English Language Learning Motivation of First Generation Immigrant Students from Low Socio-Economic Background in Swedish Secondary Schools.

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2018

Student thesis, C essay, 15cr
Sociolinguistics
English (61-90)
ENG 801

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Abstract

This study explores the factors that influence the English language learning motivation of first generation immigrant students from a low socio-economic class in the city of Växjö, Sweden. Qualitative research methods are applied and semi-structured, in-depth individual as well as group interviews are used to collect the empirical data. The results indicate that students from socio-economically disadvantaged background feel excluded from the society and lack intrinsic motivation to learn English. This lack of motivation is explained in connection with their socio-economic background and the roadblocks currently existing in the Swedish education policy. The findings are analyzed using a theoretical framework consisting of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, social comparison theory and some aspects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. A concluding discussion is presented in the end.

Keywords: Motivation, Immigrants, Swedish secondary schools, Socio-economic Status, English language learning.

Disposition

This study is divided into 6 sections. Each section starts with a brief outline of what the section entails. The first section gives an introduction, presenting the background, research questions and the relevance of the research topic and its contribution to the current scientific debate. The second section lays out the methodological framework, presenting the chosen methodology and its justification. Third section presents a comprehensive review of some of the major current research available on the topic. Fifth and sixth sections present an analysis of the findings, connecting back to the research questions posed in the first section. The last chapter presents a concluding discussion.
**Key Definitions in the context of this study**

**First generation immigrant students**
Students born outside the destination country whose parents were also born outside that country.

**Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation**
Intrinsic motivation refers to motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake. Intrinsically motivated people work on their tasks because they enjoy it and find it interesting. They do not expect explicit rewards and consider task participation to be a reward in itself. Extrinsic motivation on the other hand is engagement in an activity as a means to an end. Extrinsically motivated people work on a task to achieve desirable outcomes as a result of the task, for example reward, praise from the teacher or peers and to avoid punishment. (Schunk, D., Pintrich, P., & Meece, J., 2010 p.236).

**Incongruity**
Idea that individuals are motivated to reduce discrepancy between prior experience and knowledge and new or conflicting information. (Schunk, D., Pintrich, P., & Meece, J., 2010 p.377).

**Motivation**
Brown defines motivation as “the extent to which you make choices about (a) goals to pursue and (b) the effort you will devote to that pursuit” (Schunk, D., Pintrich, P., & Meece, J., 2010 p.85).

**United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**
The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

**List of Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UN DESA</td>
<td>United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Program for International Student Assessment</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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1. Introduction

The introduction is divided into three sections: background, research aim and questions, and limitations of this study.

1.1 Background

Immigration and the emergence of English as a global language

31 million school-aged children are international migrants, owing to the rapidly changing dynamics of the world (Nicolai S., Wales J., & Aiazzi, E., 2017). Immigration has become one of the most challenging issues of the present times, making international migration a critical concern for the implementation of the 2030 sustainable development agenda. According to the international migration report by UN DESA (2017), there are now an estimated 258 million people living in a country other than their country of birth — an increase of 49% since 2000, making 3.4% of the world’s inhabitants today, international migrants. This implies that there is an overwhelmingly large population of students who are acquiring the language of their host country. Narrowing that down to Sweden, the situation is no different. Immigration statistics, according to Sweden’s official immigration site, show a similar hike in immigration leading to challenges such as education of the young immigrants.

The image shows the long history and the recent immigration peak- (Sweden.se, last updated Dec 2016).

Today, English language has gained a global status due to many reasons including human geography, the past expansion of British colonial power and the emergence of USA as a
powerful and influential economic power. It can therefore be argued that English has become a global language in many respects, with about a quarter of the world’s population being competent or fluent in English, and this number continues to grow (Crystal 2003, p.14).

**Immigrants and the English language in Sweden**

There are no precedents in human history for what happens to languages, in such circumstances of rapid change. While diversity enriches a society, it also poses a set of challenges. David Crystal (2003) stresses that the need for effective and swift communication has never been more urgent, more critical. English language learning by the first generation immigrant students from different countries is a complex process, which further complicates when the immigrant students are from war-ridden countries and are socio-economically disadvantaged. OECD report (2015) articulates this issue by stating that “some systems need to integrate large numbers of school-age migrants and asylum seekers quickly; some need to accommodate students whose mother tongue is different from the language spoken in the host community or whose families are socio-economically disadvantaged; some systems are confronted with all three challenges at once.” Sweden happens to be one of the latter, tackling with all three problems at the same time. The way school systems respond to the integration of immigrants in the education system of their new country, has an enormous impact on their motivation to learn.

It is therefore established that in order to effectively leverage the language learning potential of immigrant children, it is important to study the factors that influence their motivation to learn English in Sweden, which is the basic aim of this study.

**1.2 Research Question**

This research aims to explore and better understand the factors influencing the motivation of immigrant students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to learn English in
Sweden. By analyzing personal experiences, this study aims to highlight trends in the society, which can also provide inspiration for a larger scale study in this direction, aiming to improve the English language learning process for the immigrants in Swedish secondary schools, and facilitate them in their journey of learning the English language.

Q- What factors influence the motivation of first generation immigrants from low socio-economic background to learn English in the Swedish secondary schools?

1.3 Ethical considerations

Owing to the vulnerability of the target group, ethical considerations were given utmost importance. Main measures quoted by Bryman (2012, p.125) were taken to ensure an ethical study.

- Identity of the informants is protected by anonymity.
- Their names are not mentioned. They are only referred to by the country of their origin.
- Due to the age of the informants, a consent to the interview was signed by their parent/guardians.
- Before the interview, they were made aware that they can terminate or walk out of the interview at any point they wish to. They can also refuse to answer any question they wish not to answer.
- They were made aware that their voice is being recorded for the purpose of transcription later.
- Being an immigrant myself, I was aware of the possibility of a bias, even though my own circumstances are very different from that of the target group of this study. I have therefore tried to remain neutral in my data collection and analysis.

Transcripts of the interview were shown to the informants later, for elimination of any possible error.
2. Methodological Framework

This chapter outlines the methods used in the study, stating and justifying the critical choices made while conducting the research. Ethical consideration and the limitations of the study are presented at the end of this section.

2.1 Overarching methodology

This is a qualitative study using semi-structured, in-depth interviewing method. This study applies a bottom-up, inductive approach focused on finding the factors influencing the English language learning motivation of immigrant students from low socio-economic background.

Qualitative research method is the most appropriate here as it focuses on words and processes rather than numbers. In-depth interview method was deemed best for this type of research as it involves getting an understanding of deeply personal life experiences of the respondents, more so, when the respondents are children. “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.” (Seidman 2006, p.9). Interviews conducted were generally open-ended and exploratory in nature. The conversation was guided using an interview guide. Findings of the study were analyzed using an inductive approach to generate meaning from the data collected and patterns were identified.

2.2 Sampling procedure

Informants were selected according to a certain criteria. All respondents are first generation immigrant students. 10 of them are from low socio-economic backgrounds and have parents who are not educated beyond primary level, while two respondents come from the lower-middle working class with highly educated parents. Their parents’ occupation provided in
this study is from before arriving in Sweden. Informants study in the same school but different
groups and grade levels. Their English language proficiency is evaluated roughly between
elementary to intermediate. They are all fairly fluent in spoken Swedish. Interviews were
conducted within the school premises. Individual interviews were roughly 30-45 minutes long
while the group interview lasted 80 minutes.

2.3 Informants

I conducted three individual and one group interview with a group of nine students; five
girls and seven boys between January and April 2018. All interviews were conducted
face-to-face, in the presence of a Somali interpreter with intermediate Arabic language skills. He
works as language support staff in a primary school in Växjö. All respondents are between 14
and 16 years of age. Informants have been living in Sweden from between two to seven years.
Six informants have had education from their home country before immigrating to Sweden and
six came with Arabic education from Quran School but no formal school background. Two
respondents come from highly educated families, their fathers being a doctor and a teacher
respectively. Mothers of ten respondents are currently housewives.

Informants

I’m from Somalia. I’m 15 years old. My father works as a mechanic and mother is a house-wife.

I’m from Pakistan. I’m 14 years old. My father works was a brick-maker and mother was a house-wife.
I'm from Syria. I'm 15 years old. My father is a doctor and mother is a house-wife.

I'm from Chechnya. I'm 14 years old. My father works as a van driver and mother is sick so she does not work anymore.

I'm from Syria. I'm 16 years old. Both My parents work as teachers in a school.

I'm from Somalia. I'm 14 years old. My father works in a pizzeria.
I’m from Somalia. I’m 15 years old.

I’m from Iran. I’m 14 years old. My father does many jobs. He worked with construction. Mother helped.

I’m from Afghanistan. I’m 14 years old.

I’m from Afghanistan. I’m 15 years old. My father worked as a carpenter and mother is a housewife. She can speak 5 languages.
I'm from Somalia. I'm 16 years old. My father works very hard.

I'm from Iraq. I'm 14 years old.
3. Literature Review

This section lays out a comprehensive review of some of the important literature available on the topic.

The role of socio-economic status

The role of socio-economic factors in a student’s motivation to acquire a foreign language is a well-researched area within the field of sociolinguistics. Studies highlight the influence of social and economic background in the foreign language learning context, based on the fact that students from different socio-economic backgrounds have access to different kinds of resources. Gayton (2010) links socio-economic status to mobility (access to foreign travel), and subsequently mobility and language-learning (Carr & Pauwels, 2006; Wright, 1999). Studies indicate a strong link between the education level of the parents and the achievement level of their children in foreign language acquisition.

According to a report by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA 2003), the European school-age children whose parents had higher qualifications performed better in the language proficiency tests. Ausubel (1968), conceptualizing general academic motivation through ‘Meaningful Learning Theory’, based on the premise that the acquisition of knowledge is more successful when it is connected to the learner’s past experiences. He further states that middle class children emerge as academically more competitive compared to lower-class children, as they are more ambitious in their learning (ibid). Parents in lower-class families don’t tend to give the same importance to education as the middle class parents do (ibid). Butler (2013) studied the influence of parents’ beliefs and behaviors related to English education and found out that it had little effect on their children’s English language learning outcomes in primary schools but the effect increased significantly at the secondary school level. An interesting study conducted by Gao F.(2010) indicates that “not only social class status influence the learning of English, but the reverse is also true, learning English affects the social class status.”.
English as a global language can also prove to be threatening for immigrants with low socio-economic status. Emergence and prevalence of a global language comes with certain risks. It can reduce the will and opportunities for people to learn other languages, resulting in the eventual disappearance of the minority languages. Pointing towards similar risks, David Crystal states in a study conducted in 2013, that a global language can “cultivate an elite monolingual class, more complacent and dismissive in their attitudes towards other languages.” (Crystal 2003 p.14-15). He points out that speakers of such a global language, particularly the native speakers will always have an advantage over the others, as they’ll be in a better position to think and work in the language much more easily than the others, manipulating it to their own advantage, at the expense of those who don’t have it, “thus maintaining in a linguistic guise, the chasm between rich and poor.” (Crystal 2003 p.15).

**Language learning Motivation**

Motivation has been defined in many different ways in language learning literature. Abrudan 1997) calls motivation a “motive force, something that prompts, incites or stimulates action” and attributes the success of any action, to the extent to which the individual strives to attain it. Motivation is thus the impulse that generates that action. Williams and Bruden (1997, p.120) describe motivation as “a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, a state which leads to a conscious decision to act and gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort”. Similar idea is stated by R. C. Gardner who presents a rather mathematical definition of motivation stating that “motivation is a combination of effort plus desire to achieve a goal plus favorable attitudes towards the goal to be accomplishes.” (Gardner 1985, p.11).

L2 motivation has been the subject of a considerable amount of research in the recent decades. Owing largely to the rapid increase in immigration, language learning has become a complex construct catching the interest of social scientists and linguists all over the world. Until the early 1990s, two Canadian scholars named Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert , strongly influenced this field by conceptualizing motivation from a social psychological perspective,
perceiving L2 as a bridge between different ethnolinguistic communities and hence motivation to acquire the language of a different country, as a powerful tool to influence intercultural communication. A shift was seen in the way researches conceptualized motivation, calling for a more education-oriented approach (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1990, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995; Williams and Burden, 1997). Cognitive aspects of motivation, particularly those related to learner’s self were now being promoted. Situational factor relevant to classroom applications were now focused on and influential mainstream psychology theories like “goal theory” and “attribution theory” started being integrated (Dörnyei 1994).

Goals for learning English have changed over time. In the 21st century, English has become an international language used as a lingua franca in a globalized world (e.g. Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2005; Widdowson, 1993), paving way for new goals for its acquisition including “(...) interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to study or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners and one hopes, openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude towards different cultures” (Yashima 2002, P.57).
4. Theoretical Framework

This section lays out the concepts and theories that inform this study. The theoretical framework includes Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs, social comparison theory and some aspects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

4.1 Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow builds this theory on the idea that every human has a set of basic needs that they strive to meet in their life. These needs are ranked in a hierarchy. The theory presents a five-tier model of human needs often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid, where certain needs take precedence over the others. Higher needs cannot be fulfilled unless the basic needs are satisfied. (See figure 2). However, it is important to note here that Maslow later admitted that his earlier statements may have given “the false impression that a need must be satisfied 100 percent before the next need emerges” (Maslow 1987, p.69).

Satisfaction of a need is a complex phenomenon that cannot be taken as “all or none”. Secondly, fluctuation between hierarchy level can be caused due to a number of reasons, which implies that not everyone will move through the hierarchy in a unidirectional manner but rather move back and forth between the different types of needs.
This five-stage model can be divided into deficiency needs and growth needs. The first four levels are often referred to as deficiency needs (D-needs), and the top level is known as growth or being needs (B-needs). The deficiency needs are the result of deprivation and increase the motivation when unmet. Once met, the need withers away. Growth needs on the other hand tend to become stronger when engaged, as they don’t necessarily stem from a lack of something but rather a desire to grow. At the top of this hierarchy lies self-actualization as the ultimate goal and in order to reach this goal one has to achieve the goals of self-esteem, the fulfillment of the need of love, affection, belongingness. A feeling of security protection and freedom from fear and at the very bottom, are the basic needs for survival, such as air, food and water.
Höggren (2017) describes the basic premise of this theory by stating that a hungry, insecure, under-confident person who is struggling for the basic needs in life doesn’t have the capability of pursuing higher level goals in life. In the case of this study, the group could be seen as the immigrants and their higher level goal could be seen as learning the English language. According to H.D. Brown (2007, p.87), it is important that teachers realize that the students’ feeling of belonging, inclusion and safety in the classroom is vital to their motivation.

4.2 Social Comparison Theory

Social cognitive theory stresses the influence of “social comparison” on motivation, which simply means comparing ourselves with the others. It implies that seeing others act in a particular way and get praised for it can motivate and encourage a person to act in the same manner in order to be rewarded the same way (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece 2010). Festinger (1954) proposed that people are naturally driven to evaluate their abilities, usually by comparing themselves with the others. They get validity and a sense of cognitive clarity when they compare themselves to other individuals. He further argues that people choose those individuals for comparison who are similar on the characteristics that are the most predictive of the performance in that particular domain. Schunk (1987) argues that the more alike observers are to model, the greater is the probability that similar actions by observers are socially appropriate and will produce comparable result.

It is important to note that there might not be a direct effect of social comparison on motivation, but it can motivate students in achievement contexts, promoting for example, task motivation. In the context of this study, the first generation immigrant students when study in the mainstream English class, social comparison with their peers can improve their motivation to learn English. Peers that the immigrant student is comparing themselves with, is also important here. It can therefore be argued here that social comparison can positively influence motivation but not necessarily learning.
4.3 Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation

Motivation has been recognized as a significant factor in language learning as it works as the starting point for learning and supporting the process of foreign language acquisition (Dörnyei 1994). L2 motivation has therefore been the subject of a considerable amount of research.

In the context of this study, it is important to differentiate intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from the term interest. The term interest is used to indicate a person’s inclination or in other words, liking towards something. For instance a student might be interested in bungee jumping but that doesn’t necessarily equals motivation for actually learning the sport. His interest in the sport might influence him to take steps towards learning it. Similarly, immigrant students interested in English might display motivated behavior such as persistence. Situational or personal interest might bear similarity with intrinsic motivation but in fact it is not linked to either of them. “Students may be personally or situationally interested in a topic for intrinsic or extrinsic reasons” (Schunk 2010, p.237). It is also important to note here that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are not inversely proportional to each other.

Höggren (2017) states that intrinsically motivated students do not work towards a reward, instead, the activity itself is the reward for them. Personal growth is the internal reward that makes intrinsic motivation have such positive effects on the learner’s motivation (Brown 2007).

Hunt (1963) argued that intrinsic motivation stemmed from incongruity between prior experiences and new information, giving rise to curiosity. In the context of this study, it could be first generation immigrant students from disadvantaged socio-economic background, comparing their new reality with their past experiences and getting intrinsically motivated to reduce the incongruity. Hunt believed that individuals need an optimal level of incongruity as too much of it can be frustrating. The notion of an optimal level here is important but vague as it is not clear how much is needed to stimulate intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975).
Motivation that involves external rewards is called extrinsic motivation. Comparing it to intrinsic motivation, where the reward is performing the action itself, extrinsic motivation comes from rewards that have no real connection to the action itself (Gärdenfors 2010, p.79). Such rewards are often short-term with no significant impact on a student’s motivation in the long-term. It can therefore be argued that intrinsic motivation is a more meaningful form of motivation for learning English. Having said that, extrinsic motivation is not always necessarily less meaningful.
5. Findings and analysis

This chapter lays out the findings of the study, coded according to the themes that emerged during the research process. Findings are analyzed through the lens of the theoretical framework described in the previous section. Informants’ names have been protected for the sake of anonymity.

What goes on in the mind of an immigrant child who escapes the darkness of a war-ridden country and ends up in a completely different part of the world? What expectations does he have from this new country? What motivates him to start a new life, a new school, learn a new language and learn English sometimes as a third or even fourth language? What drives them? What slows them down? How does he connect the dots of knowledge from his previous language skills to the newly acquired ones?

This study attempts to find the answers to some of these questions by exploring the inner thought process and perspective of some of the immigrant students who are currently undergoing this experience. The findings of this study offer an insight into the minds of the most important stakeholders of Sweden’s future; its students.
5.1 Sense of belonging

A sense of belonging in the new school environment is one of the most significant indicators of an immigrant student’s physical and psychological well-being in the society. Results of this study indicate a lack of inclusiveness in the Swedish language classes, as a prime contributing factor towards the demotivation of immigrant students. Students’ basic needs of safety, sense of belonging and love are not sufficiently met, hindering them from feeling motivated to achieve higher goals in life. The study finds that the prime reason for their learning
English in the Swedish school system is to get a passing grade and move on towards financial independence. Their motivation for learning English is extrinsic in nature with an urgency to get a job, make money or be famous. The results also indicate a shift in this feeling when in the football field, where they feel sufficiently skilled to be wanted by every team. Both boys and girl informants expressed that they feel at home when playing football in the playground.

Informants unanimously expressed that one of the biggest hindrance in their English language learning was a sense of exclusion that they feel in their school environment. A 13 year old informant from Somalia expressed that she has a lot of Swedish friends but they’re not real. “We are so happy talking in the class, discuss(ing) everything with one other and also teacher. We laugh and joke and sometime take snapchat pictures of our feet when Miss (the teacher) is not looking. But after the lesson is finish, they don’t even talk to me till the next lesson.”

Another informant from Somalia expressed a sense of insecurity in speaking English in front of his Swedish class fellows.

“When I was new here, I couldn’t speak Swedish at all but I could speak a little English. I never spoke Persian with my Afghani friends when our Swedish friends were in the corridor. I don’t want them to think that I am from the FBK group (förbredelse class/introductory group) where only the failures go. So I only spoke in English but then I found out that my class friends think that I speak English with them because I want to show off.”

Informants expressed frustration over the fact that they feel their English language skill is rather a baggage that keeps them from being a “real Swede”. Having good English language skills indicate a lack of Swedish language skills, or a lack of the will integrate into the new culture. An informant from Iraq stated, “When Emil talks English with Tilde, it is so very cool. But When Mohammad talks English with Tilde, it’s only funny and not cool.” Informants expressed that they are not accepted because their English sounds different from the others. An informant from grade 9 said that he was confused for a long time because his friends think that the English that he speaks is not even English. They feel burdened with stereotypes that are all
around them; in the social media mostly. Seven out of nine informants mentioned feeling distressed and belittled by the viral memes created around “funny” immigrant English accents in Sweden. An informant shared a memory stating that, “We had a group presentation about cultures of world. We decided that I will not do the talking part because I sound like the telephone operator from Indian tech support. And then they laughed and joked about it every day.”

Communicative activities are an integral part of language education which involves students working with each other, in pairs or groups of different sizes and language ability. Such activities also require a certain level of trust and comfortability between the group members. Informants of this study expressed that these activities are more often than not, a cause of stress and anxiety for immigrant students, when put together with the Swedish students with obviously much higher level of language skills, in an environment where they already feel out of place. An informant from Somalia recollected by saying, “If I’m in a group with språkstödiare (language assistant), I’m then F group but if I go in the other group, my Somali friends think I don’t like them. But I don’t learn much new language from Somali friends.”

Looking at these findings through the lens of Maslow’s needs theory, it can be argued that the immigrant students get stuck at the level of basic human needs and hardly get the motivation to move towards self-actualization, which in this context would be to find satisfaction and enjoyment in the process of learning English. In order for them to feel intrinsically motivated to learn English, they first need to feel connected, accepted, appreciated, included and free from fear of all sorts. Their esteem in terms of status and achievement needs to be raised before they can feel motivated to achieve the growth needs. School environment needs to be more conducive to learning with a growth mindset. Their self-esteem is threatened in an environment where they feel different and excluded in both visible and subtle ways. According to Brown, it is vital for the teachers to realize the significance of the of students’ need for safety, belonging and affecting in the classroom, in order for them to feel motivated to achieve higher goals in life (Brown, p.87).
It is however interesting to note that things change for the informants from African countries when move from the language classroom to the football field, where they feel at home. They feel appreciated and wanted. They work as a team and feel comfortable even shouting at each other, everyone passionately focused on working towards the same goal. An informant added, “Zlatan is our hero. It doesn’t matter if we cheer in English or Swedish in the game. We just want to sound like him (Zalatan) and win the game.”

Football is a big part of life in many African countries and immigrants that come from African countries usually grown up with football as an essential part of their everyday life, which means that they are have skills in the sport that make them more desirable to the players from the other countries, making them feel safe, wanted and appreciated. The fact that some of their basic needs are met in the field, makes them motivated to achieve the higher level goals; a phenomenon lacking in the English language classrooms.

Going back to David Crystal’s study mentioned earlier in the literature review section, emergence of English as a global language can be particularly threatening to the immigrants from low socioeconomic background. They feel that their first language is of low-status and not of any value to anyone in the world. They do not see the benefit of their native language in their new reality which further lowers their self-esteem, in turn lowering their motivation for achieving higher level goals, connecting it back to Maslow’s needs hierarchy. “It’s cool to speak English in Iraq. It’s the ticket to a good jab and lots of money. With English, you can be rich. In Iraq, English is a rich people language but here (in Sweden) it is an outsider’s language.”

High levels of incongruity can be observed in the statements of the informants. As mentioned earlier, Hunt (1963) argued that intrinsic motivation stems from incongruity between prior experiences and new information, giving rise to curiosity. Therefore some level of incongruity is motivating for the immigrant students as they try to minimize it by achieving their learning goals. However, too much of incongruity can be frustrating and have a negative effect on the motivation level of the students. “It is cool to buy stuff in English. It’s cool to speak
English with the teachers. In my village, we got extra marks when we asked questions in English during the lesson, even during math lesson. Not here, no way.”

As established earlier in the literature review section, the term *interest* is not the same as *intrinsic motivation*. A student who might be interested in learning English does not necessarily mean that he is intrinsically motivated to learn the language. Interest is not motivation itself but rather an influence on one’s motivation. When asked about motivation for learning English, respondents mentioned their interests in the language by stating that, “I love watching films and the best music on Spotify is in English. Most of all, I want to learn English to get more views on YouTube. My own VLOG is in English. VLOG is all about how many views you get.”

### 5.2 Social Pressures

This study finds a strong connection between immigrant students’ motivation to learn English and the social pressures that they experience, both from home and school. Connecting back to Maslow’s needs hierarchy, the most basic form of human needs is of a physiological nature. This includes the need of food, water, shelter, clothing etc. and then are the safety and security needs such as health, property, family etc. Analyzing the finding through Maslow’s pyramid, this study finds that immigrant students’ motivation seldom manages to reach to the top of the pyramid, as the very basic needs are unmet due to the pressure from both home and school. The lack of a sense of belonging in school has already been discussed in detail above. When coupled with the pressure from family, the fulfillment of these basic needs multifold.

Their motivation can be linked to the socio-economic factors. As established earlier in this study, parents of immigrants from low-income families struggle with resources and have never had the money to keep their children’s education as their top priority, when they are struggling for survival in terms of food and shelter. For these children, the biggest motivation for education is to make money, get financial independence and to realize their dreams. Therefore they spend most of their time in school in order to be able to get the grades and start earning
money. They feel pressured by their families to get good grades. An informant from Iran said, “My parents think my grades are money. If I fail, I waste money. I think I can make them rich or poor in one day.”

The findings of this study suggest that students feel pressured from their parents to perform well in school so that they can fulfil their own unfulfilled dreams. These students at a rather tender age feel burdened with the pressure of their parents’ dreams, on top of their own.

5.3 Status of English in the home country

This study finds that the immigrant students’ motivation to learn English is influenced by the beliefs of their parents, and consequently, to the perception of English in their home country. Connecting this back to the study conducted in 2013 by Butler, the influence of parents’ beliefs and behaviors related to English education has an increasingly strong effect on their children’s English language learning outcomes in the secondary school.

An informant from Iran stated that English is nothing more than a foreign conspiracy to invade the Muslim world. He sees English language as a British and American conspiracy against Iranians and their future generations. “The government has banned English in schools in Iran because learning English is not as important that the west says. It is a trick to kill our heritage. I think that komenei is crazy because but not my father.” Another informant from Pakistan had a very different view on this subject. She felt that learning English can give her the words that almost everyone can understand. She wants to be a cooking show hostess and everyone in the world can understand her recipes if she can film them in English instead of Pashto. Quoting her mother, she expressed her admiration for “the language of the powerful countries like America and England”.

Social comparison theory explains these findings. According to Festinger (1954), people are naturally driven to compare their abilities with the others. Socio-economically low class
people from the former British colonies associated English as the language of the masters and are still inclined to teach their children this high-status language of the rich and powerful.

These findings suggest that if immigrant students are more likely to repeat a grade, they are then older than their class fellows, impeding their chances for integration with their peers. Connecting back to the social comparison theory, this age difference may cause the student to consider himself coming short in terms of ability and skills, as compared to their peers who manage to gain the same skills earlier. Several respondent from expressed frustration over Swedish school policies. An informant articulated his feelings saying that, “Teachers say that the Swedes are better in English than us (the immigrants) because they’ve been studying English for long. He (the teacher) said that I have the right to stay one more year in 9th but I don’t want to, because they will be doing jobs and getting rich money soon.” On the same topic, another respondent from Iran expressed frustration on the fact that he has been struggling with reading skills in Swedish and English for 3 years now but his language deficiencies have not been identified until the last year when it was too late to do anything but to repeat grade 9. “What’s the use of doing the same thing again a whole year when these two (pointing at another informant) will already be learning more serious things in gymnasium?”

Another issue that came up was the fact that immigrants often tend to end up in vocational programs, rather than other university preparation programs, due to a lack of language skills. They require to pass minimum English, Swedish and Mathematics in order to get into any gymnasium program. They usually get to pass Swedish because the school’s focus is there but math and English hold them back. An informant from Syria said, “I want to be a doctor but I know I will fail English. I can go in vårdomsorg (health care) and be a nurse or try again next year. Both are very bad and boring but at least it is free.”

The topic of “immigrant areas and schools” was prominent during the interviews. Informants expressed frustration over the lack of opportunities they get to rub shoulders with the native swedes and get a better understanding of their living. The findings of this study indicate
that the concentration of immigrants in some schools can severely limit their opportunities to integrate or mingle with the culture of their new country. An informant from Iran expressed his thoughts around this topic in these words, “Signe and I live in the same village. I can see her house from my window. But we never talk out of school.”

OECD report (2015) offers detailed statistics to explain this phenomenon on a larger scale. According to the report, all across the OECD countries, first generation immigrants often tend to settle in areas with people from their own country, speaking their own language and usually from similar socio-economic backgrounds. This perhaps helps them build a network of people that share similar background and experiences and perhaps even get help in various forms, to settle in the new country and find work. This usually results in immigrant students being concentrated in some schools. This happens due to several reasons; sometimes because they live in the same neighborhood and sometimes because they are grouped together by the school system, even if they are not neighbors but basically because of similar performance patterns. According to their annual report, “PISA reveals that it is not the concentration of immigrant students in a school but, rather, the concentration of socioeconomic disadvantage in a school that hinders student achievement.” (OECD 2015, p.8).

The findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

1. Immigrant students don’t feel included in the Swedish schools. They feel like outsiders, lacking a sense of belonging. This results in a lack of motivation to achieve at a higher level.
2. Social pressures from both home and school hinder these students to feel intrinsically motivated to learn English. Their motivation is mostly targeted to learn English to get a well-paying job and become financially independent.
3. They are influenced by the perception of English language in their home country.
6. Conclusions

Studying vulnerable groups like children and immigrants can be complex yet rewarding as it brings forth new knowledge that can help us better understand the world we live in. With this understand at its core, this study was conducted to explore socio-economically disadvantaged, first generation immigrants’ English language learning motivation in the Swedish secondary schools. Empirical data was collected through group interviews of a total of 12 informants, which was analyzed through the lens of a theoretical framework consisting of Maslow’s needs hierarchy, social comparison theory and some aspects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Despite the limitations of the study, the results have made some significant indications. Swedish education policies are not tailored to the needs of immigrants in the secondary schools. English language classes in the secondary schools are generally not inclusive of the immigrants from war-ridden countries with low social and economic status, which hinders their motivation to learn. The only motivation they have is extrinsic, focused towards a rewarding future, mostly in terms of socio-economic factors. The results also indicate an ineffectiveness of the education policy, subtly pushing the immigrant students in the direction of socially low-status vocational training rather than socially high-status professional careers. Gender aspect was also considered during the collection of data. However, the sample size was not large enough to make any significant generalizations.

This study can serve as a basis for a larger scale study in this direction.
7. References


http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:konstfack:diva-4048.


OECD (2015). Helping immigrant students to succeed at school – and beyond. [online] Available at:  


Annex 1
Interview Guide
Checklist

✓ Introduce yourself and the interpreter.
✓ Explain the purpose of interview and the reason why they have been selected. Inform about the duration of the interview.
✓ Information about confidentiality.
✓ Inform them that the interview is being recorded.
✓ Conduct the interview.
✓ Repeat for the student, summarized key data collected through the interview and verify for accuracy.

Background and Personal Information

Name: __________________________________________________
Age: ____________________________________________________
Country of origin: _________________________________________
First language: ____________________________________________
Number of languages they can speak: _________________________
Strongest language: _______________________________________
Prior education background: _________________________________
Medium of instruction in the previous school(s): ______________
Swedish language ability: _________________________________
English language ability: _________________________________
Number of years in Sweden: _______________________________
Parents’ occupation before coming to Sweden: ______________
Preferred language for the interview: ______________________
Question guide

Theme 1: Before moving to Sweden
1. Let’s talk about your schooling in your home country. At what age did you start school and what was it like?
2. Which languages did you start to learn in your first school?
3. At what age did you formally start learning English in your school?
4. Can you describe a typical English lesson from your school in your homeland?
5. Did you speak English outside of school? In which kind of situations? Can you give any examples?

Theme 2: After moving to Sweden
1. Do you currently have a lot of friends from your home country? Which language do you speak with them most often?
2. Do you currently have a lot of Swedish friends? Which language do you speak with them most often?
3. Do you currently have a lot of friends who have immigrated from different countries? Which language do you speak with them most often?
4. Do you get a lot of opportunities to use your knowledge of other languages to learn English? Please elaborate your answer.

Theme 3: Language and Society
1. How do you feel using your first language in the English lessons?
2. On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being the easiest and 5 the hardest, where would you place yourself in terms of feeling confident speaking English with your Swedish friends?
3. How do you feel about taking help from a language assistant (språkstödjare) in class? Please elaborate your answer.
4. Do you learn better working in a small group of students from your home country or do you learn better with the whole class? In what ways?
Theme 4: Motivation

1. In your opinion, why do we need to study English in Swedish schools?
2. How can the English language help you in life?
3. What motivates you to keep learning English? What frustrates you in the process?
Annex 2
Permission Letter for Parents/Guardians

I allow my child ____________________________ of class ________________ to participate in the research conducted by Mehkar Sheikh on the following topic,

Factors influencing motivation of English language learners by first generation immigrants students at high school level in Sweden.

Jag tillåter mitt barn ____________________________ i klass ________________ att deltaga i denna intervju görs i utbildningssyfte. Elevernas svar är anonyma.

Signatur vårdnadshavare: ________________________

Datum: ____________________________