Harnessing motivation: A study into Swedish English students’ motivation for engaging with English in and out of school
Abstract

This study explores the motivation that students in Swedish upper secondary school have for engaging with, and learning, English both in and out of school to find out if there is a gap between them and find a way to possibly bridge this gap if it exists. Students’ motivation has been described as important for their learning and motivation and its effects have been studied in several ways. A study with focus on how informal learning and out of school (extramural) English improve students’ English proficiency have been conducted by Sundqvist (2010) and Socket (2013). The effect of schools, and teachers in particular, on students’ motivation in school or during class has been studied by Sundqvist (2015), Bernaus and Gardner (2008) and Ushida (2005), while a study on what actually motivates students was done by Saeed and Zyngier (2012).

This study is conducted through group interviews with four focus groups made up of three students each which come from two different upper secondary schools in Sweden. The results of these interviews are analysed through Ryan and Deci’s Self-Determination Theory (2000) to determine how motivated the students are and how their motivation is affected by different factors.

The results show that students are highly motivated to engage with English activities on their own volition, and that they are highly motivated to learn English. The results also show that teachers have a great effect on students’ motivation and can both raise and lower it depending on how they conduct their lessons. Students want more choice, to learn through authentic English experiences and a teacher that they can relate to.

Keywords: upper-secondary school, Sweden, EFL, teaching English, motivation, extramural English.
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1 Introduction

Learning is undoubtedly much more engaging when one is motivated to do so, and motivation is one of the most important factors when it comes to students’ retention and efficiency (Brown, 2007; Gärdenfors, 2010; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012; Ushida, 2005). During field studies and placement studies at upper secondary schools in Sweden, I have found that motivation seemed to be lacking among some of the students in English courses, as some of them were unwilling to work with the assignments that the teachers gave them, or if they worked, did so half-heartedly. Despite this apparent lack of motivation, there were still students that showed great English skills, which meant that the students in question were learning English well without being motivated to work with it in school. This lack of motivation to engage in English activities in school despite good English skills is a phenomenon that has been observed by Sundqvist too, although among younger students. She conducted a study based on the assumption that the more prominent presence of the English language in Swedish everyday life is the reason for this lack of motivation and found that some teachers were unable to make use of the motivation the students already possessed (2013). In essence, the teachers were not able to keep up with the students’ use of English to make their lessons interesting enough. In another of her studies she coined the term Extramural English, which will be used in this study, and which refers to all English that students meet outside of school, be it through social media, news, movies, music, friends, or digital games to name a few examples (Sundqvist, 2010).

Based on the same assumptions, a quantitative study was conducted that focused on Swedish upper secondary students’ use of English in school compared to out of school (Halling & Höggren, 2017). The results showed that there was a gap between how teachers conducted lessons and how their students engaged with English in their free time, with students in general being more motivated to engage with the English they encountered during their free time. This study will follow up on these findings and investigate students’ motivations on a deeper level, to see what motivates or demotivates them.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to explore the motivation that Swedish upper secondary students have for learning English. By finding out what motivates the students to engage with and learn English I hope to be able to provide some insight into how to bridge the gap between
extramural English and English in school that was found in Sundqvist’s (2013) and Halling & Höggren’s (2017) studies, so that the teaching done in the future may take advantage of the students’ already existing motivation. This is to be done by answering the following research questions:

1. What motivates some Swedish upper secondary students to learn or improve their English?
2. How motivated are these students to engage in extramural English activities?
3. How motivated are these students to engage with English in school?
4. If there are cases where students’ motivation in school is lacking, what could be done to improve it?

2 Background

As motivation and its connection to extramural English activities are the main concerns of this study, a brief summary of theories and studies into motivation will be presented. This will be done to show a background to the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in particular. SDT will then be thoroughly explained followed by an account of a few studies on motivation and the effects of extramural English on students’ learning.

2.1 Theories and approaches to motivation

Gärdenfors reports that motivated and confident students learn much more efficiently and have greater retention, and goes as far as to say that the lack of motivation, together with low self-esteem and confidence, is the biggest contributor to failed learning (2010, p. 68). That motivation is important is of little doubt, but in order to be able to work with improving or retaining students’ motivation a clear understanding of what motivation is is needed.

Brown defines motivation as “the extent to which you make choices about (a) goals to pursue and (b) the effort you will devote to that pursuit” (2007, p. 85) but notes that such a definition is open to interpretation. What exactly is it that drives a person to be motivated? He continues to list three traditional approaches that try to explain this drive with their own interpretations of motivation, namely the behaviourist, cognitive, and constructivist approaches (2007, p. 85).

The first traditional approach to motivation is the behaviourist approach which defines motivation as the “anticipation of reinforcements” (Brown, 2007, p. 85). Reinforcement refers
to how external rewards or punishments reinforce behaviour in a person, and put simply it means that if a person performs an action and is rewarded for it, the person will be more likely to repeat that action while anticipating the same reward once more. The same reinforcement applies to the anticipation of a punishment, where the reward is instead the absence of punishment. A person’s motivation is then their pursuit for this anticipated reward. While rewards are easily seen as physical, such as money or food, they can also be more abstract, such as being liked by a person. Even the most altruistic action is seen as having an anticipated reward that is somehow beneficial for the performer of the action. Brown further notes that external rewards are prominent in schools in the form of grades or a chance at a desired career (2007, p.85).

The second traditional approach to motivation is the cognitivist approach which puts the external rewards aside and instead views self-rewarding as a person’s source of motivation. Brown presents three theories that all make use of this approach to define motivation: the Drive Theory, the Hierarchy of Needs theory and the Self-control Theory (2007, p.86).

The Drive theory suggests that all humans possess innate drives that their motivation stems from, i.e. drives compel humans to act. These 6 drives are: exploration, manipulation, activity, stimulation, knowledge and ego enhancement. Through this theory, humans are seen as wanting to understand the unknown, to explore and control their environment, to be active to receive stimulations both physically and mentally, to find answers and improve their own self-esteem. All of these drives are aspects that the school should promote in its students according to LGY11 (Skolverket, 2011).

The Hierarchy of Needs theory (Maslow, 1970) builds on the idea that there is a set of basic needs that all humans strive to satisfy, but they are ranked in a hierarchy where the higher needs cannot be satisfied until the more basic needs have been taken care of. See Figure 1 for a visual representation.
At the top of this hierarchy of needs lies self-actualization as humans’ ultimate goal, where the reward is nothing else than achieving this goal. Before self-actualization can be reached, a person’s esteem in both status and strength must be raised and before that can happen, this person must have fulfilled the needs of feeling love, belongingness and affection. A feeling of safety, security, protection and freedom from fear is required for that and at the very bottom there are needs such as air, water, food, rest and exercise. The premise of this theory is that a person who is hungry, has not slept well or feels like they do not belong to group is incapable of pursuing higher goals. A group in this situation could be seen as a class, while higher goals could be seen as education. According to Brown, it is important that teachers realize that students’ need for safety, belonging and affection in the classroom is vital to their motivation, and that familiar procedures or casual conversations should not be ignored (2007, p. 87).

The Self-control theory stresses the importance of own choice both in short-term and long-term contexts, as motivation is deemed to be the highest when a person make their own choices rather than reacting to others’ choices. In school it can be reached through cooperative learning opportunities where a student gets the chance to choose what they want to study. While motivation is highest with free choice, the theory also states that the opposite is true, as
motivation for a task will diminish and vanish if a person is forced to do something against their will.

The third traditional approach to motivation is the constructivist approach which focuses on social aspects and individual choices, as it is built on the idea that every choice a person makes is done in the context of a cultural or social situation. The constructivist definition of motivation is that it is derived from both self-determination and interactions between people. This means that a student can be highly motivated to learn something like a language, which is referred to as global motivation, but at the same time be demotivated to work with a task regarding that language if the situation does not offer the right circumstance for it, referred to as task motivation. Perhaps the student thinks highly of their English skills but is paired up with someone vastly superior that makes them feel inadequate, or it can simply be that the task in question is not stimulating enough (Brown, 2007, p.87). The constructivist approach makes a difference between global and task motivation, viewing them as separate from each other as there are different drives for each of them.

2.2 Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Another distinction that is made is that of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation which determines where a person’s motivation originates. The intrinsic motivation regards motivation that is innate to humans and comes from within oneself while extrinsic motivation comes from outside the self. Both forms of motivation are important for learners, though learning through intrinsic motivation is more efficient and leads to greater retention than learning that had extrinsic motivations as a main driving force according to Brown (2007), Maslow (1970), and Gärdenfors (2010). This section will therefore start with a deeper look into what intrinsic motivation is and how to maintain it, followed by a similar exploration of extrinsic motivation.

Thus, intrinsic motivation comes from within, but that alone is not enough to define it. Edward Deci (1975, p. 23) defines it as:

Intrinsically motivated activities are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. People seem to engage in the activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward. ... Intrinsically motivated behaviours are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding consequences, namely, feelings of competence and self-determination.
It is this internal reward of personal growth that makes the intrinsic motivation have such positive effects on learning and keeps the learner motivated (Brown, 2007, p. 89). The idea of intrinsic motivation fits in well with both the cognitive and constructivist approaches to motivation in that it is the growth of the self that is the main drive of it. It is worth noting that while intrinsic motivation is often described as coming from inside a person, it is not a conscious motivation. A person can start a task believing that they will dislike it, but throughout working with the task can find sincere enjoyment in it, and that way develop an intrinsic motivation for it (Brown, 2007, p.88). Looking into the highest position on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs we find self-realization, which he claims is what all humans strive for and that it is in itself an intrinsically motivated goal (Maslow, 1970). He also affirms that the intrinsic motivation to fulfill this need of self-realization is stronger than any extrinsic motivation. Jerome Bruner, however, claims the opposite, that the addictive nature of extrinsic rewards can in fact disrupt and hamper intrinsic motivation (Brown, 2007, p.89).

Furthermore, Ryan and Deci note that the social environment in which learning is happening can have a great effect on students’ intrinsic motivation, by either facilitating it or forestalling it, depending on the situation (2010, p.71). They also state that teachers’ actions and behaviour have similar intense effects on students’ intrinsic motivation, which is not that hard to accept as teachers control the environment in a class. This is further supported by Hattie who claims the teacher is the factor that affects students’ learning the most (2012, p. 43).

Often seen as the opposite of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation envelops all motivation that deals with external rewards. Comparing it to intrinsic motivation, where the reward is performing the action itself, extrinsic motivation comes from rewards that have no real connection to the action itself (Gärdenfors, 2010, p. 79). Additionally, the rewards that fuel extrinsic motivation are often short term and rarely have a great impact on a student’s future motivation and self-determination, and are more likely to serve as reinforcers to a behaviour or action. This makes the behaviourist approach to motivation a great way to explain extrinsic motivation, with its physical and abstract rewards or punishments.

Learning through intrinsic motivation seems to be more desirable due to the longer retention and efficiency in comparison to extrinsic motivation. The possibly harmful effects that extrinsic motivation may have on students’ intrinsic motivation, as mentioned above, make it easy to see extrinsic motivation as something negative that should preferably be avoided. Ryan and Deci do, however, make a statement that under the right conditions
extrinsic motivation can also lead to a positive growth in the student’s self-determination (2010, p.72). This integration of extrinsic motivation into the self will be expanded on further down as SDT is discussed.

2.3 Self-determination Theory (SDT)

The data collected in this study will be analysed through Ryan and Deci’s Self-determination Theory which is used to describe people’s self-motivation by researching environmental factors that either support or reduce it (2000). SDT consists of two subtheories named Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) and Organismic Integration Theory (OIT). Through their research with CET, Ryan and Deci identified three physiological needs that were crucial for people’s optimal motivation and wellbeing: autonomy, feeling of competence and relatedness (2000).

**Autonomy** refers to a person’s ability to decide over, and control, their own learning and actions, as well as gaining a responsibility to do just that. The feeling of autonomy means that a person can make self-endorsed choices and can go through with their decisions without restrictions, or simply feel that their opinions or suggestions are considered. In a school environment, being able to contribute to lesson plans could be said to give the students a feeling of autonomy.

The **feeling of competence** refers to a person’s ability to engage in, in this case, the use of English, to be able to demonstrate they know and be recognized for it. The recognition can come either as direct praise or just the feeling of communication working as it should. Simply put, it is the feeling of mastery over something that is important to a person, i.e. overcoming a challenge or feeling that they learn.

**Relatedness** refers to the social meaningfulness of a person’s learning, assignments or environment. This means that there is a sense of belonging that is needed for a person to feel like they matter to others, to feel connected and cared for by others, but also to care for them. Relatedness also refers to the authenticity of the tasks a person is working with, requiring them to feel a connection to the task at hand.

Satisfying one or two of these psychological needs is not enough, as only together do they aid someone to reach their best mental state. It is, however, through meeting the needs of autonomy and the feeling of competence that a person finds intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70). Relatedness is also important for intrinsic motivation, but only in the sense
that if a person’s need for it is being rejected by cold and uncaring social connections, their intrinsic motivation will be diminished (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 71).

Teachers who are inclusive and caring therefore create an environment where students have a chance to let their intrinsic motivation flourish, while uncaring teachers diminish this intrinsic motivation instead. The same can be said about teachers that support student autonomy, as they enhance their students’ intrinsic motivation, while teachers who are controlling and offer the students no choice when it comes to their studies lower their students’ intrinsic motivation instead. Teachers who make use of extrinsic motivation in the form of rewards, run the risk of harming the students’ intrinsic motivation as the focus shifts from the enjoyment of the assignment or learning, to the more immediate reward that is being offered. Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation in the form of threats like deadlines, pressured evaluations and firm directives is likely to lower students’ intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70-71).

Extrinsic motivation should not be seen as fully negative, however, as Ryan and Deci show with the second sub-theory OIT. It is used to show how extrinsic motivation can be internalized in students to increase their sense of autonomy. By internalizing extrinsic motivation, a student may find themselves willingly engaging with a task they once were forced to work with (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 72). Through OIT they construct a continuum of motivation that starts at amotivation and ends with intrinsic motivation, with four stages of extrinsic motivation in between (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Ryan & Deci's Organismic Integration Theory (2010, p.72)](image)

From left to right, amotivation shows the absence of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation for a task where there is no regulation in the form of rewards and thus no incentive for a student to work with a task. The extrinsic motivation and its four levels of regulations follows. The external regulation shows pure external motivation and a student is now complying to
work with the task due to a promised reward or a threat, making them feel low autonomy. *Introjected regulation* is the next level, where the student has started to internalize the rewards and is now working on the task to prove to themselves that they can do it and in so strengthening their ego as a reward. After that comes the *identified regulation* where the subject or task has a personal importance to the student and the reward is that the task is completed. Note that the student does not find enjoyment in doing the task yet. The last regulation of the extrinsic motivation is the *integrated regulation* where a student is doing a task simply because it aligns with their personal values. Last, is the *intrinsic motivation* where the student finds sincere enjoyment in the task and is able to lose track of time for being so engaged with the task in question (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 72).

By properly making use of extrinsic motivation, a teacher can internalize the motivation in the student, which according to Ryan and Deci becomes easier if there is a strong feeling of relatedness between the teacher and student (2000, p.73). Furthermore, internalizing motivation and increasing the feeling of autonomy in a student becomes even easier if the student has a strong feeling of confidence, as the external reward will not impede on the student’s autonomy as much if they perceive a task as doable (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 73).

2.4 Previous research

Plenty of previous research into motivation has been done, and in Sweden it seems that younger students, from the age of 7 to 15, have been the main focus. A brief summary of a few studies will be presented below, where they have been organized based on their findings.

2.4.1 How extramural English activities aid in learning

Sundqvist investigated the effects of extramural English activities on the oral skills and vocabulary of 14-15-year-olds, with a focus on digital gaming, and general computer use to a smaller extent (Sundqvist, 2010). Through the use of a questionnaire, interviews and a language diary, where the students wrote down what extramural English activities they were engaging in, Sundqvist mapped how 80 students engaged with English during their free time. The students’ oral abilities were tested by having two students speak to each other and having an outside party evaluate their proficiency while their vocabulary was gauged by two written tests. The results showed that active extramural English activities such as gaming, reading or
browsing the internet had a greater effect on students’ oral proficiency and vocabulary, while more passive extramural activities like watching television or movies, or listening to music, had a lesser effect. It is, however, notable that any extramural English activities were beneficial to both oral proficiency and expanding the students’ vocabulary.

In another study, Sundqvist worked together with Sylvén to investigate 11-12-year-olds in Sweden to determine how they engaged with English during their free time (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). This time they made use of a questionnaire and a language diary to gather data from 86 students. The questionnaire asked the students to report how often they were reading books, newspapers, watching TV, films, used the internet, listened to music and played digital games. Their proficiency was then measured with three tests, one for reading, one for listening and one for vocabulary. Their findings showed that younger males engaged in more extramural English activities than females did, which also correlated with a higher proficiency among the male participants. Furthermore, students that engaged with digital cooperative and multiplayer games were shown to have the highest English proficiency among the students in the study.

Another study further focused on computer use, specifically digital gaming, and its effect on young learners’ English proficiency (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2014). The aim of this study was to find out how computer use related to students’ gender, motivation to learn English, self-assessed English skill and self-reported strategies for speaking English. A questionnaire and a language diary were used, where 76 10-11-year-olds reported what extramural English activities they engaged in, how motivated they were and how skilled they thought they were. The students that played digital games most often were also the most motivated to learn English and reported as having high self-assessment. Those that did not play as much also reported high on motivation and were also the ones that rated themselves highest when it came to self-assessment. It would seem, then, that extramural English activities may indeed have a positive effect on students’ English skills. Consequently, to investigate students’ motivation to engage with such activities seems a worthwhile task as the results may be used to improve teaching.

A study on how informal learning functions was performed with the help of nine female university students by having them report every moment of informal learning they personally encountered (Socket, 2013). These students were experienced in second language acquisition research, which allowed them to describe in detail how these informal learning moments happened. Socket made use of the Dynamic System theory (DST) which considers learning English through extramural activities as a dynamic experience rather than a linear learning
process. DST defined informal learning through six factors: *Establishing joint attention, understanding the communicative intentions of others, forming categories, detecting patterns and imitating them, noticing novelty and having a social drive to interact with others*. For three months, the students wrote blogs in which they reported every extramural English online activity and learning experience they met, relating them to the six factors previously mentioned. At the end of the study, Socket concluded that informal language learning happens mostly through categorization and pattern detection to make sense of novel concepts, and then comparing them to previous knowledge of the language and making suitable changes to it if this new information does not match with it. Furthermore, the students and Socket also emphasized the importance of what they call *stable attractors*, such as relationships or watching series on television, as motivators to learn English informally.

The validity of using informants that are experienced in English language acquisition to gather information about their own English language acquisition can be questioned, as they may use their previous knowledge to skew the results of what they report. The findings do, however, conform with other research in that media usage and authentic situations motivate students to use English. Moreover, the students’ reported extramural English activities are useful as they can be used to anticipate the responses from the interviews conducted in Socket’s study to help with probing, or aid in the recognition of extramural English activities or moments of informal learning when it comes to analysing the data.

### 2.4.2 Motivation to learn and teacher effects

The English proficiency, and the motivation to learn English, of one 14-year old boy who had immigrated to Sweden and learned most of his English from games was the focus of another of Sundqvist’s studies (2015). This study was done by interviewing him and having him do three university level English language proficiency tests. This boy had no experience with English before he began playing digital games at the age of seven and did not start learning English in school until a year later. According to him, escapism, competition, and stories offered by the games he played motivated him to learn English, and it was through the fun activity, and trial and error, that he learned from this extramural English. At 8th grade, he achieved passable grades at the three university tests, suggesting that his English proficiency was higher than expected of a 14-year-old. According to Sundqvist, this was due to his choice of extramural English activities in the form of digital games. There is, however, nothing in the study but the student’s own statements to support this suggestion.
While motivation to engage with extramural English seems to be high, demotivation has been observed when it came to working with English in school. This led to a study with a focus on students between the ages 14 and 16 and their motivation (Sundqvist & Olin-Scheller, 2013). By recognizing the media landscape that was current at the time and its ability to offer informal learning opportunities to learners of English, Sundqvist and Olin-Scheller investigated efforts made to bridge the gap between extramural English activities and English in school. Students’ demotivation was said to be caused by teachers’ inability to take advantage of extramural English activities that seemed to motivate students to engage with English, and the fact that students seemed to lack knowledge of how the English they learned in school would be beneficial to them. Their study was conducted through a survey with teachers that had taken part in a program that raised their knowledge of informal learning, and the effects of extramural English activities and autonomy. Every teacher that responded to the survey reported that their students were more motivated to engage with English in school after they had made changes to their teaching to reflect the program suggestions. The teachers who included students in the planning process of lessons and courses saw a greater increase in students’ motivation. This shows that research regarding students’ motivation is worthwhile if teachers are willing to take the results to heart.

The relation between teaching strategies and students’ motivation was further researched by Bernaus and Gardner (2008). Through two questionnaires, one for teachers and one for students, 31 teachers and 694 students from various schools in Spain took part in this study. The results of the two questionnaires showed that most teachers did not experience that there was a connection between their teaching strategies and the students’ attitude, motivation and anxiety towards English. The students, on the other hand, reported that different strategies had either positive or negative effects on their attitude, motivation and anxiety. Traditional strategies of teaching, such as those that had heavy textbook use or little active participation for the students, had the most negative effects, while strategies that invited students to take a more active role had the most positive effects. While this study was conducted in Spain, and 10 years ago, it shows that some teachers may not be aware of the effects they have on their students’ motivation and that they would benefit from being educated in this matter.

The effect of teachers on motivation and language anxiety, as well as the effects of motivation on students’ progress, was researched by Ushida in 2005. Three questionnaires were administered to students who were taking language courses online: one to map the students’ previous experience with technology and language learning, one that made use of Likert-scales to gauge the students’ attitude, motivation, interest, anxiety and desire to learn
the language, and one form that was distributed three times during the semester to continuously gather information on the students’ learning behaviour and course participation. While anxiety was high among all participating students at the beginning of the courses, teachers managed to lower it while raising motivation on several accounts and those that made use of social interactions often, despite the online nature of the courses, succeeded in raising their students’ motivation the most. Through this study, Ushida reinforces the idea of teachers having a great influence and effect on their students’ education. Furthermore, students who reported having high motivation worked more regularly and productively than those that did not, further supporting the importance of teachers’ effect on their students’ motivation.

Saeed and Zyngier explored the connection between students’ motivation and their engagement with English to find out if it was intrinsically or extrinsically motivated (2010). They made use of the Self-Determination Theory, just as this study, to analyse the results from a survey that was administered to 24 students in the ages between 11 and 13, and two qualitative interviews with students that showed signs of intrinsic or highly integrated extrinsic motivation in the survey. Their findings showed that most students had a highly integrated extrinsic motivation for learning English and that their engagement with English in school was authentic rather than forced. There were also students that were intrinsically motivated and found enjoyment in learning, as well as students whose extrinsic motivation was not as integrated, which made them develop strategies to be rewarded rather than to learn, as they found no value in learning.

Extramural English activities clearly have a positive effect on students’ English skills as reported by Sundqvist, Sylvén, Olin-Scheller and Socket above, which is not too hard to understand, as the more one is exposed to English, the better one will be. Motivation was also shown to be of great importance for learning efficiently, and the teachers’ effects on student motivation was made quite clear by Ushida, Sundqvist, Olin-Scheller, Bernaus and Gardner, as they showed that teachers could both increase and decrease student motivation. By harnessing students’ interests, which drive them to engage in extramural English activities, teachers would be able to raise or maintain high student motivation in school. Most studies about this kind of motivation seem to have been done with students in the grades 1-9, making a study that focuses on the grades 10-12 a relevant addition to the field.
3 Materials and methods
This study was conducted through a series of smaller group interviews and focus groups. Elaborations on the set-up of these interviews, interview questions and method of analysis can be found below.

3.1 Selection of informants
In order to find informants English teachers at various upper secondary schools were contacted and asked if they would be interested in letting their students participate in this study. Four teachers were interested in being visited so that their students could take part in this study. The informants were volunteers from four different classes in two different upper secondary schools from two different cities in Sweden. The classes ranged from grade 10 to grade 12 and other than stating that an even distribution of genders would be preferable, no other selections of the informants were made. Between all groups there were six male and six female informants. One group contained only male informants while the remaining three groups contained two females and one male informant each as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Gender Distribution in groups

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<tr>
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<th>Interview 1 - Grade 10</th>
<th>Interview 2 - Grade 11</th>
<th>Interview 3 - Grade 12</th>
<th>Interview 4 - Grade 12</th>
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3.2 Data collection
Data for this study was collected through interviews with focus groups of Swedish students in the grades 10 to 12. Each group consisted of three students and the interviews were between 25 and 35 minutes long. The choice of using focus groups was made because the approach allowed for the gathering of data from multiple informants at a time, but also so that the informants could aid each other by discussing their opinions. By letting the informants discuss and share their answers and opinions with others, the data collected will reach a greater validity (Bryman, 2008, p. 449). However, Bryman states that the negative aspects of this approach could be that the informants would be unwilling to share some information when
together with other informants, but as the questions in this study were not of a sensitive nature it was judged not to be an issue (2008, p. 449).

The informants met with the interviewer in a separate room from their class and the interview was performed with all attending members sitting in a circle around a table, with a microphone in the centre to record. During the interview, the interviewer engaged as little as possible with the informants to let the possible discussion happen naturally, and only asked the questions, probed for deeper answers, or encouraged a silent informant participate in the discussion to keep the focus group interview on topic (Bryman, 2008, p.453). The interviews were conducted in English as teachers in participating classes preferred to use the interviews as an authentic practice session for the students.

3.3 Interview questions

As the data is analysed based on SDT, the questions used in the focus group interviews must be designed to elicit answers that represent the informants’ psychological needs: autonomy, feeling of competence and relatedness. Moreover, as the aim of the study is to research students’ motivation for extramural English activities and compare it to the motivation they have for engaging with English in school, the questions had to allow the informants to answer from both these angles. As shown in Appendix 1, questions were created based on the 3 frames: out of school, in school, and general attitude towards English and sorted into which psychological need they primarily represented to make sure that every need was covered and brought up during the interviews. The questions were then sorted based on their frames to serve as the guideline for the interviewer as the focus group interviews were being conducted. This interview guideline can be found in Appendix 2.

3.4 Method of analysis

The collected data was analysed with the help of the SDT to determine motivation. This was done by finding answers that supported the three psychological needs, autonomy, feeling of competence and relatedness. The results were sorted into commonly found themes in the students’ answers that relate to motivation, and then explained by linking them to the previously mentioned needs.

3.5 Adherence to ethical research principles

This study has been conducted in agreement with the ethical principles of social research in that each informant that took part in this study was informed of the study’s purpose prior to
the interview, that they were informed that their participation was fully voluntary and that they were free to end their participation at any time, or refuse to answer a question. They were assured and promised that their participation was completely anonymous and that none of their answers would ever be able to be linked to them, and they were assured and promised that the information they gave would be used for this particular study and this study only.

4 Results

The results of the interviews will be presented through common themes found in the informants’ answers and discussed in relation to the psychological needs of SDT in order to answer the study’s research questions. Quotes from the four interviews will be used to support these themes, but as the small size of the study makes it possible for involved teachers and informants to deduce which informant gave which response, each of the 12 informants have been labelled with a letter from A to L, and no further information such as gender or grade will be given, to link them to a quote. These quotes have been grammatically corrected, both for the sake of the reader and the informants.

As this study is investigating what motivates students to learn English and engage with English activities both in and out of school, it does not focus on grade or gender differences between the informants. However, with the gender ratio among the informants being the same for both genders, some clear differences in what their preferred extramural English activities were could be noticed, e.g. more male students seemed to be more interested in music and comedy shows while more female students showed a preference for reading. Other than that, male and female students’ answers were mostly similar.

4.1 Students’ motivation for learning English

4.1.1 Communication in a globalized society

Students in all groups found it important to learn English for communicative purposes, e.g.:

“...it is an advantage to be able to communicate with other people no matter where you are” (K, gr. 4)
“There was a friend with me, he’s American, and we talked .../ it was very good to use English like that.” (C, gr. 1)

”Good if you want to travel to a lot of countries.” (B, gr. 1)

While they agree that English is highly useful when travelling abroad, they also point out that while they live in Sweden, English is a part of their everyday life as it, according to one student, is “the world language” (B, gr. 1) and “a lot of movies are in English” (B, gr. 1). This thought is supported by another student, as they say “it’s all part of being able to communicate in different countries, and not even different countries, but also here in Sweden” (F, gr. 2). Some students even expressed concern that “those who don’t know English may feel excluded” (E, gr. 2) due to the English language being so integrated into the Swedish society.

4.1.2 Future career or studies
Continuing on the idea that Sweden is part of a globalized society, the majority of the students expressed a need for understanding English in order to remain competitive in the future when it comes to work as “a lot of workplaces are global now” (I, gr. 3) and “you have the best opportunities when you know English” (A, gr. 1). Not only does this concern work, but also future academic pursuits, as one student claims that “you have so much use for it, unlike with Swedish. If you want to study outside of Sweden it is very important to learn English” (G, gr. 3). This shows that they are aware of the positive effects of speaking multiple languages, and English in particular.

4.1.3 Competitive comparison between students and others
The competitive aspect of knowing English does not only seem to be concern for future work or studies, as a majority of the students already compared themselves with others when asked to describe moments when they felt good or bad about their English skills. One student described a visit from the U.S.A. and said that “when I talked to them I was better than any of my siblings. So it felt good” (B, gr. 1) and another student described when they were in France “as a foreign exchange … and [the French] thought our English was so good that they thought that Swedish was our secondary language ... they didn’t understand that we could have
learned English like that” (H, gr. 2). Situations like these allow the students to show their competence in authentic environments, which according to SDT promotes motivation in them.

4.1.4 Enjoyment of English

Students also showed signs of intrinsic motivation as they described their experiences where they preferred English over Swedish, e.g.:

“Everything that’s being done in Swedish is just stupid.” (L, gr. 4)

“Because they sound cool when you speak English.” (A, gr. 1)

While the comments may sound unimportant, they show that there is a sincere enjoyment in consuming media in English rather than Swedish, as shown as one student tells that they prefer to be “watching in the original language, if it is English” (I, gr. 4) when it comes to movies, but also mentions that they “like speaking English for fun. With my friends ... make funny accents and have fun sometimes” (I, gr. 4), showing that engaging with English activities can be a reward in itself.

4.2 Students’ motivation for engaging with extramural English activities

4.2.1 Available contents and origins

Further continuing on the integration of English into the Swedish society, one recurring reason for students to engage in extramural English activities is that the media they wish to consume is most often available in English, e.g.:

“There are a lot of stand-up comedy in English than there’s in Sweden.” (A, gr. 1)

“Well, I prefer to read a book in English if it is originally written in English. ... most movies are in English so you have to watch them in English.” (H, gr. 3)

As H mentioned above, there is a preference for English media too, as if it is “not translated properly, ... you actually lose some information because things change and how you write it” (I, gr. 3), showing that these students are confident in their own English skills.
4.2.2 Extramural English learning

Learning English through extramural English activities is often not a conscious effort (Sundqvist, 2013) and is therefore hard to examine. However, when asked if they ever made intentional choices to learn English during their free time, the students could recall a few situations. One was when “they say something on a show or movie and you’re like ‘what does that mean?’ and especially if something comes up more than once. Like it repeats and you’re like ‘no, I have to know what they said’” (L, gr. 4). This hints that these students want to understand the media they are consuming and recognize that learning English will help them enjoy it further. The social aspect is also important when it comes to learning, as one student said that “when someone else uses words in speech ... I get really interested and I need to learn that word ... I think that’s the main way I’ve been learning words” (F, gr. 2).

When finding words, sentences or phrases that the students were not familiar with, they wanted to understand them and every student defaulted to using online translators or dictionaries, but they also presented other alternatives to learning as “most of the time you can understand a word or a sentence from the whole story. You can tell what this means” (B, gr. 1). This way, the students build new knowledge on their earlier knowledge, allowing them to fulfill SDT’s need for a feeling of competence as well as autonomy, as they control their own learning. Furthermore, extramural English activities do not only help the students to learn English as a language, but also regional and cultural knowledge as “being exposed to English opens a door to another world. I think you learn when you know English because it gives you access to so much more” (I, gr. 3).

4.3 Students’ motivation for engaging in English classroom activities

4.3.1 The importance of teachers for motivation

When it came to motivation in the classroom students in every group emphasized the teacher’s importance for their motivation, e.g.:

“there’s a big difference to have a good teacher, [teacher] is American. That makes it more attractive. (G, gr. 3)

“now we have a better teacher, there’s like, this course feels much better.” (B, gr. 1)
They make a point of how better teachers make them more motivated and that, in the case of G’s response, a sense of authenticity and relatedness connected to the teacher makes learning more attractive. While the students praised good teachers, they also gave examples of negative traits connected to teachers and how that affected their motivation. These negative effects will be reported further below.

4.3.2 Authentic English and student interests
Second to teachers, students preferred to work with subjects that they could relate to. One student wanted to work with “stuff that I am interested in. ... movies or music, I would like to work with that. So something that connects with me” (A, gr. 1). Another felt that work with movies or news is “more realistic. You see something, and then you work with it. But if you just sit in the class it’s really boring I think” (J, gr. 4). This relatedness does not only connect to what subject or topic students work with, but also to other students, as a student explains that they “like group tasks. I think it’s kind of cool when you talk to each other” (C, gr. 1), which is further emphasized by another who says they “like to hear other’s opinions about the things you are working with” (I, gr. 3).

4.3.3 Autonomy
A majority of students preferred to have some sort of control over their own learning, and more specifically, have a choice of what they want to work with, e.g.

“I’d like to write essays, creative writing, doing presentations on a subject that I get to choose. Yeah, having a lot of choices I think.” (F, gr. 2)

“I think every teacher should be more like [teacher], giving students freedom and make the lessons more like, open and fun and more current.” (E, gr.2)

“Having a lot of choices I think. Even with the books we got to choose which book we wanted. Out of 10.” (G, gr. 3)

This need for autonomy can, as shown above, be satisfied with both complete freedom or the ability to choose between a set of options. The need for autonomy does not stop at a task or
even classroom level, however, as the following student points out that choices regarding what courses they read also affect their motivation:

“I think it is possible to get every single person motivated. Because everybody here is coming from a previous course and then get to choose whether they want to do it or not. These people chose to do it so they obviously are quite motivated.” (H, gr. 3)

Despite the majority asking for more freedom, there were some students that desired a more controlled learning environment in school, with one of them saying that they “think it is easier to write something when you have a theme. I’m real bad coming up with something from the top of my head so I need to have a theme to get started” (I, gr. 3). This shows that even with a small sample of informants there is a clear divide in how students want their education.

4.4 Students’ lack of motivation

4.4.1 Repetitive work and seemingly pointless tasks
When asked about what English activities in school that failed to motivate them, they showed a clear distaste for tasks that were seemingly pointless. One student gave the example of a “3 minutes presentation where you have no time to actually say anything, it’s like ‘okay, stand there and talk briefly about something’ and it feels like it doesn’t matter” (H, gr. 3). Another disliked task that was often brought up was “working in typical textbooks ... I feel we’ve been doing for years in a row now ... that makes me not so motivated, and makes it kind of a waste of time” (D, gr. 2).

4.4.2 English proficiency and task difficulty
Further demotivating factors in the classroom seemed to be the difficulty of the task, as one student stated that “writing is my weakness, which may show why I don’t improve it, because whenever I hear about writing I don’t even try” (I, gr. 3). This shows how, when the need for a feeling of competence is not being satisfied, motivation drops. In the previous response, the task was too difficult so that the student did not feel competent, but as another student puts it when speaking of worksheets to practice grammar: “I think it should be a little more challenging” (F, gr. 2). Such tasks also deny the students a chance to satisfy their need for a
feeling of competence, as the tasks are too easy for them to derive a sense of accomplishment from.

4.4.3 Teacher importance for motivation
As previously mentioned, the students believed that teachers affected their motivation greatly. This is true for both positive and negative effects on their motivation, as a student reports they have “had other teachers who force grammar and boring stuff on you, and they don’t let you choose so much” (B, gr. 1). This denies the students a feeling of autonomy. A positive feeling of relatedness between the teacher and student can help with motivating the student to work with such tasks that lack in autonomy, but a negative feeling of relatedness have the opposite effect. One student said that “when I get a response from my teacher it’s like ‘this text sucks’, I don’t feel very good” (E, gr. 3) and gave an example of a classroom situation where neither the need for a feeling of relatedness nor competence was met, all due to the teacher’s interactions with the student. The teacher’s negative effects on student motivation was further emphasized by another student, as they hoped to have a teacher that “keeps the motivation up and not have a teacher that kills the motivation. ... so you’re like ‘now I want to learn’ and they’re like ‘nope, you’re not!’ and you’re like ‘okay I’m not.’ And you’re just sitting there, crying inside because your teacher is so bad” (I, gr. 3). Another student even gave an example where “most of [the students] changed [courses] when they got to hear they were going to have [teacher] for another year” (H, gr. 3). Yet, another student said that they heard from a previous group that had another teacher that “their motivation is quite lacking because their teacher’s teaching is probably not as great” (L, gr. 4). The students also compared the levels of motivation between two classes with different teachers, and came to the conclusion that the class with the perceived better teacher were more motivated to engage with English.

4.5 Raising students’ motivation
4.5.1 Effects of free choice
The vast majority of the students claimed to be motivated and most could not think of anything that would aid them in becoming more motivated. There were, however, a few that had some suggestions. One student reinforced the idea that greater autonomy would motivate them as they said that they wanted “more interesting tasks. ... working with what you enjoy. ... it’s hard for teachers to let students work with what they want to work with ... it would help me get more motivated if I had the choice” (J, gr. 4).
4.5.2 Authenticity and context

Other students desired a higher relatedness in the form of context and authenticity, as one student suggested to put “the assignments in context so that we know what we’re learning and what it’s for and why. ... I get more motivated when I know that I may be able to use words in the future.” (G, gr. 3). Another emphasized the same fact as they wished that the teacher would “focus the lesson and the course on the reality side of English instead of just working in the book, ... with text that’s completely outdated from like… 2005” (H, gr. 3) and went on to say that “that’s how people like to learn these days, involved with things around you, ... with things on the internet, it’s very interesting” (H, gr. 3).

4.5.3 Compelled to produce English speech

One group of students discussed their use of English during lessons, noting that not every teacher they had in upper secondary school had spoken English during the lessons:

“Yes, but [teacher] always tries to make us speak English with each other.” (F, gr. 2)

“I think it is good that he is always speaking English.” (D, gr. 2)

This adds to the authenticity of the English language they learn, as it in itself becomes a tool for learning. By encouraging the teacher’s attempts to make every student speak English during English class, these students deny themselves and other students some of their autonomy, which, according to SDT, is a demotivating factor. Other responses presented above also ask for classrooms with some form of strictness and lack of choice, showing that these students desire some guidelines and not full control of their own learning.

5 Discussion

With a small sample size of 12 informants, the ability to generalize the result of this study is limited. The discussion and conclusion that follows may therefore serve as inspiration, or as comparison, for future studies in the same field.
5.1 Discussion of results

Based on the three psychological needs of SDT: autonomy, a feeling of competence and relatedness, the results can be discussed to explore the motivation, or possible lack of motivation, that the students’ responses tell of. Through these discussions concerning the three needs, the research questions will be answered too, and as a reminder, here they are:

1. What motivates some Swedish upper secondary students to learn or improve their English?
2. How motivated are these students to engage in extramural English activities?
3. How motivated are these students to engage with English in school?
4. If there are cases where students’ motivation in school is lacking, what could be done to improve it?

Starting with autonomy, it is quite clear that almost all extramural English activities are highly autonomous, as the students decide that they will engage in them. Learning English does, however, not seem to be a goal in these activities except for the few cases where learning something new somehow leads to greater enjoyment, such as understanding a word or concept in a movie, book, series or show, much like it did for the boy in Sundqvist’s study (2015). This would suggest that most extramural English activities are intrinsically motivated, as the activities have no other goal than the enjoyment of doing them. This answers both the first and second research questions. However, these students also seem to have internalized their extrinsic motivation and are highly motivated to engage with extramural English due to that, just like the students in Saeed and Zyngier’s study (2012). These students are motivated to learn English both because they enjoy it, and because they know that it is good for them as it gives them more options for future education or work (see 4.1.1 and 4.1.2), showing signs of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It is not so strange then, to understand that the students would like to see even greater autonomy in school, to further aid them in internalizing their motivation.

While their extramural English activities do not have learning in focus, the students realize that they learn from engaging in them, and if more choices are made available to the students in school, they may be able to develop greater motivation for tasks and assignments that they have had a chance to influence. While SDT states that greater autonomy relates to a more internalized or intrinsic motivation, some of these students said that they want directions
and control from the teacher. It is perhaps not that surprising, as a complete lack of control from the teacher would make his or her role in the students’ learning irrelevant. These students seem to realize the teacher’s importance in their learning, showing that they have come to the same conclusion about teachers’ effects as Ushida (2005) and Bernaus and Gardner (2008) did. Student autonomy should then be given in moderation, so that they feel that their choices matter and that they can show their English competence in their own way.

The answer to the third research question is therefore more difficult, as student motivation varied greatly between tasks and teacher. Generally, it can be said that the internalized extrinsic motivation drives them when it comes to engaging with English in the classroom, but tasks or teacher interactions that fail to meet the three psychological needs of SDT reduce this motivation, even if only temporarily.

According to SDT, the feeling of confidence in connection with autonomy, is what has the greatest effect on a person’s motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2010). The students interviewed in this study showed that they felt good about their English skills when overcoming authentic challenges, like holding a conversation in English. However, tasks that failed to make the students feel good about their English were either too easy for them, such as worksheets that they had done many times before, or too hard, in the case with the student that did not like to write because they did not believe their writing was good enough.

This suggests that, in order to raise students’ motivation, the difficulty of tasks and assignments should be balanced. Teachers need to offer the students a challenge, so that they may overcome it and feel a sense of accomplishment and competence. An assignment that is too hard will make the student feel incapable of completing it, and through that be denied the feeling of competence that is needed for motivation. An assignment that is too easy will fail to reward the student with a feeling of competence as they complete it.

There were, however, some answers from the students that suggested that they were driven to learn when they encountered English that they did not understand, e.g. when they encountered phrases or words in movies, songs or in conversations that they did not know. Despite being denied this feeling of competence, they still were motivated to learn. Worth noting, is that their willingness to learn in such a situation stems from their own autonomous decision.

Autonomy and relatedness seem to be what these students desired the most, however, as teacher interaction and free choice were what they connected to their own motivation, much like Sundqvist and Olin-Scheller (2013) reported. To answer the fourth research question: the lack of motivation most often stemmed from a lack of autonomy or feeling of
competence, suggesting that the teacher should work with the students when creating tasks or assignments, to give them work that they feel is engaging.

5.2 Discussion of method

Regarding the way this study was conducted, there are three methodical aspects that could affect the result: the interview questions that determined the data which was collected, the way the interviews were conducted and finally the analysis of the gathered data.

During the interviews, there were occasionally moments where the questions needed to be clarified or rephrased, showing that further control and revision of them should have been performed before they were put to use. The questions about whether the students had learned something from English activities were the most unclear ones due to not being focused on language learning. The occasional lack of clarity may have skewed the students’ answers to them.

Four interviews with 12 students did not offer a large enough sample size for this study to derive any impactful results. The students that participated in the study were also picked at random, while students that were either decidedly motivated, demotivated or both could have been used to further pinpoint what either kept students motivated or made them lose motivation.

Furthermore, the interviewer was inexperienced and while attempts were made to follow up on the students’ answers to make them elaborate on them, potentially valuable data was hypothetically lost due to it. Group interviews and focus groups served to gather plenty of qualitative data over a short span of time, however, and many interesting aspects of students’ motivation was explored due to discussions between the students that the interview questions did not touch upon.

The data collected through the interviews was analysed through the perspective of SDT, and the interview questions were created with this perspective in mind. This could have led to a certain bias towards parts of the data that was not directly linked to students’ autonomy, relatedness and sense of competence. Using another perspective, or simply using more than one, could have allowed for a more interesting and rewarding result. Still, many of the students’ answers could be accounted for with the three psychological needs of SDT.
6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore students’ motivation for learning English, both in and out of school, to see if the two activities can somehow be used beneficially together by harnessing the motivation that students seem to have for extramural English activities in the classroom. These students seem to be greatly motivated to engage in extramural English activities, and in some cases even intrinsically motivated. They seem to have an internalized motivation when it comes to English in school, as they are aware that English is important, and that learning and developing their English skills will help them reach their own personal goals or simply grow as a person. Through relatedness, their teachers seem to have helped them internalize the extrinsic motivation they have for learning English, which would suggest that teachers that have students who are not motivated could make use of the students’ interests to help the students realize the importance of knowing English, and how knowing English can aid the students in their life. Despite the limitations of this study, the findings do seem to indicate that including the students in the planning of lessons could help them both to relate to the English activities as they are put in context, i.e. the students may be able to understand why they should learn something and why it will aid them in their future, which gives the students the autonomy they need to feel motivated.

Future research may want to explore how teachers can effectively work to internalize the students extrinsic motivation, and investigate just how much autonomy the students should be given.
References


Appendix 1 – Creation of questions

Out of classroom:

**Autonomy**
- Do you feel like you learn a lot from the English you engage with during your free time?
  - Can you name anything that you know you have learned on your free time?
- What do you do when you encounter English that you don’t understand in your free time?
- Have you ever made active choices to make use English media?

**Feeling of competence**
- Are there any moments where you feel good about your English skills outside of the classroom?
- Are there any moments where you feel like your English language skills are lacking outside of school?

**Relatedness**
- How do you interact with English in your free time?

In classroom:

**Autonomy**
- Do you feel like you learn a lot from the English you engage with during lessons?
- What do you do when you encounter English that you don’t understand in the classroom?

**Feeling of competence**
- Are there any moments where you feel good about your English skills in school? What ones?
- Are there any moments where you feel like your English language skills are lacking in school?

**Relatedness**
- How do you interact with English during lessons?

General attitude towards English:

**Autonomy**
- Do you want to learn English? In which case why/why not?
- What would you like to see in the classroom that would make English more engaging to work with?

**Relatedness**
- When do you find it useful to know English?
- What do you think of English as a language and its status in Sweden?
- Do you think it is important to learn English? Why/Why not?
Appendix 2 – Interview questions

INTRODUCTION (Easy non-loaded questions, general English stuff)
· Do you think it is important to learn English? Why/Why not?
· What do you think of English as a language and its status in Sweden?
· When do you find it useful to know English?

EXTRAMURAL
· How do you encounter English in your free time?
· Do you feel like you learn a lot from the English you engage with during your free time?
  o Can you name anything that you know you have learned in your free time?
  o Do you find this knowledge to be useful?
· What do you do when you encounter English that you don’t understand in your free time?
· Have you ever made active choices to use English? What/Why?
Watch/read/listen to something in English rather than Swedish.
· Can you name one or more occasions when you have felt good about your English skills outside of school?
· Can you name one or more occasions when you have felt that your English skills outside of school were lacking?

IN CLASSROOM
· How do you interact with English during in school?
· Do you feel like you learn a lot from the English you engage with during in school?
  o Can you name anything that you know you have learned during in school?
  o Do you find this knowledge to be useful?
· What do you do when you encounter English that you don’t understand in the classroom?
· Can you name one or more occasions when you have felt good about your English skills in school?
· Can you name one or more occasions when you have felt that your English skills in school were lacking?

ROUNDING OFF[TS3]
· How motivated do you feel to work with English in school right now?
  o What tasks make you more motivated to work?
  o What keeps you from being motivated by English in the classroom?
· What do you think would help you get motivated to work with English in the classroom?