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Extramural English Activities

Teachers’ perceptions of students’ extramural English activities in relation to vocabulary

Lärarens syn på elevers engelska fritidsaktiviteter med avseende på ordinlärning

Sara Pettersson
Johan Bergdahl

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Examinator: Björn Sundmark
Supervisor: Shannon Sauro

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Abstract

Because of the globalization of society, English as a foreign language (EFL) has become easier to access through internet and outside school English activities, so called “extramural English activities” (EEA). Previous research indicates a positive relation between pupils’ EFL vocabulary development and EEA (Sundqvist, 2009). This development may influence teachers’ lesson planning, because of pupils’ wide span of interests and the resulting different levels of EFL vocabulary. The focus of this degree project is on year five teachers’ perception of pupils’ EEA and their level of vocabulary. We investigate there is a relationship between those variables, and how teachers are bridging the gap between pupils’ EEA and classroom activities. Further on, different theories of motivation and vocabulary, and previous research are presented and used in the analysis of collected data. The data was collected qualitatively through six interviews with teachers in year five. The results indicate that the teachers, to some extent know what kind of EEA the pupils are interested in. Teachers’ perceptions of the pupils’ level of EFL vocabulary correlated to some extent with their EEA. To bridge the gap between pupils’ EEA and enhancing motivation in EFL classrooms, some teachers tried to include pupils’ experiences in their teaching. Further on, these conclusions are discussed in relation to previous research. Finally, this degree project may motivate teachers to explore the EEA habits of their pupils.

Key words: Extramural English, EFL, motivation, teachers’ perception, vocabulary development, young language learners, implicit & explicit learning, receptive & productive vocabulary
Foreword

In this degree project, we have been collaboratively processing all part fairly equally. But to some extent we have had different responsibilities through the project. Sara’s main task has been to structure the written foundations for the outcomes in our discussions. She is also the interviewer for the teachers, Malin and Josefine and has also transcribed these. Johan’s contribution has been to finding interesting inputs and aspects to the degree project. He is also the interviewer for the teachers Hector, Charlie, Kim and Ingrid and has transcribed these too. Johan has also been a main contributor to the vocabulary section, while Sara has had more responsibility for the section on motivation and scaffolding. But as mentioned above, we feel that the workload has been equally distributed and we support each other fully.

Sara Pettersson

Johan Bergdahl
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1. Introduction

This degree project will focus on teachers’ perception of pupils’ English as a foreign language and their outside school activities. According to the syllabus for English (Skolverket, 2011a), teaching should include familiar topics, interests, situation, activities and events that are currently relevant.

Teaching of English should aim at helping the pupils to develop knowledge of the English language and of the areas and contexts where English is used, and also pupils’ confidence in their ability to use the language in different situations and for different purposes. (Skolverket, 2011, p. 32).

A purpose and a social need when teaching English is to connect students to the global society. Students may have access to a huge amount of information easily through the Internet and different activities outside of school. A lot of these activities may be in English. Statens medieråd (2012) lists the top activities of ten to twelve years olds outside of school. The list indicates that playing online games is the most popular internet activity among children. The second most popular internet activity was watching video clips through YouTube, and the third most popular activity was to surf on the Internet as entertainment and to pass time. These activities, which take place outside school hours, are referred to in this degree project as Extramural English Activities (EEA) (Sundqvist, 2009).

The assumption we make is that almost every learner in Swedish schools has access to books, video games and internet outside of school (Statens medieråd, 2012). Statistics from Statens medieråd (2012), show the access to media in their homes for nine to fourteen year old Swedish children. Numbers show that all children had access to TV-set, 96% of the children had access to a computer, and 91% of them had access to Internet from the computer. 65% of the nine to fourteen year old children had access to the Internet via other equipment than the computer. This indicates that the access to the Internet has developed and that the English language nowadays is more available than ever, perhaps being the most used common language on the Internet.

The top three extramural activities nine to fourteen year olds spent time on was Television, Internet and reading books. They spent 73 minutes a day on Internet activities and 66 minutes
of reading. (Statens medieråd 2012). For learning to occur and develop, one needs a set of pedagogical tools to make acquisition of language faster than it would naturally occur if students would not go to school:

\[...\] the whole point of pedagogy is that it is a way of short-circuiting the slow process of natural discovery and can make arrangements for learning to happen more easily and more efficiently than it does in ‘natural surroundings’. This is what schools are for, whatever subject we are dealing with. Pedagogy is bound to be a contrivance: that is precisely its purpose. If what went on in the classrooms exactly replicated the conditions of the world outside, there would be no point in pedagogy at all. (Widdowson in Lundahl, p. 47, 2012)

From a historical point of view, the Swedish language has been greatly influenced by many languages such as Latin, French and German. At the present moment, the English language is widely spreading into our daily lives via different media. Essentially, the internet and its possibilities with English as its main language of stored information opens up a lot of new doors to spend time with the language. The general public are reaching a level of English never seen before (Lundahl, 2012).

When reaching a level of English never seen before, it is important for teachers to help pupils sort out information. This information may be about different areas and contexts where English is used, and therefore it is important for teachers to aim for pupils’ development in English as a foreign language (EFL). But what does the level of English look like today in Swedish schools? The trend has gone down but up again. NU-03, The National Evaluation of the Elementary School (Nationella utvärderingen av grundskolan, Skolverket, 2004a), showed lower scores in vocabulary than NU-92. But on the other hand, Sweden and Norway came out on top in English vocabulary tests compared to other countries (Skolverket, 2004b). This indicates a comparatively high level of English in Sweden. Further, the PISA tests (2012) indicated that pupils’ level of foreign language vocabulary have further increased since 2010 to 2012. It is likely that there has been a further increase in the last five years.

The English language is as stated, more available than ever. Nowadays, kids can spend hours acquiring English without parental influence. From a historical point of view, a lot more acquisition of English is being obtained during students’ spare time. This may lead to a greater language development. Skolverket (2004a) carried out an evaluation of the primary school, in subjects such as mathematics, Swedish, Swedish as a second language and English.
In the case of English it turned out that more than half of Swedish fifth graders learned more English outside of school than inside of it.

Finally, regarding the global influences of English as the dominated language on the Internet, one might discuss how this influence students’ vocabulary of English in Sweden.

### 1.1 English as a Foreign Language

Throughout this degree project we will refer to English in Sweden as English as a foreign language (EFL). Though English is increasingly penetrating the Swedish language, it is still not a second language as compared to a country like South Africa, India, Hong Kong or Kenya where English is a second language to the people when a huge part of the population are having a variety of mother tongues. Also, when English is a second language, the education, especially the higher levels, is delivered solely in English (Lundahl, 2012). The research we use in this degree project will thereby focus exclusively on EFL vocabulary learning.

### 1.2 Problem

In this section, we problematize the development of the global society, its influences on pupils’ interests outside school and their level of EFL, and how teacher deals with this possible spread. Finally, reasons for a pilot-study are also presented.

A problem with EFL theories is the utopian dream of being surrounded by the language as much as possible, preferably with native language speakers (Lundahl, 2012), as it is in countries where English is a second language. One domain dominated by English is the Internet. This may seem to be a playground for acquisition of language for learners of English as a foreign language. On the other hand, students’ varied command of vocabulary is inevitable, and it is not controllable which type of language children will be exposed to outside of school. One question is how teachers can deal with the variations in linguistic competence among pupils.

In the development of technology, the availability of the Internet is widened through different equipment the children may have in their homes (Statens medieråd, 2012). When EFL lessons are delivered in English the opportunities of variations of communication may be created.
In the last two years since the use of media may have increased, new activities and modes of communications may have developed further. Through these new extramural activities the availability of EFL and its’ learning opportunities in different domains on the Internet may have further expanded.

That is why the dramatic change in the variation of communication tools may influence pupils’ diversity of vocabulary, which may be difficult for a teacher to discover. The problem is for teachers to find out pupils’ full level of vocabulary in English and further challenge them at their specific level in language teaching. What might make it difficult is pupils’ wide range of language development and interests which may affect pupils’ development of their English vocabulary. Therefore, it may be difficult for the teacher to especially challenge the higher performing students. But as a side note, some of these students may only have deeper linguistic knowledge because of an interest in a specific limited area, for example Minecraft, which may be difficult to scaffold.

Another problem for teachers may be that pupils in 2015 may have an even wider range of opportunities of FL vocabulary development. The pupils’ may have more varied communication tools at home than in schools. A great spread among EEA may be even more difficult for teachers to grasp. This may increase the challenge for teachers for motivational purposes in the classroom. Since the latest findings we have studied are from 2013, we are aware that there may have been further changes in the last few years.

To get a further understanding of how the results from mainly Sundqvist (2009 & 2012) regarding FL learners and their Extramural Internet Activities (EIA) translates to learners of 11 year olds, we made a smaller pilot study (2015-01-27). Data from 24 11 year old Swedish learners was collected. We looked at their level of English vocabulary, their interests of EIA, and the amount of time they spent on EIA activities. Our interpretation of the data and results concur with those of Sundqvist (2009 & 2012) and other mentioned dissertations. In Sundqvists’s study (2012), the 12 year old pupils’ vocabulary level of FL had a positive connection to their EIA. When this positive connection also became clear through our pilot study, we became interested in teachers’ perceptions of their pupils’ EIA and what the teachers’ opinions were of their pupils’ level of vocabulary.
1.3 Purpose & Research Question

In an attempt to fill a gap between previous studies, we are interested in exploring how teachers perceive their pupils’ EE and how teachers view their students’ level of vocabulary. In this degree project we view vocabulary from two aspects, implicit versus explicit and receptive contra productive vocabulary. This paper is targeted to teachers of English in foreign language education. To narrow it down, we would also like to investigate if there is a relationship between teachers’ perceptions of their 11 year old students’ level of FL vocabulary and their time spent on certain extramural activities and finally, how teachers are trying to bridge the gap of motivation between EEA and classroom activities. We make the assumptions, based on statistics, that a year five learner has time to develop their foreign language and may have more interests in foreign language, in extramural English activities (Sundqvist, 2009). As future teachers in grade four to six, 10-12 year olds, we chose to focus on Swedish fifth graders, 11 year old learners.

A lot of time may be spent on the Internet or computer-based activities during students’ spare time activities. In relation to teachers’ perception of this, one might ask where the problem lies in incorporating students’ daily life activities, background and previous experiences. If Gee in 2003 already stated that “[…] I believe that use of games and game technologies for learning content in schools and skills in workplaces will become pervasive” (Gee, p. 1, 2003) one might question where the lack of implication has been disrupted. As teachers for the age of 10-12 years old, we have searched for studies regarding EFL vocabulary in relation to EEA without reasonable success. As future teachers we want to investigate what teachers’ perceptions are of students’ EEA, what level they think their students are at and if there are any relationships between those variables. The outcome of the results and conclusion of this study will be relevant for teachers in classes with 10-12 year olds.

Based on our purpose and problem area, we investigated the following research question:

- What are teachers’ perceptions of students’ extramural English and their level of vocabulary?
- How are teachers bridging the gap between students’ EEA and enhancing motivation in classroom?
2. Literature review

In this section, we explore how EFL vocabulary learning occurs through theories and later on the implications from the Swedish syllabus. Based on Bryman’s (2011) recommendations for sources, we are to choose resources with a theoretical base, previous research within our content area and the Swedish government's official documents.

2.1 Extramural English Activities

Our definition of extramural English is defined as:

 [...] an adjectival compound of Latin origin where the prefix, extra, means ‘outside’ and the stem, mural, means ‘wall’. Hence, the term extramural English means ‘English outside the walls’ and [...] it refers to the English that learners come in contact with or are involved in outside the walls of the classroom. (Sundqvist, p. 24, 2009)

In this degree project we define extramural English activities as reading, digital games and social networks. Each of these activities will be undertaken in the student’s additional studied language, English. We are referring to reading as pupils reading books in their foreign language of English. When mentioning digital games, it can be categorized as: video/computer games which are undertaken in the English language. When mentioning social networks on internet sites, we are referring to pupils’ use of social networks on the Internet in English. Social networks can be identified as all online activities which are read, watched and written in English e.g. YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Further, when mentioning texts in extramural English, we refer to Olin-Scheller in Lundahl (2012) highlighting a considerable difference between texts inside and outside of school, between colloquialism and formal teaching of the English language. Additionally, when mentioning texts, we refer to Olin-Scheller (2006) with a broader concept of text which includes the above mentioned media such as TV, social media and social networks.

In this degree project we define extramural English activities as reading, digital games and social networks. We are referring to reading as pupils reading books in their foreign language of English. When mentioning digital games, we define it as pupils playing video games, computer games and games online in their foreign language of English.
When mentioning social networks on internet sites, we are referring to pupils’ use of social networks on the Internet in English. The social networks are e.g. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Further, when mentioning texts in extramural English, we refer to Olin-Scheller in Lundahl (2012) highlighting a considerable difference between texts inside and outside of school. There is a distinction between the use of slang and colloquialism in everyday language and the more formal essentials in language being taught in school. Additionally, when mentioning texts, we refer to Olin-Scheller (2006) with a broader concept of text which includes the above mentioned media such as TV, social media and social networks.

2.2 Scaffolding for motivation

To scaffold motivation in classroom, different theories are used. The main theories in this section are based on a social constructivist approach by Vygotsky. These theories are scaffolding through an interlocutor, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and building a positive atmosphere in the classroom.

To develop pupils’ EFL learning, Gibbons (2002) explains the importance of involving learners to give them a wider range of context and help them develop their EFL and their EFL vocabulary. This requires support through socializing and collaboration with a more skilled interlocutor. The teacher may support and provide them with feedback to develop their EFL vocabulary. Gibbons (2002) encourages teachers to build upon students’ previous knowledge when teaching vocabulary. Further, students with a solid knowledge of a topic are showing more interest and memorizes more easily than when being forced to learn (Pinter, 2006).

Gibbons (2002) draws upon a social constructivist approach when learning from Vygotsky’s work and perspective on learning acquisition in an interrelational view. Thus, EFL vocabulary learning motivation may depend on the interlocutor accompanying a learner. With support from an interlocutor, Lightbown and Spada (2006) agree that the way learners gain new knowledge is by being active participants. The use of scaffolding (Gibbons, 2002) is in a metaphorical sense to explain a sort of temporary, but yet essential pedagogical practice to give adequate support to pupils when acquiring new knowledge. Concerning EFL vocabulary, Gibbons (2002) cites this concept of language acquisition referring to the gap between what children do and the
level they can reach from a more skilled participant. This theory may be in line within Vygotsky’s theory of ZPD.

The ZPD is divided in three different zones, the green-, yellow- and red zone. In the green zone, the tasks are too easy to manage for the pupils and they do not further develop their knowledge. In the yellow zone, the tasks are at a level slightly above pupils’ knowledge but manageable, therefore language development is possible because the pupils are challenged. If they are in the red zone, the tasks are too difficult. Conclusively, this may cease their willingness to learn and prevents further development. The notion of ZPD may be used as a state of mind when teaching English (Gibbons, 2002).

Finally, Lightbown and Spada (2006) argue for a positive atmosphere in classrooms where pupils’ own experiences are included to contribute to pupils’ motivation for their EFL vocabulary learning. If classrooms become enjoyable positive places for pupils to learn, they may be more motivated in developing their EFL learning. Such factors are interesting content, supportive atmosphere, relevant tasks including own experiences, and learning goals challenging enough but yet manageable and clear for the pupils.

With great effort and instructional support, some of these students are able to succeed in spite of their difficulties. The challenge is to find instructional approaches that meet the needs of learners. (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 60)

2.3 Vocabulary

As mentioned, to narrow down our RQ, we chose to include teachers’ perception of students’ EEA in relation to vocabulary. Theories of implicit and explicit knowledge of vocabulary are going to be defined to further on in the analysis investigate what type of English is being taught and learned (Sundqvist, 2009).

2.3.1 Implicit & Explicit

Olin-Scheller (in Lundahl, 2012) highlights a considerable difference between texts inside and outside of school. There is a distinction between the use of slang and colloquialism in everyday language and the more formal essentials in language being taught in school.
Since a lot of knowledge is being acquired outside of school, Gibbon’s (2002) statements about including students’ interests and background have to be interpreted in new ways alongside the development in society. At this point it is necessary to clarify how new knowledge is produced. We do so throughout this section, distinguishing between acquisition and learning in terms of implicit and explicit learning. Sundqvist (2009) relies on Krashen’s (1987) theory of implicit knowledge to explain the process of acquiring EFL knowledge and vocabulary subconsciously, whereas explicit knowledge, according to Krashen (1987), is a more formal and conscious way of learning. In addition, it can be noted that the Swedish syllabus (Skolverket, 2011a) presupposes that the complex concept of knowledge and learning should be discussed in all schools.

Furthermore, there are two other types of languages to differentiate between when discussing learning. It is the everyday language, with features of spoken informal language and the academic language with traits of written formal language and more abstract forms (Lundahl, 2012). Jim Cummins (1979 in Hornberger 2008, p. 71) differentiates between the two with the use of BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills) & CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency), BICS being the informal everyday part related to acquisition and CALP the latter, formal one related to learning. He explains the teaching of CALP as the “concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school” (Cummins 1979 in Hornberger 2008, p. 71). Olin-Scheller in Lundahl (2012) stresses that the gap between everyday language and the academic language is something that teachers need to bridge in their teaching. Further, she emphasize the need to strive towards relating the students’ interest in EEA and in-school activities.

2.3.2 Knowledge of vocabulary

Receptive and productive vocabulary is, according to Sundqvist (Nation in Sundqvist, 2009) a theory about what it involves to know a word. Receptive vocabulary means that the learner is able to recognize the word in spoken context or in written text. By recognizing the word the pupil knows, to some extent, what the word means but cannot use it in other contexts. Productive vocabulary means that the pupils’ knowledge of a word is greater than the receptive, because of the recognition of the word, and the ability to apply it in other contexts. With productive knowledge of a word the pupil can also pronounce the word or write it. The pupil is also able to use the word in other contexts by using it appropriately and in its correct forms in
spoken or written situations. As Sundqvist (2009) mentions, receptive and productive vocabulary can sometimes be another term for passive and active vocabulary.

Laufer’s Productive Level Test (Laufer & Nation in Sundqvist, 2009) is an interesting way of testing pupils’ knowledge of vocabulary. This test does not focus on the correct form; instead it only credits the knowledge of targeted words. In the test the pupils were given sentences with missing words. The first letters of the missing words were given, but without a translation. Minor spelling and grammatical mistakes were ignored and not marked as incorrect in the test. This theory about only crediting targeted words may be interesting to investigate through interviews with teachers.

2.4 Steering Documents

Skolverket (2011a) states that to promote learning among pupils, it is important for an active discussion to take place among teachers of how the learning and the acquisition can be developed, in this case vocabulary. This may create awareness amongst teachers of their own perception of when learning occurs and also of pupils’ different ways of learning vocabulary. This may contribute to opportunities for developing pupils’ language awareness of their vocabulary. The curriculum mentions the importance of pupils’ opportunities to develop communicative skills, such skills as understanding clearly spoken and written English. When pupils’ language is lacking in one way or another, they are requested to use learning strategies to go around these barriers. To develop different strategies to make oneself understood and solve problems when language skills are lacking may be an abstract but yet crucial aspect in language learning. In the curriculum (Skolverket, 2011a), one goal in the core content highlights language strategies, such as through reformulations. This is arguing for having a wide vocabulary when interacting with others to be able to reformulate oneself when not being understood.

Considering the revolution of the Internet, pupils growing up may have Internet activities, such as YouTube, playing digital gaming, or reading articles on the Internet as a main hobby and interest. The commentary material to the syllabus for English (Skolverket, 2011b, p. 9) mentions the importance of using students’ daily life activities, and background as well as
taking in previous experiences and familiar subject areas as a content of communication when it comes to vocabulary learning.

When students get to practice their vocabulary through different media they are given a chance to meet a dynamic and living language. Thus the students can process and acquire new vocabulary in a creative and authentic way in an immediate context (Skolverket, 2011b).

The curriculum (Skolverket, 2011) further emphasizes the knowledge of other cultures in relation to the internationalization of Swedish society. It is of utmost importance for teachers to encourage appreciation of values of cultural diversity. When pupils have access to the Internet in their spare time, they may reach different cultures more easily. The knowledge goals in the curriculum requests the use of modern technology as a tool for communication and to search for knowledge (Skolverket, 2011a, p. 16). Therefore, the internet may be a tool of modern technology to reach the diversity of cultures.

2.5 Previous research

In this section we are looking further into studies to investigate different variables and results. This develops an understanding of what has already been studied and may contribute to further knowledge about our topic area: time spent on EEA and teachers’ different perspectives on students’ EEA.

Bucht & Harrie (2013) concluded in 2012, 96% of Swedish 9-14 year olds had access to computers, whereas 71% used the internet on a daily bases. Further, the most common media activity within the same age group was computer games. The average time spent on these activities were 85 minutes per day. When viewing statistics from 2002 until 2012, in 2002, the average time spent on internet activities was 12 minutes, in 2010 fifty three and in 2012, 73 minutes per day. We assume that since this research was conducted, the use of media, especially internet activity related ones, has further increased.

The results of Sundqvist (2009), based on Krashen’s (1987) theory of implicit and explicit learning and Swain’s (2000) output hypothesis, show a positive relation between students and their level of vocabulary and comprehension with the amount of hours spent on EE. Video
games, internet and reading were more effective regarding foreign language learning, because learners has to be actively using their foreign language when watching TV or films and listen to music where learners can be passive. Another result shows that every learners’ foreign language developed with extramural English, regardless of socio-cultural background.

Ryu (2013) also establishes that foreign language learning, regarding vocabulary, occurs in gaming, but also in online communities after the game ends. Being able to participate in online communities, articles discuss the importance of a wide vocabulary in foreign language acquisition. In the online communities, foreign language learners interact with native speakers or more fluent peers. Therefore learners might have more opportunities for foreign language acquisition developing vocabulary because of the expanded language use.

According to the arguments stated by Sundqvist (2009), concerning explicit knowledge as a higher level of learning, gaming is not primarily an optimal teaching aid. Since its low level of critical thinking, pupils may not be aware of language learning occurring when playing.

Sundqvist (2012) collected data through a smaller investigation to ascertain if there is a relationship between the 12 year olds’ level of English and their interests. Her reflections on the data suggest that there might be a positive relation between the two variables. Her reflections also indicate that they use English frequently when they are bored or when they want to keep secrets from younger siblings. Regarding the motivational fact, Sundqvist (2012) reflects on the data collected that the young learners needed English when playing digital games and when using the social networks on the Internet.

Finally, the discussion considering the ZPD can be seen in a more modern perspective with diSessa’s quote in Gee (p. 2, 2003). He highlights what level of vocabulary teachers are implementing in relations to ZPD compared to computer games: “Good games operate at the outer and growing edge of a player’s competence, remaining challenging, but do-able, while schools often operate at the lowest common denominator.”
3. Methodology

This degree project relies on validity as a craftmanship (Kvale in Alvehus, 2013), meaning that the study was checked, questioned, and theorized through every major aspect in the researched area. The results and conclusions are based on a methodical way of collecting data and questioning its validity (Kvale in Alvehus, 2013). A pilot-study was made before we chose a qualitative method with semi-structured interviews. This was chosen to further investigate our research questions about teachers’ perceptions of students’ extramural English and their vocabulary, the relationship between teachers’ perception of their students’ EEA and their vocabulary level and how to bridge the gap between EEA and classroom motivation. This was investigated through methodology theories and ethical considerations.

3.1 Pilot study

A pilot study was carried out to contribute to our own understanding of Sundquist’s (2009) results. A quantitative method was chosen to collect data through a computer-based vocabulary test to measure learners’ level of vocabulary (Brinkkjaer & Høyen, 2013). Smaller interviews concerning learners type of EEA and time spent was made.

Quantitative data were collected through a computer-based vocabulary test, based on the Cambridge vocabulary test (2015-01-13). In this way, it facilitated matters when collecting and overlooking the statistical quantitative part of the results. When using the Cambridge test “Test your vocabulary”, we discovered that the test had too many questions and therefore might bore younger learners when taking the test. They may not concentrate throughout the test, and therefore it might skew the results. Instead we chose to redesign the test through selected questions with options (Cambridge, 2015), to make it a bit shorter and make the results more valid. The test was redesigned on the familiar platform elevspel.se, which the learners already were using weekly. All students from the class were tested to make the results more valid (Brinkkjaer & Høyen, 2013).

Through smaller interviews we investigated when and how much time learners actually spent on their EEA. One question asked to learners was what type of EEA they spend the most time
on. Another question was what type of activity they devote their EEA time to. And the last question was how much time the learners thought that they spent on EEA.

With this pilot-study we obtained more knowledge about pupils’ EIA and level of vocabulary especially in relation to time spent. This pilot study made it easier to choose a proper method to investigate our research questions about teachers’ perceptions of pupils’ EEA and their level of vocabulary and if there might be a relationship between these variables.

3.2 Qualitative method

In this section, we go through our qualitative method and ethical considerations with our semi-structured interviews with the six teachers, why it was chosen to underpin our research questions and finally the degree projects methodological limitations.

3.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews had the structure of a set of 13 pre-prepared guiding questions. Our structure allows the questions to be open-ended encouraging the interviewee to have opportunities to collaborate with the answers (Zoltan Dörnyei, 2009).

One set of interviews took about twenty minutes. The tools used were an interview guide with structured questions and a recording device. Dörnyei (2009) mentions that an interview guide can be the main research instrument, which facilitated during the interviews. The guide is prepared with questions that will lead the interviewee from easy questions to more difficult ones. The questions prepared is about teachers experiences of pupils EEA and their level of vocabulary, and also if there is a relationship between teachers’ perception of their pupils’ EEA and their vocabulary level. The interview questions were based on Sundqvist’s interview in her dissertation from 2013. See appendix A.

Dörnyei (2009) also points out a specific structure of the interview questions to get more quality into the interviews. To start with easier questions will boost the interviewee’s confidence and make him/her more comfortable. Dörnyei (2009) states that this may affect the quality of the interview and make the answers more detailed.
Kvale in Dörnyei (2009) discusses the neutrality when conducting qualitative research interviews. They argue that, when asking questions in a semi-structured interview, the questions themselves are judgmental and follow-up questions furthers the non-neutrality. Something else that might have been judgmental is our own perspective and preconceptions that may have affected the interview. The thoughts about the teachers age, if they had a modern teacher-education, if the classroom looked traditional etc. may have been judgmental and may have affected the results of the interviews.

Our preconceptions about our interviews were that they were only about twenty minutes long and the questions might have been too long. But with the interview guide with prepared questions, the specific structure and trying to be neutral will perhaps provide a valid and reliable results, according to Dörnyei (2009). We tried to do the interviews as objectively as possible maintaining the quality alongside Dörnyei’s (2009) guidelines.

3.2.2 Methodological considerations

The drawbacks with choosing a qualitative method is that its result will not be applicable in greater contexts, e.g. heterogeneous classes or schools. For the interview, six teachers were chosen from similar, homogenous schools in a bigger city in south of Sweden. They were selected because they were all teachers of fifth graders and taught English in a similar environment with children from more or less the same socio-economic class. Further, the schools they work in tend to be homogenous, instead of heterogeneous, resulting in our results being applicable and comparable only within that context (Alvehus, 2013). Although a heterogeneous study could have provided, a more nuanced view, one underlying foundation of this study is the non-impact of socio-economic status on extramural English acquisition (Sundqvist, 2009).

Concerning the open-ended questions, the follow-up questions we asked each interviewee varied from one interview to another. Consequently, the interviewer is leading the interviewees in different directions depending on their answers. Taking in the fact that each interview was conducted by only one of us at a time, the follow-up questions might have been differently formulated if switching the interviewer.
Finally in this section, there is one ethical consideration to highlight. When choosing to include or exclude different parts of the interviews to analyze, we possess a great deal of power. Favorably, this allows us to choose what kind of material from the interviews, in line with our research question and theories, to use. Although, this may seem a bit pre-judgmental, we have striven to be as neutral as possible in this degree project.

3.3 Teachers’ background

All interviewed teachers are teachers in a year five. The first teacher in our study, who will call Hector, is a teacher at a fairly high-performing school on the outskirts of a bigger city in Sweden. He has been a teacher for about 30 years. The second teacher, by the fictitious name of Charlie, is also a teacher at a fairly high-performing school in the outskirt of a bigger city in Sweden. She has been a teacher for about 30 years too. The third teacher, called Kim, is also a teacher at a fairly high-performing school in the outskirt of a bigger city in Sweden. She has been a teacher for about 40 years. The fourth teacher, Malin, is at a school outside a bigger Swedish city and has been a teacher for about ten years. Next, the fifth teacher, called Josefine, is also she located at a school outside of a bigger city in Sweden. She has been a teacher for about 15 years. Finally, the last teacher, named Ingrid, is a teacher in a smaller city in the south of Sweden. She has been teaching for roughly 15 years too.
4. Results

In this section, the interviewees’ answers were analyzed. The analysis is divided into different sections by the research questions; teachers perception of pupils’ EEA, level of vocabulary, relationship between EEA and finally, bridging the gap between EEA and motivation.

4.1 Teachers’ perception of pupils’ EEA

The teachers were asked about what they knew about their pupils’ EEA and the amount of time spent each and every day. Ingrid stated that she did not have enough knowledge about pupils’ extramural English in an individual sense: “I can’t say that I know so much about each student’s extramural English.” All the other teachers interviewed had an idea of what kind of EEA their pupils had interests in e.g. reading, online gaming and watching TV-series. Another question was about the pupils’ extramural activity habits regarding if they included English. Some teachers thought that the pupils included the EFL to some extent. Kim stated that: “Yes I’m quite sure it is in English. I think the computer games are cooler in English [...] Minecraft and so on.” Hector thought that the challenging online-gaming was all in English: “[...] it’s the Internet based international games which makes the difference”.

Continuously, teachers’ perception of the top EEA among pupils was online-gaming and watching TV-series, both active and passive EEA (Swain, 2000). Swain (2000) states that pupils doing EEA regarding online-gaming actively can use EFL in different contexts and may therefore have developed their vocabulary further than those being passive when for example watching TV-series. Lightbown and Spada (2006) state that a way for learners to access new knowledge more effectively, is through being active participants.

When asked about pupils’ amount of time spent on EEA, the answers was varied. Some teachers thought the pupils spend about maximum one hour per day, while other teachers thought it was between four to five hours. Hector said that “[...] on this level some of those who use English are quite advanced learners.” The amount of time spent learning English in school may be three hours per week, while time spent on EEA may be 14 hours per week. When pupils are learning English implicitly, outside of school through the EEA, the teachers thought, they get a greater development of EFL than pupils only learning EFL in school, even though explicitly (Krashen,
1987). The time spent may be a great factor, but it may depend on individual factors as well (Sundqvist, 2009). Other factors that may improve pupils’ development of EFL through EEA may be through how well games scaffold. They might be placed in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky in Gibbons, 2002). Therefore, students may be motivated to continue their EEA, which could explain the great amount of time spent. One disadvantage with the time consuming activities, may be that it may take the time off from developing their knowledge in other areas.

Malin also stated that scaffolding may be the main reason for the development of pupils’ vocabulary. What she meant by scaffolding were that the pupils were scaffolded in EFL through their EEA in YouTube-clips, online gaming, commercials or movies (Gibbons, 2002). Scaffolding may be one reason why pupils spend that much time at EEA and ultimately become advanced learners. When pupils are scaffolded appropriately they may be closer to the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky in Gibbons, 2002) and therefore may be motivated to continue. Thus explaining the great amount of time spent and learners advancing.

4.1.1 Level of vocabulary

To get an understanding of teachers’ perception of pupils’ level of vocabulary, questions were asked on how they measured it. Through the answers, two of the teachers’ methods stood out.

Laufer’s and Nation’s (in Sundqvist, 2009) theory of the non-focus on correct form but instead crediting the targeted words, is visible from Charlie. During the interview, she stated that her way of testing students’ vocabulary has dramatically changed in the last five years. Instead of having a traditional word test with a strict and rigorous point system for the correct words she was after, she now lets her students write down the targeted word on a smaller whiteboard and then holding it up.

They have like 20 words for each Friday. And then I used to bring in the books and grade them but nowadays I have tiny whiteboards and I say the Swedish words and they write the English words and hold it up. (Charlie, 2015-02-10)

Further, her students are also allowed to write down synonyms to the targeted words. By doing so, the students get a chance to show their teacher if they are, in a sense, capable and confident
of their vocabulary. In this case, Charlie may be aligning her teaching with the approach without focus on correct form of words (Laufer & Nation in Sundqvist, 2009), only looking for the targeted words. Instead she understands that students’ knowledge can have been acquired elsewhere, regarding EEA and other outside of school activities and knowing students’ language evolving constantly. The teacher may be aware of students’ level in correlation to the year she is teaching in. Since she is teaching a grade five she might know her students acquiring a lot of vocabulary in a BICS way (Cummins in Hornberger, 2008). With her way of screening her students’ level of vocabulary, she can later make them familiar with a more formal CALP way that school is providing without lowering their confidence by not letting them show what they do know.

Further on, a correlation between Olin-Scheller’s (in Lundahl, 2012) statement and a section from Kim’s interview is interesting. Olin-Scheller highlights the differences between texts inside and outside of school. This can be noticed when Kim talks about her students’ level of vocabulary: “They know many words that I don’t even know”. This is said when asking about how she incorporates her students’ interests in vocabulary-testing. As an example, she used elevspel.se and tried the Minecraft vocabulary test. Some of her pupils were highly successful in the test, while others could not even answer a single question correctly. This clarifies the difficulty of incorporating students’ individual EEA and complicates what and how to scaffold vocabulary testing. Discussed in Lightbown & Spada (2006), scaffolding is a major important factor in successfully developing vocabulary learning. Hector is further trying to use his students to incorporate scaffolding vocabulary situations in the classroom when the teacher’s own techniques are insufficient or the topic being discussed is out of his range. “[...] it’s about highlighting role models, those who are good and can speak English [...] they get to be role models for others”.

4.2 Relationship between EEA and level of vocabulary

Throughout the transcription of the interviews, one pattern became clear. All the interviewed teachers agreed that the pupils’ development of their EFL vocabulary has increased the last few years (Statens medieråd, 2012). One main reason all the teacher had in common was about the development both online and in the commercial sector. Most of the teachers agreed that more than five years ago they used to be the ones first introducing EFL to pupils.
Like ten or twenty years ago they were like blank sheets and I was the first one to introduce English to them but now they’ve been introduced to English through TV, computer games and so they know quite a lot more. (Interview with teacher two, 2015-02-10).

In 2015 those teachers explained that pupils are introduced to EFL earlier through their EEA. Because of this early introduction to EFL through EEA, teachers thought that their pupils’ were more used to English vocabulary and therefore more pupils were not afraid of speaking in EFL. Some teachers stated that the students recognized more words now than five years ago, but could not explain what they meant or could use them in other contexts. Hector states that “The level of vocabulary is better now because there are so many more English words surrounding us today in the Swedish language” (2015-02-10). This could be explained through pupils only developing their vocabulary receptively (Nation in Sundquist, 2009). In online gaming the teachers thoughts were that the pupils developed their vocabulary through different interlocutors (Gibbons, 2002) around the world; Malin states “They have to use English if they are playing online with someone in South Africa, France or in Argentina, they have to speak English. That makes their English better” (2015-02-10).

4.3 Bridging the gap between EEA and motivation

To start off the last part of the results, a quote from Hector is lifted. When discussing the amount of time spent on EEA, 14 hours/week, for the frequent players, Hector clarifies in relation to time: “Yes for the good but zero is still zero. This is creating a big gap”. The answers related to this, have helped us to investigate our research question about how teachers are bridging the gap between pupils’ EEA and motivation in classroom. Firstly, Lightbown and Spada (2006) argue for including pupils’ own experiences in classrooms to contribute to a positive atmosphere, where pupils’ motivation for their EFL vocabulary learning may increase.

All the interviewed teachers mainly used a textbook and workbook in their classroom and some of them used add-on material as songs and rhymes, games and YouTube-clips. Through the interviews the add-on material seemed to be chosen by the teacher. The main material was chosen by the teachers for different causes: the content connected to the learning criteria from the curriculum, or that it was relevant to their skills etc. Only two of the interviewees chose the material to make the teaching enjoyable through including the pupils’ interests. Malin states
that “I want to make the English fun, so they can enjoy it [...] I also use vocabulary games so they can learn new words in a fun way”. Lightbown and Spada (2006) stresses the importance of including pupils’ interests to contribute the positive atmosphere of learning EFL.

Considering the fact that all the teachers know, to some extent, what kind of EEA the pupils have interests in, only two of the teachers tried to include those in the education. After her Minecraft vocabulary test, Kim lets the students who were proficient and successful with the targeted vocabulary be the ones teaching and explaining to their peers. By contrast, Charlie says: “[...] I find it difficult to have the kids who knows a lot to show what they know in the whole class”. The opportunities may increase to create individualized lesson plans when including pupils’ backgrounds and their EEA (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). By knowing pupils’ background Skolverket (2011) stresses the importance of creating the best conditions for pupils.

A few attempts can be seen in the interviews when teachers try to include individual references in their teaching. But when being asked how to include students’ individual experiences, one of the most detailed answer was “We can have a show and tell. [...] For example they can talk about their computer games to their peers.” (Interview with teacher one, 2015-02-10). With such an exercise, students get to choose individually what to talk about.

At the other end of the spectrum Charlie maintains that “It’s hard to do that” when asked about individualization. The reason for this statement is explained by the size of her class and lack of teacher assistants. But the most individualized answer she gives is the opportunity the students get when discussing synonyms to the new words arriving in texts: “When we have words and we talk about words and so on. I always try to have them write down, if they know more words having them write down both words. Write three words, you know” (Interview with Charlie, 2015-02-10) She is at least aligning her teaching to the steering documents (Skolverket, 2011a) by creating vocabulary awareness among students. Some further aspect of it is the spontaneous crediting from the teacher to students’ word bank (Nation in Sundqvist, 2009). But Charlie also states that there is not much room to differentiate her teaching more than doing everything in whole class settings.
5. Discussion

In this section, results from the analysis of the empirical material are presented in relation to our research questions. These results will be further discussed, analyzed and problematized in relation to previous research. Finally, conclusions of the discussion of the results are presented aligned with this degree projects purpose and research questions.

The results of teachers’ perceptions of pupils’ EEA and level of VOC depends on different variables. The variables are differentiated with active and passive types of EEA, the amount of time spent on EEA, scaffolding of vocabulary, and implicit and explicit learning. The teachers’ perception of pupils’ EEA were that they had interests in e.g. reading, online gaming and watching TV-series. The teachers thought that the EIA more or less were in English. When pupils used EFL in those activities, it resulted in teachers’ perceptions aligned with Swain’s (2000) discovering about pupils being more active, due to online games, or passive when watching TV. Lightbown and Spada (2006) agree upon pupils being active interactors to gain new knowledge at a greater pace.

The amount of time spent on EEA was, according to the teachers’ perceptions one to four hours per day, which was approximately in line with the results of Bucht & Harrie’s (2013) study, which was 85 minutes per day. Since Bucht & Harrie’s study was made in 2012, the amount of time spent may have increased, which some of the teachers agreed with. Some of them mentioned pupils may spend approximately four hours per day on their EEA. The Scaffolding and ZPD may be two theories providing motivation to pupils’ amount of time spent on EEA. The teachers thought that the more time spent on EEA, the more developed pupils’ EFL became, which Sundqvist’s (2009) results indicated having a positive relation.

With regard to Charlie’s vocabulary-testing, the quote from diSessa (p. 2, 2003) can be discussed: “Good games operate at the outer and growing edge of a player’s competence, remaining challenging, but do-able, while schools often operate at the lowest common denominator”. What Charlie is showcasing is slightly contradictory to diSessa’s (2003) quote concerning teachers operating at students’ lowest denominator. Charlie operates at the lowest but she lets students with more knowledge challenge themselves too. “I always try […] having them write down both words. Write three words”. Ambitiously enough, this attempt to operate
at different levels is hard as it is but can be quite two dimensional because it still resembles more or less the same structure and engagement as a traditional word test. While the games, alongside diSessa’s (2003) emphasis, can engage more dimensions simultaneously and more accurately fit the individual student’s level.

The results of the teachers’ perceptions of pupils’ level of vocabulary was that the pupils learnt a lot of EFL vocabulary outside of school in BICS way. Sundqvist (2009) stresses that implicit knowledge may not be the most optimal teaching aid, because it is not contributing to pupils’ critical thinking of their own learning of EFL. Some of the teachers thought that the pupils knew more vocabulary in context of EIA than the teacher did. Ryu (2013) establishes that pupils learn the most vocabulary in online communities after the game has ended. To know pupils’ level of vocabulary, the teacher tested them through common ways of vocabulary tests, through quizzes and vocabulary games online. Though it may focus on the correct form and not as Laufer’s Productive Level Test, which focused on to credit learners’ level of the targeted word (Laufer & Nation in Sundqvist, 2009), only Charlie has implemented it so far. Some of the other teachers are becoming aware of implementing this in the future.

The results of the relationship between EEA and level of vocabulary is clear. The teachers’ perception of this is that EFL is introduced to pupils at an early age through modern technology, EEA, and commercials. Their perception of this is that the pupils recognize and are familiar with a lot more words in 2015 than when they taught pupils before 2010, though they are only familiar with the vocabulary in a receptive way (Nation in Sundquist, 2009). Sundqvist (2012) confirms that younger pupils are interested in learning EFL with different intentions. One conclusion of her study of why the younger pupils are interested is because they may want to keep secrets from their younger siblings or, as this degree project focuses on, that they need English when playing online games.

The results of teachers’ perception of bridging the gap between pupils’ EEA and motivation in classroom were interesting. All of the teachers do work with textbooks and workbooks. Only a few of the teachers chose some add-on material as attempts to include pupils’ EEA. The other teachers said that it was difficult to individualize lessons, and even further, finding it difficult to include pupils’ EEA. When including pupils’ EEA, according to Sundqvist’s (2009) assumption, a wider context may enrich a larger vocabulary.
Finally, in this degree project we reached some conclusions of teachers’ perception of pupils’ EEA and vocabulary related to the mentioned variables in relation to teachers’ perceptions about the effects of EEA. These connections surfaced the problem mentioned in the purpose, in relation to the gap between EFL learning in schools and acquisition of EFL outside of school. Consequently, the steering documents (Skolverket, 2011a) entitle teachers to use a variety of sources, influenced by their students’ interests, when teaching English. Skolverket (2011a) highlights the importance of using up-to-date technology. Regarding the time consuming factor for implicit EFL acquisition in EEA, the question remains concerning how schools are to adapt and incorporate the knowledge from the results in EE studies. Conclusively, a common denominator among the interviewees was that they all agreed upon students having advanced in their level of vocabulary the last few years thanks to technology. Some teachers claim that they try to use what is up-to-date on the market though some teachers still do not even use any technological tools when teaching EFL.
6. Conclusion

In this section the conclusion of this degree project is discussed with connections to our future job as teachers. Further on, the study is generally problematized and the conclusion is discussed critically. Suggestions for future research is given. Eventually, the generalizability of the results and conclusions of this degree project are discussed.

6.1 Conclusive remarks of study

Through the results related to our research questions, several theories and previous research indicates reasons for teachers to explore pupils’ EEA habits. When doing this, reasons for pupils’ different level of vocabulary may be discovered. Through this knowledge, pupils’ different level of vocabulary may be easier to discover through, e.g., vocabulary tests which only credits the targeted word (Laufer & Nation in Sundqvist, 2009). When teaching EFL, results of this study and previous research indicate that it may be important to have the development of EFL in relation to the global society in mind. This may differentiate pupils’ level of EFL vocabulary even further over time.

Different suggestions of changes to this degree project came to mind after brief discussions. One thought was to go through eventual topics to analyze chosen theories to develop our knowledge of how to formulate the interview questions. If doing this, the results of the interview may have gotten more quality, and so the results of analysis. It also would be interesting to see the differences if this study had been done quantitatively, as we thought of doing in the early process of the degree project.

Further on, this study may be developed with the focus on how the knowledge from EEA may be applicable in the classrooms, considering the pupils' time consuming and implicit acquisition of foreign language learning. If further studies are made in this research area, it may help teachers to include pupils’ interests, as they continue to spread through the development of EEA in the global society. By doing this, it may create an interesting EFL learning environment for pupils to develop their English in. When some pupils already have a basic EFL vocabulary, the teacher may help them to make their knowledge explicit. Cummins (2008) stresses the importance of scaffolding pupils’ learning:
The most productive direction to orient further research on this topic, and one that can be supported by all scholars, is to focus on creating instructional and learning environments that maximize the language and literacy development of socially marginalized students. Because academic language is found primarily in written texts, extensive engaged reading is likely to be a crucial component of an effective learning environment (Guthrie, 2003). Opportunities for collaborative learning and talk about text are also extremely important in helping students internalize and more fully comprehend the academic language they find in their extensive reading of text. (Cummins, p. 81, 2008)

In a professional sense, the results may contribute to being a motivational factor for teachers to explore what EEA habits their pupils have. Considering pupils’ interests and amount of time spent, knowing background variables in EFL vocabulary may be essential. Teachers can, with this degree project, discover factors affecting students’ acquisition and learning of vocabulary in relation to EEA. Next, they can problematize their own testing of students’ vocabulary. Finally, this degree project can work as a gate to discuss, in a slightly more detailed way, what type of vocabulary is being taught in their own classroom and why.

6.2 Limitations

Some limitations were made to conduct a clear structure in line with the research questions of this degree project considering the pilot study, method chosen and selection of participants. In the pilot study we could have sent surveys to learners’ parents to answer how much time their child spent on extramural English activities. We chose to exclude this because of the availability of games, books and internet outside of their homes. This makes it also difficult for parents to track their children’s time spent on EEA.

We could have chosen a quantitative method to facilitate applications in other contexts, but the question of how to make the interviews valid remains. We chose to exclude language diaries, observations and tests because the variables, purpose and research question of this paper does not match the possible answers, even though they might have contributed qualitatively. Further, these tasks might have been too heavy to conduct. The reason to not complement the research with a quantitative method was decided through different variables. One main reason was the timespan for the degree project, due to the course ranging within 10 weeks.
Our choice concerning the interviewees, may only reflect one specific group of teachers instead of a phenomena (Alvehus, 2013). Six teachers were enough to interview considering the timespan. Though it may be on the edge of a smaller number of interviewees, we rely on the quality of our interview questions (Alvehus, 2013). We chose teachers of fifth graders, because the pupils may have had up to five years of experience of learning English in school if they started with it in year one. Nation (2001a, 176-177) through Sundqvist (2009) reports the positive development when being familiar with EFL. A reason for not choosing older learners is related to the variable of fifth graders’ level of implicit and explicit knowledge of vocabulary, which is essential to this degree project. We also believe that six teachers will be satisfactory for our research questions and our purpose of this degree project (Alvehus, 2013).

After the interviews, we discovered that the questions might have been too long and also could have been separated into more questions. Kvale in Alvehus (2013) states that this might result in eliminating useful data that we could have collected if the questions were shorter. We are aware of this giving us more useful data. Some of the questions in our semi-structured interviews were spontaneously constructed. This requires a self-trust and we are aware of the professionalism needed to execute the interviews properly with these self-added questions. Eventually, this is a qualitative research thus needing some reactiveness of the interviewer to get the most out of the interviews.

A final evaluation of this study’s transferability to a generalizable sense is questionable. Since this degree project is a qualitative study with a few randomly chosen teachers, seemingly homogenous, it is hard to carry over the results to other settings in different environments. This study could have been carried out in a greater quantitative manner, expanding the range of attendees and cutting down the individual response. Then again, the results could have been less colorful and harder to get the deeper point of view teachers are carrying with them.
7. References


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8. Appendix

Framework for the Interview Questions

Information:

- This interview will be a part of our degree project at Malmö Högskola.
- We chose you randomly for this interview.
- Your identity will not be revealed.
- If there are any questions you do not want to answer, please skip them.
- The purpose of this interview is to get a view over teachers’ perception and experience about students’ extramural (outside the classroom) activities and their vocabulary level.
- Explicit = Learning language (Consciously obtaining knowledge)
- Implicit = Acquisition of language (Unconscious obtaining knowledge)

Questions:

For how long have you been teaching English?

In which years have you been teaching?

What type of methods and materials do you mainly use in your classroom? Do you add some other teaching materials?

Why have you chosen this/these?

Have you changed your way of teaching English the last five years? If so, how and in what way?

Have you experienced any differences among students' development of their vocabulary throughout the years? In that case, in what way? (When obtaining knowledge)

Do you know what type of activities your pupils do outside of school?
Do you know if they include English when reading, playing digital games or using the Internet?

How do you include students' own experiences when teaching English and to what extent?

How much time do you believe the extramural activities are spent in English?

How much time do you think they spend on these activities during each day?

How do you think the students’ time spent on their extramural activities influences their level of vocabulary?

How can the students get the most out of their extramural activity in the classroom when teaching vocabulary?