions on using the target language during English lessons?
2. Background

2.1. English from a Swedish school perspective

English is emphasized in the curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011a, p. 30) as an important language to learn since it is something we meet on a daily basis in our ordinary lives and is widely used around the world. It is also important to learn if pupils someday want to go abroad to study, to work or just want to be able to communicate with other people. School plays a major role here, since it is where most people begin their English learning.

Learning a language is a versatile and demanding task. Pupils are not only supposed to learn words and how to organize them in sentences, they also need to learn how to adjust their English to different situations or people they encounter. Furthermore, they need to develop strategies to be able to handle a situation where their English skills might be insufficient. Since it is important for pupils to use their linguistic knowledge, it is essential for them to become confident enough to dare to speak. Using the language with others is also a way to learn even more and to consolidate present knowledge (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011a, p. 30).

Throughout pupils’ education, difficulty level and demands increase as they grow older. According to the English commentary material (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011b, p. 17) pupils initially learn basic things at lower ages where the expectations of their oral communication are low and focused on “simple presentations and messages” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011b, p. 17). As pupils grow older, the difficulty level increases and in grade four to six, pupils are expected to learn how to make oral presentations, tell stories, and write descriptions, messages and instructions (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011b, p. 17). In addition, they are supposed to learn strategies in order to be able to interact in conversations, and the strategies are concentrated on both listening and speaking. If they for instance do not understand something, they should be able to communicate that and ask for additional explanations (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011b, p. 17).

The aim of oral communication in the syllabus for English (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011a, p. 30) is that pupils develop the ability to understand spoken English and learn how to speak it themselves. Furthermore, language strategies aimed toward those abilities should be developed and finally, they should develop the ability to be able to adapt their communication to the situation and who they speak to (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011a, p. 30).

The English syllabus consists of three parts: the aim of the subject, core content and knowledge requirements. When planning lessons, the teacher needs to take all these parts into consideration. In the core content for oral communication and interaction, both input and output are mentioned and should focus on things pupils are familiar with, such as their everyday lives. In addition, pupils are supposed to receive input from different sources like for instance media, dialogues, movies, narratives, songs and poems. Furthermore, pupils need to hear and learn how English letters and words are pronounced, how a conversation is structured and how to use a word in a conversation for example (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011a, pp. 31-32).

2.2. Using the target language in the classroom

Language education in the classroom is supposed to prepare pupils well enough to be able to use the target language properly and furthermore make them able to communicate with others. To make that a reality, teachers need to challenge pupils in many ways and foremost in the target language. Pinter (2006) emphasizes pupils’ need for plenty of oral input in the target language and insists that it increase pupils’ vocabulary, their ability to put words into sentences and how to properly pronounce words. Lundberg (2010, p. 19) mentions that younger learners are better than
older learners are at acquiring a good pronunciation. Therefore, it is important to start practicing this early. In addition, Pinter (2006, pp. 45-46) claims that since young learners have not developed into strong readers yet, listening and speaking exercises in English are a good way for those pupils to develop their language skills.

According to Lundberg (2010, pp. 25-26), language teachers must possess good language skills and a variety of good teaching strategies in order to be able to properly teach the target language. Furthermore, if teachers want to motivate their pupils to speak the target language, pupils need to feel safe and confident enough to do it. Therefore, teachers need to create a good and safe learning environment for pupils.

Using the target language during language lessons brings challenges for teachers according to Pinter (2006, p. 45). For instance, pupil’s skill levels can be very different from each other and therefore it is important for teachers to be observant. If a class, for example, listen to something on a CD-player, the speed and length of what they listen to can make it hard for some pupils to understand and to follow and unknown voices can be difficult to understand as well (Pinter, 2006, p. 45). Instead, it could be easier to listen to the known voice of the teacher, who can adjust talking speed, repeat things several times and use body gestures to help pupils understand. Furthermore, young language learners have not developed language strategies that help learners to understand. Unfortunately, it takes time to develop them and it demands plenty of practice as well (Pinter, 2006, pp. 45-46).

Becoming a fluent or even a good English speaker is another challenge for pupils according to Pinter, since it means to be able to “speak and think at the same time” (Pinter 2006, p. 55). A good or a fluent speaker needs to have many strategies as well, for example being able to adapt their language and use different conversation techniques. The issue with young English learners is that they most likely have not developed those strategies even in their first language and still need to practice that (Pinter, 2006, pp. 55-56).

2.3. Theoretical perspectives

2.3.1. Sociocultural theory

According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is an ever-continuing process, which begins as soon as we are born. Until the day a child begins to attend school the everyday and preschool learning mostly consists of “non-systematic learning” (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 84-85) like imitation and learning things from parents, and asking questions about everything and anything. Thereafter it changes to consist more of “systematic learning” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85), which is primarily learned in school. Systematic learning is not the only thing that is potentially new in the learning process when a child begins school though. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning in “the zone of proximal development” (p. 85) becomes a new and an even more important factor as well. It means that a pupil, in contrast to learning by him/herself, is supported by someone more capable and in possession of knowledge the pupil tries to acquire. That someone could both be a teacher or a classmate (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Without support from someone more capable, a pupil will not learn in the zone of proximal development and instead remain in what Vygotsky calls “the actual development level” (1978, p. 86). The actual development level is the skill level the pupil possesses in a subject without any form of support and from where it is more difficult to learn new things.

In 1976, Wood, Bruner, and Ross published an article based on the socio cultural theory in which they presented “scaffolding” (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976, p. 90). Scaffolding is based on Vygotsky’s idea of a pupil in the zone of proximal development being helped by someone more competent. If a pupil for example is supposed to learn something that he/she would not be able to do alone, the teacher, or a classmate who is more competent, is supposed to support the pupil
and let him/her focus on solving those things that are in their zone of proximal development (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90). According to Säljö (2010), the support and guidance is supposed to be adjusted to the pupil’s individual need for help and the teacher supporting the pupil is not supposed to do all the work. Pupils need to be challenged at all times and therefore it is important for a teacher to know how competent each pupil is in order to be able to adjust both the challenges and the support to fit every individual pupil and to help them develop properly in their zones of proximal development (Säljö, 2010, p. 192).

3. Materials and method

3.1. Design

The design of this thesis is a systematic literature review based on the following research questions:

- What are the advantages of and challenges with using the target language during English lessons?
- What are pupils’ opinions on using the target language during English lessons?

The working process described in Eriksson Bajaras, Forsberg and Wengström (2013, pp. 31-32) has been followed. Articles have been searched for and critically evaluated, according to the selection criteria and aim for this study. Relevant findings in the selected articles have been analyzed and thereafter divided and categorized into three different themes. These themes are presented in Section 4, Results. Finally, the result and background chapters are compared and discussed in Section 5, Discussion.

The material searched for consists of previous research such as peer-reviewed research articles that have been published in journals, within the specific area. This thesis is limited to five articles, since the analysis of the articles found in the searches resulted in only five that reasonably fulfilled the selection criteria.

3.2. Search strategies and selection criteria

The procedure to find relevant articles for this thesis consists of two parts. The first part was a search for articles with certain search strategies (Table 1). The second part comprises an analysis where the found articles were read, analyzed and included in this thesis if they fulfilled the selection criteria (see Table 2).

In order to find articles for this thesis, the search databases Summon, ERIC and Google Scholar have been used. References to articles, possibly interesting for this thesis, were also found in previous student theses and therefore downloaded from Google Scholar for further analysis. In Table 1, they are presented as manual searches.

The search results presented in Table 1 are divided into seven categories: database, search word/s, limitations, results, titles read, abstracts read, and further evaluation needed.
Table 1: Search results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Search word/s</th>
<th>Limitation</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Titles read</th>
<th>Abstracts read</th>
<th>Further evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summon</td>
<td>Target language</td>
<td>Full text Peer review Article English 2005-2015</td>
<td>61403</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summon</td>
<td>English as a second language</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>71034</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summon</td>
<td>EFL oral communication</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>1026</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERIC</td>
<td>Target language</td>
<td>Peer reviewed 2005-2015</td>
<td>5454</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERIC</td>
<td>ESL AND target language</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERIC</td>
<td>ESL AND L2 AND Oral communication</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google scholar</td>
<td>Target language</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1530000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google scholar</td>
<td>Target language in grade 4-6</td>
<td>2005-2015</td>
<td>23200</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google scholar</td>
<td>Tala engelska i klassrummet</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>15900</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual search</td>
<td>From previous thesis</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Further evaluation: The number of articles that seemed interesting from reading the title and abstract. Therefore, these articles were read entirely and thereafter analyzed according to the selection criteria.
Table 2 presents three examples of the selection criteria applied to articles from the database search. These articles were read in their entirety and thereafter analyzed. Table 2 is divided into six categories: article, age group, year, relevant topic, ethical, and included. Some categories are explained in the footnote section.

Table 2: selection criteria (some examples)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Relevant topic</th>
<th>Ethical</th>
<th>Included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching. The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume 13, number 2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chambers, G.N. (2013). The target language revisited. Teaching and</td>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Education 36. (pp. 44-54).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3. Analysis

The articles were analyzed through content analysis. This method is used to compare data from different sources and thereby find patterns, similarities, and differences between them. That is achieved through a systematic and detailed analysis of each source, where important findings are sorted in a table by different themes that then can be compared with important findings from the other sources. The themes emanate from the research questions. In this thesis the working process has followed the pattern presented in Eriksson Bajaras et al. (2013, p.164). Each article has been read at least two times. Thereafter, important findings have been coded and sorted into categories. Those categories have then been divided into themes in a table, which made it possible to compare the different sources. These themes are presented in Section 4, Results.

3.4. Ethical aspects

When writing a thesis along with searching and using scientific material, there are guidelines to follow. For a systematic literature study like this one, Eriksson Bajaras et al. (2013, pp. 69-70) refer to the Swedish Research Council and state that “cheating and dishonesty” is forbidden. All collected material and the procedure to collect it must be accounted for in order to present fair and honest results. The results must not be presented in such a way that it suits the author or anyone else who could benefit from it. All results must be presented, no matter if they confirm or reject the hypothesis. The collected material itself must come from trustworthy sources and follow ethical aspects, for instance the demand for protection of individuals participating in research. There are four specified demands researchers need to follow (Dimenäs, 2007, pp. 26-27): informants have the right to know the aim of the research; participants decide if and how long they want to be a part of the research and can end their participation at any time; participants’ identities should be protected and kept away from unauthorized people; and finally, collected material should only be used for scientific purposes, be presented likewise and not be used for something else. All guidelines and demands mentioned above have been accounted for in this thesis.

2 The full list of articles can be found in Appendix 1.
3 Relevant topic for this thesis is the use of target language in the classroom.
4 If the ethical aspects which are described in section 3.4 have been fulfilled.
4. Results

This section is divided into four parts. In the first part, the included articles will be briefly presented in a table, with focus on purpose, method, scientific value, and results. In the next three parts, relevant findings from the analysis of the articles will be presented, divided into the three themes: “Benefits from the use of target language”, “Difficulties and challenges”, and “What stimulates pupils to use the target language in the classroom?”. The first two themes are connected to the first research question and the third theme is connected to the second research question.

4.1. Presentation of used articles

Table 3: Short summary of used articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Scientific value</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bateman, B.E. (2008). Student teachers' attitudes and beliefs about using the target language in the classroom. (US).</td>
<td>Follow 10 student teachers during their education and focus on their attitudes and beliefs on using the target language.</td>
<td>Qualitative analysis of 10 student language teachers' questionnaires and analyses of the reflections they wrote during their education.</td>
<td>Fulfilled.</td>
<td>Student teachers’ aim is to use as much English as possible but they find it difficult when teaching grammar and when they need to discipline pupils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chambers, G.N. (2013). The target language revisited. (UK).</td>
<td>Investigate the use of target language in classrooms.</td>
<td>Qualitative – observations of lessons and group discussions with 25 student language teachers in compulsory school.</td>
<td>Fulfilled.</td>
<td>Teachers’ aim is to use English but for instance pressure to manage the syllabus or help pupils with difficulties makes it hard.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Scientific value: If validity, reliability, objectivity and limitations are mentioned and/or fulfilled.
4.2. Benefits from the use of target language

All five articles mention benefits with using the target language in the classroom. Table 4 below shows some of the more important examples of these benefits\(^6\) as well as the similarities and differences between the articles. Some benefits, for instance enhanced vocabulary and improved pronunciation, are mentioned in four of the five articles, while pupils’ confidence only is mentioned in one of them.

Table 4: Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good for English outside the classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher benefits from use of target language</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beckman Anthony (2008), Sesek (2005) and Wyatt (2009) maintain that pupils’ linguistic development is dependent on the amount of target language input and that it is of good quality. Although Beckman Anthony (2008) believes that pupils need a lot of qualitative input, she distinguishes herself from Sesek (2005) and Wyatt (2009), and along with Bateman (2008), emphasizes the importance of what Krashen (1985) called comprehensible input. Comprehensible input means that pupils should be able to understand the context and therefore the teacher must not use too many unknown words. If it is comprehensible, it will be positive for pupils’ linguistic development (Bateman, 2008, p. 11; Beckman Anthony, 2008, p. 473).

Pupils who receive plenty of target language input from their teacher are more likely to develop an increased ability to speak it. Furthermore, if teachers give their pupils opportunities to use the target language in meaningful tasks and together with their classmates, it benefits their English speaking skills even more (Bateman, 2008; Beckman Anthony, 2008; Chambers, 2013; Sesek, 2005).

There are several skills benefiting from use of target language in the classroom, but the articles differ in which skills they emphasize. Bateman (2008), Beckman Anthony (2008), Chambers (2013) and Sesek (2005) all mention pronunciation, while only Bateman (2008), Beckman Anthony (2008) and Chambers (2013) mention vocabulary. Chambers (2013) also emphasizes that recurrent repetition of new words helps pupils to strengthen their knowledge of them. Beckman Anthony (2008) is the only one who mentions sentence structure, but receives support from Wyatt (2009) on language speaking and understanding strategies.

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\(^6\) There are more benefits than this table shows but these are considered as the most relevant for pupils at the upper elementary school level as well as for teachers.
According to Sesek (2005), pupils’ use of English in their spare time is another source for input and output. Sesek (2005) emphasizes that proper use of the target language in school benefits pupils’ language learning in their spare time as well. This is mostly because improved language skills from school make it easier for pupils to enhance the skills even more in their spare time without the support from a teacher or a classmate (Sesek, 2005).

In Beckman Anthony’s (2008) article, cooperation and common learning is emphasized as important when pupils develop language skills. Teachers and classmates can scaffold a pupil to improve abilities, for example by giving immediate response on sentence structure or pronunciation. Furthermore, they can help each other with ideas on how to improve a sentence or how to express it differently (Beckman Anthony, 2008).

Teachers benefit from use of the target language in lessons as well, but in a different way than pupils do, according to Bateman (2008). Teachers who mainly use the target language during lessons are more successful as teachers since their pupils seem to improve more and faster. Even though it is more time consuming to plan for lessons where English is primarily used, Bateman (2008) insists that it is worthwhile for teachers, since their ability to plan lessons increases with practice. Furthermore, lessons that are carefully planned are more beneficial to pupils than lessons that are not, according to Bateman (2008). In addition, teachers receive much more respect from pupils when they use the target language, especially if they use it in a proper, and for pupils, beneficial way. Finally, pupils seem to develop an improved self-confidence from teachers that mainly use English, since they experience it as a sign of higher expectations from the teacher and therefore more belief in their skills as well (Bateman, 2008).

4.3. Difficulties and challenges

When teachers and pupils use the target language in the classroom, difficulties and challenges arise as well as benefits. All articles bring up difficulties and challenges, and they emphasize both similar and different difficulties and challenges. Table 5 below presents some of the difficulties and challenges found in the articles.

Table 5: Difficulties and challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson planning</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating tasks</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe and tolerant classroom environment</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Differences in pupils' language skills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the target language all the time</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
According to Beckman Anthony (2008), Chambers (2013) and Wyatt (2009), it is challenging for a teacher to plan lessons involving use of the target language and there are many things the teacher needs to keep in mind. Language tasks need to stimulate, motivate and be meaningful to all pupils. Lessons based on work in a textbook, a workbook and weekly vocabulary lists to learn are not enough and tend to make pupils unmotivated to use and to learn the target language instead of making them motivated (Beckman Anthony, 2008; Chambers, 2013; Wyatt, 2009).

Creating a safe and tolerant classroom environment is important according to Beckman Anthony (2008) and Chambers (2013). Pupils' language skills usually differ in a class and therefore Beckman Anthony (2008) and Chambers (2013) emphasize the importance of a classroom, where especially pupils with low skills are stimulated and supported enough to develop confidence to dare to produce output. Pupils who are not supported enough will probably let their low self-esteem and fear of saying something incorrectly hold them back. Probably, that will make them feel left out (Beckman Anthony, 2008; Chambers, 2013). In addition, Sesek (2005) emphasizes the importance for pupils to use the target language, since it is otherwise difficult to learn a language properly.

Language comprehension is an area where difficulties and challenges of using the target language in the classroom appear, according to Bateman (2008), Beckman Anthony (2008), Chambers (2013) and Sesek (2005). Beckman Anthony (2008) mentions new vocabulary as one of the challenges. It is mainly difficult to make everyone understand a word and for example how to use it in a sentence. It is the same with grammar according to Bateman (2008) and Chambers (2013). Both of these are areas where teachers tend to use the first language to explain properly, since they do not want any of their pupils not to understand or to misunderstand something (Bateman 2008; Beckman Anthony 2008; Chambers 2013; Sesek 2005). Furthermore, Bateman (2008) and Sesek (2005) insist that teachers find it more challenging to maintain a calm environment in the classroom and to manage discipline when using the target language and instead tend to use the first language for those things.

Finally, teachers themselves have challenges they have to approach (Bateman 2008; Chambers 2013). For instance, teachers can experience low confidence or low skill competence and therefore have problems using the target language consistently in the classroom. Furthermore, they can feel stressed about the amount of things in the curriculum they must teach in English while they know that it takes more time to both plan for and to teach in the target language (Bateman, 2008; Chambers, 2013).

4.4. What stimulates pupils to use the target language in the classroom?

As for the previous themes, the articles present different results on this topic. Different tasks stimulate pupils to use the target language to a varying degree. Table 6 below presents some of the factors that stimulate pupils.
Table 6: What stimulates pupils to use the target language in the classroom?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful tasks</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Known purpose</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Variation</td>
<td></td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection to spare time activities</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>No pressure of being correct all the time</td>
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<td>x</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Beckman Anthony (2008), Chambers (2013) and Wyatt (2009) insist that if a task is supposed to stimulate pupils to use the target language it has to feel meaningful to them. For example, if a task is challenging, where pupils have to think and elaborate with the language, they are more likely to be interested and thereby stimulated to use the target language. This is in contrast to the opposite situation, where a teacher gives pupils tasks and questions they can answer yes or no to. Those kinds of tasks usually do not stimulate pupils (Beckman Anthony, 2008; Chambers, 2013). In addition, Chambers (2013) mentions that teachers have to explain to their pupils why certain tasks are used and what they will learn from them.

Pupils need varied activities that consist of individual, pair and group work to stimulate their target language use (Wyatt 2009). Beckman Anthony (2008) and Wyatt (2009) believe that work in pairs or in groups give pupils useful and stimulating opportunities to discuss, solve tasks and learn together in the target language.

Beckman Anthony (2008) argues that teachers who connect language lessons with pupils’ spare time activities are more likely to be successful in stimulating their pupils to use the target language. Pupils could for instance learn vocabulary connected to one of their spare time activities or tell classmates about their interest. Wyatt (2009) mentions vocabulary as well, but emphasizes the connection more to pupils’ feelings, activities with their friends and social occasions than to other activities. Wyatt (2009) believes that this is a stimulating way for pupils to learn and use the target language. In addition, Wyatt (2009) insists that pupils should be able to speak without the pressure of always being correct and that it is more important that they speak at all. Teachers should try their best to be supportive, instead of pointing out pupils’ mistakes and possibly embarrassing them.

5. Discussion

5.1. Results discussion

The aim of this literature study was to learn what previous research had to say about advantages and challenges of using the target language in the classroom. Furthermore, the aim was, if possible, to find out what pupils think about it as well. The following research questions were used:
• What are the advantages of and challenges with using the target language during English lessons?
• What are pupils’ opinions on using the target language during English lessons?

From the Swedish curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011a, pp. 30-32), it appears that pupils are supposed to learn how to communicate, with confidence and help from several language strategies. Furthermore, teachers are supposed to plan lessons based on the core content, and include both input and output tasks. In addition, the lessons should consist of varied tasks and include input from different sources. Pronunciation and the ability to adapt to different situations and receivers are important.

Pinter (2006) emphasizes the need for input since it benefits vocabulary, sentence structure and pronunciation. Furthermore, Pinter (2006) writes that language strategies like language adaption and other conversation techniques are necessary for a language learner to assimilate since it is important to become a good English speaker. Lundberg (2010, pp. 25-26) emphasizes the teacher’s role and the importance of possessing good language skills to be able to teach pupils properly. In addition, teachers need to master good teaching strategies as well as knowing how to motivate and make pupils feel safe enough to speak English in the classroom.

There are challenges involved when the use of the target language dominates the classroom. Pinter (2006) mentions differences in pupils’ skill levels and younger learners’ absence of good language strategies as some of the challenges of using the target language. Furthermore, pupils seem to find it easier to follow when the teacher is the input, rather than when they listen to an unknown voice (Pinter, 2006, p. 45).

The results concerning the benefits from the articles point towards the same things that Pinter (2006) and Lundberg (2010) have highlighted. Bateman (2008), Beckman Anthony (2008), Chambers (2013) and Sesek (2005) argue that plenty of target language input enhances an increased ability to speak. Beckman Anthony (2008), Bateman (2008), Chambers (2013) and Sesek (2005) mention benefits for pronunciation, while the first three mention increased vocabulary. Sesek (2005) emphasizes the connection between English in school and spare time as an important source to enhance English skills, if it is properly maintained. Beckman Anthony (2008) accentuates group work and scaffolding as beneficial for pupil’s target language learning. In the sociocultural theory, scaffolding is mentioned as important since pupils need to be supported in order to stay in their zone of proximal development. Without the support, the pupils will stay in what Vygotsky called the development level, which means that it is more difficult for pupils to learn properly since they have no one more capable to help them when they might need it.

One of the most common challenges mentioned in these articles is for example that pupils’ language skills can differ, which makes it important for teachers to stimulate and support all pupils, especially the pupils with low skills, in order to make all pupils confident enough to produce output (Beckman Anthony, 2008; Chambers, 2013). According to Beckman Anthony (2008), Chambers (2013) and Wyatt (2009), mainly using the target language during lessons demands more careful planning and that takes more time. In addition, there are several things to keep in mind as well while planning. Tasks need to be stimulating, motivating and meaningful to all pupils. Beckman Anthony (2008) and Chambers (2013) also emphasize the need for a safe and tolerant classroom environment. Chambers (2013) accentuates pupils’ different language skills as challenging. Furthermore, Beckman Anthony (2008), Bateman (2008), Chambers (2013) and Sesek (2005) all maintain that language comprehension is challenging sometimes, especially when discipline needs to be carried out or vocabulary and grammar explained.
Pupils’ opinions on using the target language during English education are discussed in three of the articles. Mainly, the results point to the need for the tasks to feel meaningful in order to be stimulating and motivating for the pupils. Language lessons connected to spare time activities are motivating to pupils, according to Beckman Anthony (2008), and Wyatt (2009) writes that pupils often like to learn vocabulary from an interest or from things in their everyday life. It is important that they are able to think and play around with the language as well (Beckman Anthony, 2008; Chambers, 2013; Wyatt, 2009). In addition, pupils need to know the purpose of exercises. They need to know why they are beneficial for them as well (Chambers, 2013). Furthermore, varied activities and activities performed with others are attractive, where pupils can learn together (Beckman Anthony, 2008; Wyatt, 2009). When the pupils are free to think, play around with the language and learn together, it is an opportunity as well for them to scaffold each other. As Wood et al. (1976, p. 90) mention, both the teacher and possibly the pupils are supposed to help each other in each and every one’s zone of proximal development. Säljö (2010, p. 192) emphasizes the importance of individually adapted support for each pupil and the need for every pupil to be challenged. It is important for pupils to be able to speak the target language without the pressure of being correct though; since the most important thing is that they speak at all (Wyatt 2009). The teacher has an opportunity here to create a classroom where the English education feels stimulating, challenging and where all pupils can be in their zones of proximal development.

5.2. Limitations and methodology discussion

The aim of this thesis was to do research on and discuss the use of the target language in the classroom for the grades 4-6 based on research articles from both Sweden and abroad. The outcome of the search for articles did not exactly meet with the initial aim and complications occurred during the search process. For instance, it was difficult to find articles targeting the grades 4-6. Only two of the included five articles target the grades 4-6. The other three articles were relevant enough to this thesis and thereby included even though they targeted other age groups. Furthermore, articles based on Swedish research were difficult to find and therefore none is included in this thesis. The search results could probably have been better and perhaps more accurate with regards to the aim of this thesis, with use of other search words and better search technique. However, since five relevant articles were found and the time frame was limited, no further searches were carried out.

Even though some of the results in this thesis probably match the Swedish target language classroom for the grades 4-6, more research targeting that level as well as Swedish research is needed in order to be able to draw proper conclusions about the target language classroom for that age group and for Swedish pupils in that age group.

6. Conclusions

The research questions in this thesis were used to examine what previous research says about the advantages of and challenges with using the target language during English lessons and what pupils’ opinions are on using it. The results showed that there are both benefits as well as challenges for teachers and pupils in using the target language during English lessons. In order to make the English subject interesting and meaningful, a language teacher needs proper language skills as well as good leadership skills. In addition, the language teacher must be able to see all the pupils’ needs and be able to create a supportive and safe classroom environment in order to make every pupil confident enough to use the target language. The teacher must create a good learning atmosphere where the teachers as well as the pupils scaffold each other in order to improve all pupils’ target language skills.
Obviously, there are many things to consider and to work with and a teacher needs to be prepared for that and accept that there will always be challenges. The important thing is to never give up and remember that there will be positive outcomes from using the target language as well. With a dose of creativity and an open mind, anything and everything is possible to accomplish.

6.1. Further research

Although some of the results in this thesis might be applicable to Swedish language learners in grades 4-6, the results are limited due to the small number of articles used and no articles originating from research conducted in Sweden. Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct more research in this subject and especially on language learning in Sweden. An enlarged literature study with focus on the use of the target language is possible to carry out with an increased number of articles included, better search techniques and other search words than the ones used in this thesis. Furthermore, it would be interesting to conduct an empirical study in Swedish classrooms since it could give both recent and valuable information. It could include classroom observations as well as interviews with both teachers and pupils.
References


**Appendix 1 – Selection criteria**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
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<td>2005</td>
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<td>Silvina</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turnbull &amp; Arnett</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Wyatt</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* More than one age group.
** Wrong age group.
*** Wrong age group and wrong subject.
**** Too old.