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Oral Participation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the Swedish 7-9 Classroom

Muntlig delaktighet i engelska som främmande språk i en svensk grundskolekontext

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to investigate factors influencing oral participation differences in secondary school EFL students with Swedish as their second language (L2). I was eager to find out more about why some students participate in class, and others refuse, what factors could be linked to this phenomenon and what distinguishes those who chose to speak English in class from those who don’t. I also hoped the study would lead to a better understanding for EFL instructors, of factors contributing to or prohibiting oral participation in the EFL classroom.

To find some perspectives on the topic I carried out interviews with six 9th grade students, three of whom with positive attitudes towards oral participation and three who held negative attitudes of participating orally in English. The results indicate that student’s willingness to participate orally in the English classroom is related to three conditions: 1) Language; including attitudes and pronunciation 2) Motivational; mainly envisioning areas of importance of English speech, and 3) Affective; social factors such as the classroom environment, self-confidence and opportunities to communicate in and outside the classroom. Moreover, most of the students indicated that having more opportunities to speak, practice oral skills and being given more authentic communication activities in the English classroom would benefit their oral skill development in the EFL classroom.

**Keywords:** English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as an International Language (EIL), First Language (L1), Second Language (L2), Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Oral communication
Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................... 1
2. Aim and Research Question .......................................................................................... 3
3. Literature Review ........................................................................................................... 4
   3.1 Teaching English as a Second Language ..................................................................... 5
   3.1.2 Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA) .......... 5
   3.1.3 English taught as an International Language (EIL) .............................................. 6
   3.1.4 Oral Communication in the EFL Classroom .......................................................... 6
   3.2 Difficulties of Oral Skills in the EFL Classroom ......................................................... 9
   3.3 Language Transfer ..................................................................................................... 11
   3.5.1 Language Transfer in L1 Arabic EFL Learners ....................................................... 11
   3.6 Social Roles of Oral Communication in the EFL Classroom ....................................... 13
4. Method ............................................................................................................................ 15
5. Results ............................................................................................................................. 16
   5.1 The Students with Positive Attitudes towards Oral Participation in the EFL Classroom (Group P) .............................................................................................................. 16
   5.2 The Students with Negative Attitudes towards Oral Participation in the EFL Classroom (Group N) .................................................................................................................. 17
6. Discussion ......................................................................................................................... 20
   6.1 What language and affective factors influences students’ ability to engage orally in the EFL classrooms? ........................................................................................................ 20
      6.1.1 Language perspectives ....................................................................................... 20
      6.1.2 Motivational aspects ....................................................................................... 21
      6.1.3 Affective aspects .............................................................................................. 22
   6.2 Limitations and Suggestions of Future Study ............................................................. 22
7. Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 24
1. Introduction

Throughout my teaching experience in the Swedish secondary school I have noticed the recurring problem of students unwilling to communicate orally in the English language classroom. While for some students speaking English comes naturally, others are very reluctant to speak and even jeopardize their grades through their avoidance.

In my teaching experience, this seemed to be a common trend in every class I taught, and this is what caught my interest. Why do some students openly and freely take part orally in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, while others panic? I discussed this matter with some of my colleagues who confirmed that this avoidance existed with regards to oral communication, but subsided with regards to writing, reading and listening skills.

In traditional EFL curricula, being able to communicate in spoken English is important skill and it is of great concern to see some students who, for unknown reasons, risk not achieving this goal. In addition, my colleagues and I to agree that this problem tends to affect mostly students of foreign ethnicities for whom their first language (L1) is not Swedish. This makes this phenomenon even more interesting.

In order to explore factors affecting oral participation, I have researched different areas that can be related to speech and communication in a second/foreign language classroom setting. The modern Swedish school consists of students of many ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, some of whom were born to immigrant parents and others who came to Sweden after starting school in another country. Bo Lundahl (2012), a professor in Educational Science and of English and Language Didactics at Malmö University, emphasizes the differences in EFL acquisition between students of varied ethnicities in the Swedish school.

According to Lundahl (2012) factors in the L1 of students can play a role in EFL acquisition. EFL in Sweden is often taught by comparison to the first language, which is assumed to be Swedish and uses parallels and examples from the Swedish language to consolidate the knowledge transfer. Students whose L1 is different to Swedish may miss this critical aspect of knowledge transfer in the EFL classroom. For example, Lundahl (2012, p. 91-93) states that pronunciation and word sequence problems can be related to the first language. Those students who fail to get an English grade when finishing Swedish secondary school are today greatly overrepresented by students with immigrant background.
That the challenges experienced by students whose L1 is not the same as the majority of the student body is a critical aspect contributing to problematic oral communication in EFL. Additional contributing factors include students’ views on English language, the effect of first language transfer and pronunciation, as well as affective factors such as motivation and anxiety, social roles of oral communication and EFL teaching methodology.

In the modern Swedish classroom, teachers face a diverse student group consisting of varying academic, cultural and social backgrounds. A report by the Swedish National Agency for Education stated that there was a discrepancy between the material found in the educational curriculum and students’ everyday life (Skolverket, 2012). The report suggested that teachers needed to find ways to relate the curriculum to students’ everyday life in order to support learning. This is because students’ background and preconceptions are an essential part of their cognitive learning and are the building blocks for further learning. With regards to multilingual students, the report emphasized the need for intercultural teaching in order to support multilinguals language development in school (Skolverket, 2012, p. 56, 71-76). The fact that a large proportion of students today graduate from secondary school without a grade in English is a serious issue that needs to be addressed.

As speech is an important part of language acquisition and the EFL learning goals in the syllabus of (Lgr11), it is important to explore the possible causes for students’ reluctance to speak English. By doing so, a teacher can find possible solutions or ways of targeting the problem in the Swedish secondary and upper secondary schools. In addition to this, by exploring this reluctance one can better inform pedagogical practices and teachers within EFL classrooms to make oral expression more representative of the student group.
2. **Aim and Research Question**

The aim of the current study is to explore students’ views about oral participation in the EFL classroom, more specifically, the language and affective factors that influence students’ ability to engage orally in the EFL classroom. In order to do so, it is imperative to explore the student’s beliefs about the English language and EFL teaching. As such, the current study’s research question is:

- What language and affective factors influence students’ ability to engage orally in the EFL classrooms in upper secondary school?
3. Literature Review

This section will outline relevant concepts concerning the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL), specifically Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA). Then, the study will outline and discuss the oral aspects of language such as language transfer that occur during SLA and FLA. Lastly, in order to contextualize the stated research question, this study will also explore literature regarding what influences oral EFL learning, such as social and affective perspectives, motivation and views on EFL teaching.

3.1 Teaching English as a Second Language (SL) Teaching

There can be significant differences when teaching English, depending on the location the environment is English speaking and the background of the learners; if it is their first (L1) or second language (L2). Other perspectives can also be added to the views such the role of English has in the world.

3.1.1 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL)

Learning a new language, for example, English is sometimes referred to as Second Language acquisition and other times as Foreign Language acquisition. A second language generally refers to a language learned after the native language (NL), no matter which number of languages have been learned. The differences between a second language (SL) and a foreign language (FL) is that a SL can both be learned in the context of a classroom and other everyday settings such as when English is studied in an English-speaking country. Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA), on the other hand, is a second language that is taught away from the environment of the language, for example, English being taught in Sweden. The access of speaking the foreign language will then be limited in the natural environment of the learner and relies on the classroom and schoolwork (Grass & Selinker, 1994). Lundahl (2012, p. 47). In the case mentioned above, when English is taught within the classroom environment of a non-English speaking environment, such as Sweden, the term English as a Foreign Language (EFL) will be used rather than if English were to be taught as a L2 in an English-speaking country such as in the U.S. Natural settings as in L1 learning are lacking and need focus in the EFL classroom setting, according to Lundahl (2012).
3.1.2 Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA)

Second language teaching has a short history as its own domain in language teaching. Considering the knowledge of the language systems as a naturally existing ability in any human, without influences from outer components is essential. This was called universal grammar by Noam Chomsky (Lundahl, 2012; Abrahamsson, 2009). Behaviorist views from (1950-1970), indicated that learning a second language or the target language (TL), the language that is being learned can be affected by the stimulus, response and views of the first language (L1). What is sure today is that SLA differs from L1 acquisition after the age of puberty as the target language (TL) and it will not become naturally acquired.

There are significant differences between learning L1 and L2. According to traditional theories of language acquisition, young children are believed to have a natural sense of understanding for languages which develops without the need of corrections or explanations of language structures. However, late learners (post-pubescent age) of a target language (TL) rely much on cognitive processes in order to acquire a language. Gass and Selinker (1994) conclude SLA as follows:” second language acquisition is a complex field whose focus is the attempt to understand the process underlying the learning of a second language” (p. 4).

Gass and Selinker (1994) further emphasize how second language teaching is different from traditional language pedagogy although there can be commonalities. SLA goes through a process of interlanguage, which is believed to be an important part of the SLA. Within this process the Second Language (L2) learner develops an internalized system, consisting of available linguistic knowledge where he or she includes features from both the First Language (L1) and the Target Language (TL). By doing so, the L2 learner can better understand and eventually acquire the TL (p. 7 ff).

According Lundahl (2012) the difference between FLA and SLA is that the learner does not experience the natural language environment of the TL, as in the case for students in Swedish schools learning English or other languages. Within the literature, SLA and FLA represent somewhat elusive concepts as they are not differentiated unless a study specifically explores the FLA. Otherwise, SLA is the common term used for both forms of language acquisition. However, there are great differences between the two forms of language acquisition with regards to learning strategies, interactional patterns, motivation, age, and results of the language acquisition. These differences are even more prominent in situations where the TL is used in a natural communicational environment compared to a fabricated classroom.
environment. In this paper the term SLA will be used when there is no distinguishing in the information concerning both SLA and FLA. In other specific cases only concerning FLA, the term will be used.

3.1.3 English taught as an International Language (EIL)

According to McKay (2002), who encourages an international view on English language teaching, there are three areas of EFL teaching that are affected by culture and should be re-examined: 1) the teaching of discourse competence, 2) the use of cultural materials in the classroom and 3) The methods of teaching. She uses the term English as an International Language (EIL) to define English as a global language that should be used for communication and states that it is: “Not linked to any one country or culture; rather it must belong to those who use it” (p. 1).

McKay (1996, p. 104-115) also states how English teaching should be adjusted to teaching views and not necessarily use Western methods, where in general, individual expression is considered as normal as opposed to teacher centered classroom cultures. As much as English language opens doors globally in terms of business, education and tourism, the views on English language can also be linked to domination and power (McKay, 1996, p. 21).

Language and cultural identity are linked. When the use of a native language is diminished due to the replacement of English, as has happened in some Inner Circle (and other) countries due to being former colonies, parts of the native culture and language gets lost due to the assimilation of English. The idea of core countries, such as England, promoting their language and culture in other countries for cultural dominance is called linguistic imperialism, although according to McKay (1996), this happens indirectly through for example media, English literature etc. English also represents opening doors in technology and education, therefore in many countries for example, Singapore, parents choose to enroll their children into international schools and prioritize English language over the own cultural heritage (McKay, 1996).

3.1.4 Oral Communication in the EFL Classroom

Oral communication is highly emphasized in the syllabus of the English subject. The aims of the English syllabus for the grades 7-9 (Skolverket, 2011) mainly connects language use to communication by stating that through “all around communicative skills” the student should be:
“...able to formulate one’s thinking and interact with others in the spoken (and written) language, and the ability to adapt use of language to different situations, purposes and recipients. Communication skills also cover confidence in using the language and the ability to use different strategies to support communication and solve problems when language skills by themselves are not sufficient” (p. 33).

According to Baker and Westrup (2003), language is used for a clear purpose when we speak. Therefore, more authentic language use in the classrooms should be promoted. According to the syllabus (Skolverket, 2011) the content of the English subjects should relate to students’ education and social and working life; current areas and events, thoughts, opinions, ideas, experiences and feelings; relationships and ethical issues (p.37). In such ways speech and conversation can be encouraged by expressing one's ideas and opinions rather than mimicking the teacher in unrealistic activities. An important part of the motivation to learn a new language is to relate to its authentic area of use. Many students fail to see this relation, according to Tornberg (1997, p. 17). Therefore, the author emphasizes the significance of the students of EFL realizing that the main area of use is in real life. This should be incorporated in the EFL classroom, where the teacher should create authentic possibilities for oral communication (Tornberg, 1997, p. 136-137).

In the syllabus, oral communication is defined as speech and conversation skills and is placed under the category of production and interaction along with writing.

| Curriculum for year 7-9: Speaking, writing and discussing – production and interaction |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Content of communication         | • Current and subject areas familiar to the pupils.  |
|                                  | • Interests, daily situations, activities, sequences of events, relations and ethical questions.  |
|                                  | • Views, experiences, feelings and future.  |
|                                  | • Living conditions, traditions, social relations and cultural phenomena in various contexts and areas where English is used  |
| Speaking, writing and discussing – production and interaction | • Different ways of working on personal communications to vary, clarify, specify and adapt them for different purposes.  |
Several studies have been made on the topic of oral communication in the EFL classroom and contributed with views and suggestions on this matter. One of them is Törnqvist (2008) who studied Swedish 9th grade students’ and teachers’ attitudes of English oral communication. Her aim was to find out how students viewed oral communication and how significant they believed it to be within EFL. She also looked at factors influencing the engagement of students in oral communications in classrooms and explored teachers’ beliefs regarding the assessment of students’ ability to express themselves orally. The results showed that the teachers and many of the pupils considered oral communication to be an important part of the teaching and learning of English, mainly because being able to express themselves orally in English today is of great importance. It also enables students to familiarize themselves with the English language. Törnqvists (2008) results showed that factors encouraging oral communication were the classroom environment, self-esteem, engagement in interesting tasks, breaking down students into smaller groups, and inspiring students who were motivated to learn and teachers who were motivated to improve their teaching skills.

Sköld (2008) investigated ‘pupils’ attitudes towards spoken English and speaking in front of their friends, and how these attitudes appear to be related to their oral communication and communicative behavior in the classroom. The material was collected by videotaping two
classes, student questionnaires and interviewing the teacher. The results show that motivation and anxiety are psychological factors that play a significant role in the learning process. Further on, Sköld (2008) found that attitudes, both towards the target language and towards their own production affect pupils’ willingness to communicate, and consequently their oral production in different tasks. The larger the group is, the more anxious they become. In order to motivate pupils, a variety of exercises is needed, where the topic is of great importance to awaken their interest in communication. The teacher also needs to circulate in the classroom to avoid a situation where pupils switch to their first language. Otherwise, pupils appear to code-switch as soon as an opportunity presents itself which was observed in the analyses of recorded lessons.

Using a qualitative and quantitative method, a study by Larsson and Olsson (2008) investigated attitudes of 9th grade EFL students whose cultural background is other than Swedish. The results show that students with other than a Swedish ethnic background, generally had positive attitudes towards the English language and their L1 did not have a negative role in their English learning. On the contrary, it seems to be enriching for these students to have had exposure to another language and culture. The study concludes that the English language is important to them as well as part of their future plans.

3.2 Difficulties of Oral Skills in the EFL Classroom

Certain difficulties that can be related to oral communication in the EFL Classroom. A study by Chee Keog and Yassin et. Al. (2014) investigated the factors that lead to oral communication problems in Yemeni High School students of English (EFL) in Malaysia. According to the study, a majority of the Arabic high-school students of Yemeni origin experienced difficulties such as “expressing their thoughts” in English and were not confident enough to use English neither inside nor outside the EFL classroom environment. The researchers conducted a combined quantitative and qualitative study of a total of 40 (male and female) Yemeni students between the ages of 16 and 19 which examined the students’ challenges of expression in English using three different aspects: 1) problems related to the teacher 2) problems related to the curriculum 3) student related problems.

The results of the students’ reports showed that the teacher’s role in their English oral difficulties was due to lack of orally for instruction in English, as the teachers had the same mother tongue as the students. Teachers’ excessive focus on grammar and little focus on
speech practice in the EFL classroom was the main factor, as well as the curriculum not promoting oral language, resulting in students’ lack of practice. Additional factors relating to students were issues included a lack of vocabulary, passiveness, and anxiety due to fear of committing language mistakes in front of others. A motivational classroom atmosphere with more oral activities and authentic communication situations was suggested by the authors of the study. Awareness of students’ low confidence in speaking English needs to recognize in order to provide the right environment for them to feel comfortable to practice expressing their thoughts in English.

Another major quantitative study on 150 students and 10 instructors, researching factors negatively affecting English speech in Arabic L1 speakers at a Saudi Arabian College for Girls, was done by Hamad (2013). The author found several factors preventing the students from developing their English speech ability. Similarly to Chee Keog and Yassin et. Al., (2014), the problems of speech that occurred were the inability to speak publicly due to anxiety, and for example make telephone calls in English or even deliver a presentation without translation from Arabic to English, as well as not being able to express themselves in English. According to the author, the speech issues affecting the speech development of the students were related to the curriculum and teaching content as well as methods, such as using the first language (L1), Arabic, to express their ideas instead of encouraging English. Confidence was also directly related to speech development by the author. Another perspective of the oral communication issues was found by Mahdi (2014) at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia. He studied the difficulties to communicate in English among university students through investigating their “Willingness to Communicate in English” and could relate some of the issues to pronunciation problems.
3.3 Language Transfer

Language transfer theories have long been disputed as they are part of an era when immigrant L1 was an obstacle in learning a second SLA. The L2 transfer theory originates from the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis and is based on a view where the language system of L1 is thought to impact L2. According to Grass & Senkler (1994), first language transfer theory has been debated among behaviorists and linguists, having first have been an accepted L2 acquisition view in the 1940’s and 50’s, but which has become criticized by mentalists such as Chomsky in the 1960’s who believed that no outer factor could interfere in language acquisition.

According to Grass and Selinker (1994), the contrastive analysis hypothesis has not been proven to be the main cause for grammatical mistakes in L2 although in the North American tradition of Contrastive Analysis it has been used pedagogically for in classroom improvement of language teaching. The European perspective has become part of linguistics and language comparing. This perspective suggests that the production skills in L2 are affected depending on how different the L1, or other recently learned language is from the language of acquisition, resulting in that the learning process is affected either positively, called positive transfer, or negatively, which then is negative transfer.

In the late 80’s, the view of language transfer was re-acknowledged by cognitive theorists, not only as a mental process but also a factor that affects L2 learning strategies. Studies on this matter have shown common patterns in L2 learners who had same L1. In other words, according to Language Transfer Theory not only the understanding of a new language system is impacted by the recent one learned. Consequently, although today's second language research no longer supports the views of the L1 negatively impacting the SLA, strategies used to acquire L2 or a new language are still believed to be affected by Language Transfer. It has since been shown to have a significant impact on productive skills, such as in the speech and pronunciation influenced by the TL (Grass & Selinker, 1994).

3.5.1 Language Transfer in L1 Arabic EFL Learners

Arabic L1 speakers is one group that can experience many difficulties when learning EFL. In a comparative study of English and Arabic phonology, Jarrah (2012), states that most difficulties in pronunciation are due to the phonological differences between the two languages. Obvious differences between Arabic and English phonological systems are the consonants, where Arabic L1 speakers either experience difficulties in pronunciation of
consonants because of transfer from their L1, or the consonant sound and the proportions of consonant clusters of English (up to three in a row in English) which are non-existent in Arabic. This leads to the learner conforming to the phonetic ability that they have in their L1, resulting in pronunciation mistakes. Moreover, English has more vowels than Arabic which has only three; and a short and long version of each. Arabic has a simpler vowel construction and explains why L1 Arabic learners have difficulties conforming to English phonology and pronunciation, states Jarrah (2012).

Another study from Taibah University, Saudi Arabia, compared English and Arabic sound systems and shows how phonemic differences may cause difficulties in pronunciation in EFL students with Arabic as F1 or F2 (Hago & Khan, 2015). Except for differences in some non-existing English consonants in Arabic such as “p” and “v”, the authors, similarly to Jarrah (2012) mention that the English language has longer consonants. They also explain that this difference can cause L1 transfer in their acquisition of English. These results were collected by recording 60 high-school students at a secondary school in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia students using words from five of the typical problem groups of English phonemes, who were then compared to native speakers.

Results showed that the participants made between 75.8 and 89 percent pronunciation mistakes. The authors suggest that more focus on awareness of pronunciation, such as drilling exercises and frequently listening to authentic English speaking through different media (Hago & Khan, 2015) would help correct or raise awareness to the specific mistakes being made.

Additionally, word stress issues are another point that has been found to be a matter specifically for Arabic L1 speakers. Sulaiman (1993) examined the issues of L1 transfer of stress of syllables in students’ English L2. By syllable stress, he refers to the parts of a word that require more accentuation than the rest of the sounds which requires some knowledge of the spoken language to achieve.

According to Jenkins (2000: 83; Rogerson-Revell, 2011), pronunciation can be the greatest barrier in communication. The results of the author’s research showed that 27 of 40 communication errors were due to pronunciation, whereas all were due to L1 transfer (p. 5). Current perspectives on perfect pronunciation is considered an unrealistic goal for EFL/ESL
learners. Instead the term *intelligibility* is mentioned by Rogerson-Revell (2011, p. 9), among others, which refers to the goal recognition of the spoken language.

### 3.6 Social Roles of Oral Communication in the EFL Classroom

According to social psychology theory, having a conversation affects many areas of social life such as relations, education and cross-cultural communication. Therefore, being unaccustomed as to how to engage in ordinary conversations can lead to problems. Having knowledge about how to carry out a conversation is essential to succeed. Except for vocabulary, additional knowledge and skills are needed to engage in conversation including an understanding of syntax, grammatical rules, semantics, related to language content, speech rules about how to begin, end and take turns, and speech order etc. states, social psychologist Nilsson (2015, p. 55-60).

Nilsson (2015) believes that cultural understanding and knowledge of social values are needed for conversation skills to be stimulated in the classroom, according to the author. Norms, roles, attitudes and relations also are of importance and the context is generally controlled by the norms of the teacher and school, which often is related to middle class cultural norms. Due to this, students from some social and ethnic backgrounds can experience more difficulties during conversational activities in the classroom by not being familiar with the norm (Nilsson, 2015, p. 55-60).

The English syllabus for years 7th-9th grade (Skolverket, 2011), states following about goals for speech production and communication:

> “Through teaching, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop all-round communicative skills. These skills involve understanding spoken and written English, being able to formulate one’s thinking and interact with others in the spoken and written language, and the ability to adapt use of language to different situations, purposes and recipients. Communication skills also cover confidence in using the language and the ability to use different strategies to support communication and solve problems when language skills by themselves are not sufficient.” (p. 34)

Through the extract from the syllabus as well as earlier studies presented in this paper it is obvious how oral communication is related to social aspects in the EFL classroom. Oral skills are usually important to EFL students to learn, however, the ability to speak in a foreign
language is less connected to their knowledge of the TL and has more to do with the self-esteem of the student within the EFL classroom and the group, Tornberg (1997, p. 45) emphasizes. Dhyste (1996, p. 229), who has played a great role in promoting the sociocultural perspectives on learning in Sweden, highlights the need of both social belonging and social interaction in the classroom. According to the author, language is a tool for interaction and should be used in the classroom to highlight different ideas and thoughts. She stresses the importance of the teacher to give opportunities to conversations in class without entirely controlling it, but also recognizing verbally stronger and weaker students and adapting to their needs. All students are not suited for sociocultural methods; therefore, cognitive perspectives should also be taken into consideration, according to Dhyste (1996).
4. Method

The method that used in this paper is a qualitative study by conducting interviews with six 9th grade students of an inner city upper secondary school in Malmö. Three of the participants had positive attitudes toward participating in oral communication in the EFL classroom and three refused or had difficulty participating orally during English lessons. The students were chosen by their teacher, and all study either were part of the same or in a parallel class at the same school and had in common that they participated actively in other English skill areas. All participants have ethnic backgrounds other than Swedish and other L1 than Swedish. As the those less willing to participate orally were from ethnic backgrounds other than Swedish, the choice to include participants positive towards participating orally in the EFL classroom with diverse ethnic backgrounds provided more reliability in comparing. Therefore, the focus of this study is solely on students with Swedish as L2.

Before the interview, the students, all of whom are 16 years of age, were thoroughly informed about the purpose of the study and interviews, as well as their ethical rights according to the principles of research from Forskningsetiska principer inom samhällsvetenskaplig forskning from the Science Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002), and gave their written consent. The interviews were done in a structured manner which were conducted individually at the students’ school. The interviews were recorded as well as partly transcribed. Each interview took between 15 and 20 minutes and all participants received the same questions, with the exception of the participants having a less favorable view of participating orally in the EFL classroom who were given additional questions to better determine their reluctance in taking part orally in class. The responses from students positive and negative to oral participation were then structured under themes to get a profounder understanding and nuances of the issues affecting oral participation in the EFL classroom. Upon completion of the data collection, data was analyzed and compared. Based on the outcomes some suggestions were proposed as to what could enhance participation of EFL classroom oral communication.
5. Results

The aim of this research was to gather students’ views and perspectives about oral participation in the English classroom and, more specifically, to investigate reasons for their choices to either participate or not participate in speaking activities during their English lessons. I designed the interview questions to address specific areas and collated students’ responses into four themes:

1) Views on the English Language, subject and culture.

2) Views on their own oral participation (positive or negative) in EFL class.

3) Motivational factors affecting their participation in class.

4) Opinions of what aspects in EFL study could positively impact their oral communication in English.

These themes were developed according to the students answers to facilitate comparison and discussion of their views.

Figure 2: Table of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student #</th>
<th>Roster of Participants</th>
<th>Perception of Oral Participation</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>L1</th>
<th>L2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ahmed</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Alvin</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Albanian/Swedish</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ismael</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rana</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Abed</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Alaa</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1 The Students with Positive Attitudes towards Oral Participation in the EFL Classroom (Group P)

Upon completion of the inquiry, it was found that the three participants in Group P, students 1, 2 and 3 agree in the following areas: 1) the importance of English, 2) recognition of positive cultural and pronunciation perspectives 3) understandings of affective factors that impact their oral participation in the English classroom, and 4) views on future need of spoken English in their lives. They all view the English subject as very important, especially
the skill of oral communication. Only one of them, Student 1, believes that Math is more important. They each use English in their spare time such as for entertainment or communication purposes, as well as having future plans to work and travel abroad. Student 2 says: “Ifall man får ett jobb utomlands, då är det väldigt viktigt att kunna prata engelska. Det är det som gör engelskan viktig”.

They also agree that affective factors such as self-esteeom and the social setting in the classroom can impact their participation. Student 2 specifically mentioned that he feels comfortable in his class and is friends with everyone which makes him comfortable speaking and making mistakes in English. Student 3 feels differently and admits to feeling self-conscious at times worrying about classmates’ comments, although his motivation to speak is stronger and driven by the importance of it and his dreams to become a pilot. Student 1 with others making him hesitant at times, though he believes that everyone owns the English and therefore it could have many versions, “Det är ett allmänt språk som man lär sig i alla länder”, he says.

In conclusion, Students 1, 2 and 3 in Group P have future plans to use English for either travel or work as well as views such as importance or relating to the English language, which motivate them to participate orally in the EFL classroom. They also believe that Swedish is closer to English than their L1. All believe that the social setting is of affective importance, although due to other views that they have it does not demotivate them from participating orally.

5.2 The Students with Negative Attitudes towards Oral Participation in the EFL Classroom (Group N)

Students 4, 5 and 6 (Group N) do not, or rarely speak in the English classroom and have some things in common in their views, however, their reasons for not doing so differ. Their view on the importance of the subject are quite similar, viewing it as important although Student 4 ranked Math higher and Student 5 believes it is easier to learn Math. Student 6 feels learning English is more important than the others in Group N, as the student believes it will be useful for future work and travel.

Although Students 4 and 5 mention this possible area of use, they both plan to pursue futures studies and careers in Sweden for different reasons. Student 5 believes that writing would be more beneficial in a future job. She explains that the only time she would likely speak English
is with native speakers who realize that she is not a native speaker herself. According to Student 4, pronunciation does not need to be perfect and is not a hindrance as long as the language is understandable. But difficulties pronouncing hinders him from speaking.

Similarly, Student 5’s main reason that she refuses to speak is her difficulty to learn English pronunciation as she views it as very important, “Alltså jag är mycket så – du ska uttala rätt, annars snacka inte det språket!” she exclaims. She also adds that she has high language requirements in general, not only for herself but on others as well.

On the contrary, Student 4 still believes that the ability of expressing himself is more important than pronunciation, which reflects his view of English as a language for everyone. He agrees on the view of EIL where everybody is entitled to make English his own and, in agreement with Student 6 who first and foremost sees language as a means of communicating with people, thus motivating him to learn more English.

Student 4 believes that English does not belong to a specific country, it belongs to everyone. It is owned by everyone and he does not believe that he is obligated to take on any other cultural views on just because he uses the English language. Students 4 and 5 agree with this view, although they admit to a closeness to Europe and Swedish culture which could impact on how they relate to English. Student 6 mentions how countries such as India, have embraced English, while simultaneously keeping their culture. It does not seem to be a factor that affects them positively to speaking English though.

When it comes to his own culture and L1 (Arabic) Student 4 feels it has little linguistic and cultural similarities to English and is less relatable. Student 5 seems to agree, although she does not have the same Swedish language barriers, she confesses that her Swedish is as good or better than her Arabic. In fact, in recent years she has started learning more Arabic by spending time with friends with the same L1.

Student 4 has problems speaking due to anxiety about what others think of him. He says it is not easy for him because he is self-conscious. But most of all, he admits his expectation of himself are too, “Det finns de som är mycket bättre än mig på engelska”, he says, meaning that he compares himself to others which makes him more anxious in the classroom. This he has in common with Student 5, who is worried about others judging her speech. At the same time, Student 5 says that she has very high expectations of herself. Both Students 4 and 5, rarely use English outside of school, at times only in social media or watching a movie.

Student 6 is not so detailed about his speech and seems to be able to participate only when he
wants to in class, although he enjoys gaming and in contrast of the others in Group N uses English in his spare time. Student 6 is an exception as he has more in common with Group P. His reasons for not participating are personal and may be linked to motivational factors mostly. Another difference is that Student 6 does not have Arabic, but Urdu as mother tongue, which also could at language transfer being an aspect to consider in the two other participants of Group N.

Student 4 wishes for more oral content in English class and opportunities to communicate in English while Student 6 misses grammar and vocabulary studies necessary to develop his oral and written language. According to Student 5 the only way to force her to speak English would be if she travelled. She is happy with the content of her English lessons and makes an active choice not to speak unless her grade is at stake. Incorporating more relevant topics for discussion, such as soccer, would inspire Student 6 to speak more in class.

In conclusion, Student 4 relates his problems with speaking and writing to receiving too little practice and suggests the focus shift from writing to speaking. His distance from English and Swedish could be another reason. Student 6 has personal reasons for not participating as he is self-described as not being a very talkative person and has difficulties speaking having learned Swedish quite late. Student 5 refuses to let anyone hear her speak as she has such high expectations on herself (and her pronunciation) and is afraid to be judged, which Student 4 relates to, although he tries not to let it overcome him. Student 6 is the only student currently using his English for communication outside the classroom.
6. Discussion

In the discussion part I will provide answers to my research question through using the data from my results. This will then be discussed in accordance to the literature used in this paper.

6.1 What language and affective factors influences students’ ability to engage orally in the EFL classrooms?

The results pointed at the participants in both Groups P and N seem to be affected by the same factors of motivation and affective issues such as personal self-esteem and the social dynamics in class. Students’ views of the importance of the English as a subject and the skill of communication supports this. Positive or negative language transfer and their views of pronunciation effect their facility to learn English language. Finally, connecting the importance of being able to speak English to their daily lives and their future aspirations as well as current methodology in the current practice in class also seems to impact their motivation to speak.

6.1.1 Language perspectives

The result of this study has found relations between students’ views about the English language as a subject and their personal performance in class, as well as views about their personal motivation for study of the English. Students’ views of the roles of culture and linguistic proximity of English to their L1/L2 and relevant affects in classroom oral participation.

In both Group P and Group N there was a relation between the relevance of cultural or linguistic similarities to their L1/L2 and effects of language transfer as well as students views and challenges with pronunciation. This phenomenon is explained by Gass and Selinker (1994) where the production skills in L2 are affected depending on how different the L1, or other recently learned language is from the language of acquisition, resulting in that the learning process is affected either positively or negatively. Depending on the participants language skills in Swedish (L2) as well as which L1 they had, their (oral) language difficulties could be explained as a positive or negative language transfer. The fact that Group P all mentioned that their fluency in Swedish is equal to that of their mother tongue possibly contributes to positively to language transfer. Positive Language Transfer can have a significant impact on productive skills such as for example speech and the pronunciation,
concerning the of the TL (Grass & Selinker, 1994). As a matter of fact, results of Larsson and Olssons (2008) study showed that Swedish L2 and other ethnic and cultural background does not necessarily affect English learning negatively.

Studies from scholars of this area (Jarrah, 2012; Sulaiman, 1993; Mahdi, 2014; Hago & Khan, 2015) all relate English speech problems of Arabic L1 students to pronunciation issues and L1 transfer. Partly, the issues with oral participation in the results of this study were related to Swedish being used in class. Chee Keog & Yassin et.al (2014) mentioned in their study how teaching content as well as methods, such as using L1, to express their ideas instead of encouraging English, affected students’ speech negatively during English lessons.

In terms of students negative to speech, Student 4’s and 5’s relation to English both culturally and linguistically illustrate the views on their relationship to the English language, as distant and more difficult to learn. As student 4 having only attended Swedish school for 3 years, he is not as fluent in Swedish as he in his L1, Arabic, which in comparation to Group P prevents him from having Swedish linking him to the English language. Student 5 seems to agree, although she does not have the same Swedish language barriers. Skölds (2008) study shows that attitudes, both towards the target language and towards their own production affect pupils’ willingness to communicate, and consequently their oral production in different tasks. Students with negative perceptions of speaking English showed no close relation to English-based culture(s). MacKay (2002) therefore promotes international teaching of English, as she believes English teaching is still dominated by western culture. In line with MacKay (2002), by owning and accepting their own version of English, these students could become more motivated to speak English.

6.1.2 Motivational aspects

The results of the motivational factors were first and foremost taken from the the participants in Group P. The contrast between them and Group N could give possible answers to why some students are motivated to participate orally and others avoid it, as they have no or little oral communication barriers. One difference was that the Group P students directly related the need of the English subject with future goals of travel or career in a more personal manner, mentioning future professions or a strong wish to travel abroad. This goes in accordance with Tornberg (1997) who emphasizes the significance of the students of EFL realizing that the main area of English use is real life. She believes that this should be incorporated in the EFL classroom, where the teacher should create authentic possibilities for oral communication.
The current use of English outside of the EFL classroom and was also related to motivational factors and impacted the students of Group P, as well as Student 6 in Group N, as they all rapport using English outside of the classroom socially and in entertainment. In contrast, two of the participants in Group N failed to have the future visions of the others as they have no clear goals to work abroad or travel to places where English is spoken or necessary and have no current practical use for it outside of the classroom.

6.1.3 Affective aspects
Students seem to perform because of internal needs to develop speaking skills; achieve passing grades, recognition of the importance of practicing the skill to master it, are comfortable in the social settings and acceptance of their own pronunciation and performance. In both groups the students state the fact that the social setting and opportunity to speak plays a role in their oral performance. While Group P feels comfortable to make mistakes in front of the classmates, anxiety about speaking in front of others, self-consciousness and high personal expectations are factors affecting Group N.

Tornberg (1997) states about self-esteem that the ability to speak in a foreign language is less connected to their knowledge of the TL and has more to do with the self-esteem of the student in the EFL classroom and group. The results of this study points at this, as Group P tend to care less about pronunciation and making mistakes in front of others. Research by Chee Keog and Yassin et. Al., (2014) and Hamad’s (2013) study, showed similar results which related confidence to speech development as well as opportunities to speak in English the EFL classroom. As Nilsson (2014) highlighted, norms, roles, attitudes and relations all play a role in oral communication. This is usually controlled by the teacher inside the classroom. Therefore, Dhyste (1996) directs teachers how to promote a sociocultural and communicative classroom atmosphere.

6.2 Limitations and Suggestions of Future Study
The sample size of six participants is the greatest limitations of this. The results could differ if the study were completed on a larger scale. Suggestions for future studies would be to expand the number of participants as well as combine different methods such as surveys, interviews and conduct classroom observations to obtain a broader picture of the area of oral participation and what promotes it. One could also expand the target group of the participants to students of Swedish L1 to have more perspectives in the study.
7. Conclusion

As every EFL classroom has someone unwilling to participate in oral activities, the sample of students’ opinions in this small scale study could be of interest to EFL instructors as it is possible that the student beliefs and other research presented in this paper exist in other EFL classrooms.

Moreover, it could be beneficial to teachers of EFL to be aware of how the diversity of students can affect their English oral production. As oral communication in a L2 is related to many factors, it is of importance to pay attention to both individual perspectives such as beliefs about English and how students relate to the target language in relation to their L1 and culture. Teachers should also take into consideration affective aspects such as social environment where students feel comfortable to speak, as well as having a motivational approach by linking school English to authentic situations and subjects where students can relate and identify with the language and the usage of it in real life situations. Finally, as earlier studies as well as the interviewees of this study mention, having an English-speaking classroom environment where English is continuously spoken by the instructor and students could help condition students who are not exposed to English speech in any other situation, to an English speaking environment.
References


**Appendix 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview guide</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal information about the participants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Time of attendance in the Swedish school</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Which languages do you use in your daily life? Arrange them from most to least.</td>
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<td>2. Which language did you first learn? Know the best?</td>
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<td>3. Is English an important subject in school? Why/Why not?</td>
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<td>4. Rank English in a scale of importance compared to the other core subjects Swedish and Math</td>
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<td>5. Which English skills are most important to master? Rank a) Reading b) Writing c) Listening/Understanding or d) Speaking</td>
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<td>6. What is your opinion on your English-speaking ability?</td>
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<td>7. Tell me about your use of English outside of school. Where? How? When do you use it?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Do you speak more English in school or after?</td>
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<td>9. Will you need English in life? In which areas of life will you need English you think?</td>
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<td>10. In your opinion, how is the content of the English teaching in your school?</td>
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<td>11. Tell me about the communicational tasks you have. Do you like participating? Why? Why not?</td>
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<td>12. (For positive speakers) What makes you participate orally during English lessons?</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. (For negative speakers) What hinders you from participating orally during English lessons?</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. How does the classroom setting and environment affect your will to speak during English class?</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. In your opinion, how would your oral ability in English develop best?</td>
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<td>16. How important is a correct pronunciation (native speaker ideal)?</td>
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<td>17. In your opinion, could you speak English despite having a good pronunciation?</td>
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<td>18. In your opinion, is English a western or global language? Is it part of a culture? Develop how and why.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Language or culture wise, is English closer to you mother tongue/ ethnic background or Swedish?</td>
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