Is There Room for English in Swedish Nursery Schools?
A study of teachers’ opinions regarding an introduction of the English language in Swedish nursery schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to discover what nursery teachers thought about an introduction of English to Swedish nursery schools, whether they had seen children showing an interest for the English language and if so how they had reacted. Theories and research used in the analysis of the results were amongst others the sociocultural theory of learning and the critical period hypothesis. Qualitative semi-structured interviews of four nursery school teachers was the method chosen. The results showed that the teachers felt that an introduction of English could be easily implemented if it were to be unofficial, fun and voluntary and not by force through an addition to the curriculum. The teachers felt that it was currently not part of their job as it was not included in the curriculum. The teachers thought the children could have positive outcomes in their English language development if introduced to English in nursery school. The teachers thought that the main hindrances in introducing English would be due to staff competence in the English language and a possible problem in children’s Swedish language development, mainly in children learning Swedish as a second language. The teachers had seen various instances where children had expressed an interest in the English language, for example in role-play, at mealtimes and at song time. They had acknowledged this interest by asking to hear the children use English, translating English words into Swedish and by expanding the amount of English used in the children’s day to day life at nursery school.

Keywords: nursery school, pre-school, English, Sweden, teachers
1 Introduction

Sweden today is a multicultural society and the English language is a part of everyday life for the majority of the population. Television programs, Internet, films, toys, radio etc. make the list of ways in which children are exposed to English endless. Children are also becoming more conscious of the fact that the English language is of importance, for example one child told me they couldn’t go to another country because they hadn’t learnt English yet. At my latest work training placement I was in a group with 1-3 year-olds and even at this young age I found children naturally using English words and singing English songs. The staff however without realising what the children were singing had not recognised it as an expression of an interest in English. As a native English speaker and a mother of young children I recognised it as the children’s wish to express themselves and demonstrate their knowledge of the English language. They wanted to learn more and to improve their pronunciation. These situations and many similar ones left me wondering if Swedish nursery schools could be helping children’s development of the English language more. I began to wonder if this interest in English and teachers’ reaction to English was common and if so why.

Although the subject English is not included in the curriculum for nursery school it does state that nursery schools should arrange an environment where children’s will to learn, curiosity and interests are encouraged and stimulated. Nursery school teachers also have a responsibility to stimulate and challenge children’s language and communication skills (Läroplan för förskolan, 2010, p.12 &11). If the English language is expressed as an interest, do nursery teachers feel they must include it whether they want to or not and do they? If it is not seen as an active interest, is it a subject that can easily be ignored in nursery schools? English differs from many other subjects such as mathematics or sustainable development, which must be included in the children’s education in nursery schools (Läroplan för förskolan, 2010, p.7). I wondered if teachers believe English has a place in nursery schools regardless and what effects they think an earlier introduction to English might have. The study I present will investigate these questions. I will then discuss if and in what way the teachers’ thoughts, feelings and reactions are reflected in scientific research on second language development and research on the status of the English language in nursery schools in Sweden.
2 Purpose and aims

The purpose of this study is to examine the opinions of nursery teachers regarding an introduction of the English language into Swedish nursery schools. I seek the answers to the following questions:

- How do nursery teachers feel about an introduction of English into nursery schools?
- What are their thoughts regarding negative and positive aspects of an introduction of English into nursery schools?
- Have these nursery teachers seen signs that children are interested in the English language and if so, how have they reacted?

3 Background

This section discusses children’s language development. In order to approach the subject of English in nursery schools it is important to understand how a child develops a language both when monolingual and bilingual. Bilingualism is common in nursery schools today and introducing a second (or third in some cases) language may affect the children’s language development, so this is important for nursery teachers to understand. It is a part of the teaching degree and is information that in addition to experience I believe teachers will be basing their opinions on. The subject of how children are living in Sweden today and globalism are also approached to demonstrate why the English language and its place in nursery schools is a relevant discussion.

3.1 Children’s language development

A child’s language development according to some researchers, begins in the womb as soon as they begin to hear. In the first two months of life an infant communicates with grunts, cries and rhythmic breathing. The next stage consists of the infant practicing gurgle noises and consonant-like sounds and they may also respond with sounds of contentment. The following stages occur at various ages as language development is individual but usually between four and six months of age the child starts to make consonant sounds and experiments with volume and pitch. At about seven months of age they start to form syllables and chatter in a rhythmic pattern. At this stage they also begin to distinguish a mother tongue from other languages. Around the age of ten to fourteen months the child begins to use language in a functional
manner and also uses body language to complement the short combinations of syllables they are now capable of (Lindö 2009, p.63). The first words usually start to appear around the first birthday when the child has developed an ability to recognise phonetic sounds and has memories that represent objects, people and events. At some point between the age of one and three a vocabulary spurt occurs where the child rapidly increases its vocabulary starting with nouns then verbs and later prepositions, adverbs etc. (Strömqvist, 2010, p.62). Learning a second language can either mimic this process or a person picks up phrases and uses them frequently in different contexts (Sandvik & Spurkland, 2011, p55).

3.2 Childhood and multiculturalism in Sweden today.
Children in Sweden are exposed to the English language through television, the internet, newspapers etc. Programs aimed at children such as ”Dora the Explorer” incorporate English and English television programs and films are not dubbed with exception of animated programmes and films, in the latter both languages are usually available. In addition the use of learning tablets (e.g. IPad) and similar for children is increasing rapidly both privately and in nursery schools. The number of applications available in English far outweigh those in Swedish so the likelihood of them using English applications in nursery school is greater. These products allow for children to access the Internet in a simpler way and navigating can therefore be learned even before a child can read and write during the years at nursery school. Videos on YouTube are also very popular for young children and often these are viewed in English. English is natural for children growing up in Sweden as a part of everyday life. Nursery schools in Sweden have no obligation to begin teaching the English language but it is however a part of the curriculum for school from year one. The interests of the children are however something nursery teachers need to take into account when planning activities (Läroplanen för förskolan, 2010, p.6). In modern day society children are more likely to meet other people who speak different languages, particularly in nursery schools where much of their time is spent. Many children are already growing up with more than one language and culture. Immigration and emigration is increasing and children's exposure to languages other than Swedish is vast and increasing. (Arnberg, 2004, p.5)

Based on the information given on language development, multiculturalism and how childhood in Sweden looks today we see how the use of the English language has increased for children and adults in Sweden. As Swedish children also often spend a lot of their time in
nursery schools the question of whether nursery schools should reflect this increase and what effects it may have is valid.

4 Theory and previous research

In this section I will present information on the status of the English language in Sweden this information can give insight as to why English is as yet a subject reserved for schools. I will also present research that discusses various factors regarding learning a second language and the effects it may have on other aspects of development. When and how a second language can be acquired and the possible effects that it may have are subjects that need to be considered when discussing an introduction of a new language in nursery schools and is information that will contribute to my study. Finally I will present some statistics on children’s use of the internet over the past five years as the internet is a major source of children’s exposure to the English language this is relevant. I will later use these theories and parts of the research to analyse the results of my study.

4.1 The status of the English languages n society and nursery school

English is a language that has gained an increased status in many countries around the world since use of the internet became so widespread. Sweden is no exception. One study of 21,300 children in Gothenburg in 2001 showed that 36% spoke a language besides Swedish and of these almost 1,300 had English as their second language despite the fact that only 500 of these children had a parent born outside of Sweden. This indicates that the status of the English language is high (Sigurd & Håkansson, 2007, p.157). However according to Hult (2012, p.243 & 251) the status of English as a language in Sweden is under negotiation and this is reflected in its part in the curriculum where it is still seen as a foreign language. In addition to this view Hult also states that English is seen as the most useful modern language in today's society.

In 2002 the committee for the Swedish language published a document with suggestions on how to preserve the status of the Swedish language in Sweden. In it they state that English has gained status in Sweden and become a much more useful language in Sweden. However they also write that if the English language continues to gain status and becomes the majority language in some social areas, then the Swedish language will lose status and its development will diminish. The documents purpose was to propose recommendations to enable the Swedish language to flourish without negatively affecting the areas of society where English
is required and still enabling people to learn the English they need (Kommittéen för svenska språket, 2002a, p.21). The document also states that based on Swedish language politics, nursery school and school education should be primarily in Swedish. The English language is not seen as a threat to the Swedish language in nursery schools, as those seeking bilingual education generally have a connection to an English speaking country. There appears to be no trend for parents to place their children in an English speaking nursery school (Kommittéen för svenska språket, 2002a, p.70-71). As well as this, the following three aspects of the effects of English language and content integrated education in primary school were stated: The first was a fear that the children would have worse Swedish skills. The second was that they would have worse subject skills and the third was that it could improve the already strong position of the English language whilst worsening the status of the Swedish language (Kommittéen för svenska språket, 2002a, p.71-72). This research on the status of the English and Swedish language is something I will use in my analysis of the results when discussing the teachers’ thoughts on the English language’s place in nursery schools.

Statistics show that the use of the internet by nursery school aged children has rapidly increased over the past five years. In 2010 12 % of children aged 3-5 used the internet daily and 53 % on occasion and no figures were given for children under 3 (Findahl, 2010, p.10). In 2015 67 % of children aged 2 used the internet on occasion and 32 % used it daily. For children aged 3-6 73 % - 89 % used the internet occasionally and 38 % -51 % used it daily. The statistics also showed that 61 % of children aged 2-3 and 78 % of those aged 4-5 used IPad or similar (Davidsson & Findahl, 2015, chapter 6, p.4). The internet is a major source of the English language for children and this increase in internet usage means that they are exposed to the English language more. This is something that may affect their interest for English and is something I will use in analysing my results on the teachers’ experiences of children showing an interest of the English language.

4.2 Bilingualism
According to Sigurd & Håkansson (2007, p.154) bilingualism is seen as a normality in large parts of the world specifically in countries where bi- or multilingualism is a requirement to communicate efficiently. In these regions monolingualism is often seen with scepticism. One language often has a higher status than another and this can cause differences in how well each language is spoken. In nursery schools it is common to meet children who are bilingual
and this can be met with a variety of approaches but the curriculum states that teachers must give these children the opportunity to develop both languages (Läroplanen för förskolan, 2010, p.7). As bilingualism becomes more common, children’s interest for other languages grows and as English is a high status language in Sweden it is natural for them to express a desire to learn it and to also be able to speak two languages.

There are many types of bilingualism in cases where a child is exposed to two languages from birth it is classed as simultaneous bilingualism. When a child has a developed first language and then begins to learn a second language it is known as sequential or successive bilingualism (Sandvik & Spurkland, 2011, p.49-50). There is also additive bilingualism where two languages develop side by side and a first language is not affected by the addition of a second language. This can be compared to subtractive bilingualism where a second language is introduced at the cost of the first language (Arnberg, 2004, p.44-45). Nursery school teachers will most likely have seen these varieties of bilingualism in children at some point and their experiences of how bilingualism affects children may also affect their feelings and thoughts on introducing English in nursery schools.

4.3 Effects of bilingualism on intelligence, cognitive development, language development and social development

The effects that bilingualism has on children’s development are relevant to this study because, although it cannot be claimed that an introduction of English to nursery schools would automatically make the children bilingual by adding a second language, this introduction may affect their development. Bilingualism may even be more likely to be achieved as a result of an early introduction of English. This is something the teachers are likely to be aware of and may therefore affect their opinions on positive and negative effects of introducing English earlier. The following research shows some results of various effects of bilingualism on intelligence, language development, social development and cognitive development. Cognitive development refers to things such as thought processes, problem solving and perception.

When it comes to intelligence both positive and negative results have been found but due to multiple variables in the different studies the results are not conclusive so it is unknown whether bilingualism affects intelligence. (Arnberg, 2004, p.42).
According to Arnberg (2004, p.43-45) several studies have examined whether bilingual children distinguish words differently to monolingual children. These studies showed that bilingual children were more likely to categorise words by meaning than sound. Studies have also shown that bilingual children are more likely to pick up on grammatical errors than monolingual children. Other studies have shown that how bilingualism is achieved affects whether it has a positive or negative effect on cognitive development. Arnberg (2004, p.43-45) discusses research that suggests that when two languages are learned simultaneously the effects are largely positive, but when a second language is learned at the cost of a first language effects on cognitive development may be negative. Arnberg (2004, p.43-45) states that this led the researcher Jim Cummins to develop the threshold hypothesis which states that insufficient skills in two languages have negative effects on cognitive development. In order to avoid negative effects on cognitive development skills in at least one of a child’s two languages must be age adequate. If this is achieved then cognitive development is not affected. If both languages are well developed in a situation where a second language is added to a first language another threshold is passed and effects on cognitive development are positive. One study by Nicolay & Poncelet, (2012, p.603) examined the cognitive effects of a three-year immersion education program of children from age five to eight in France. They compared these children to monolingual eight-year olds. The children in the immersion program did not reach complete bilingualism as their level of language two (English) was at about age five and language one (French) was dominant. The results showed that the bilingual children's cognitive skills were higher and faster than the monolingual children in most areas in contradiction to what Arnberg discussed above.

Language development is often a general concern and in discussions on whether bilingualism is positive or not a common assumption is that bilingual children often have delayed speech development. Studies researching this are rare and children vary so immensely in when they start talking regardless of how many languages they speak so the results are difficult to analyse. However according to Arnberg (2004, p.46) one study showed that first-word development was not affected but later development during the stage at which vocabulary increases dramatically, a delay may be seen as bilingual children often hear two words for every object they see and they also don’t hear a single language as much as a monolingual child does. If both languages are included, a difference in vocabulary is not seen between bilingual and monolingual children. Arnberg (2004, p.47) also discusses that studies show both positive and negative effects on children's majority language development when a
second language is introduced. Negative effects can be a less active vocabulary where words are confused and sentences less complicated. Later studies however seem to show that this only occurs in a situation where a second language is learned at the cost of a first language. In many cases bilingual children seem to simply need a little more time to achieve a higher level in both languages and that positive effects include an advantage in learning another language later in life. I will use this research on effects of bilingualism in my discussion of nursery teachers’ thoughts on positive and negative effects of introducing English.

Some studies have examined bilingualism’s effects on social development, these effects seem to mainly be positive as bilingual children were more understanding to people's different cultures, more tolerant to other, showed a greater self-confidence and had a more positive view of themselves (Arnberg, 2004, p.56)

4.4 Critical period hypothesis
The term critical period refers to a limited period of time in development in which a person can acquire a skill and if this time is missed the skill cannot ever be fully acquired (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2010, p.30). One early study examined a child who was isolated during their early childhood. This study showed that the language the child later learned was limited to words. Grammar and other aspects of the language could not be acquired (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2010, p.37). Obviously such studies are hard to do as children such as the one in the study mentioned above are rare, so studies were instead done on second language development. The early studies were however flawed as they tested differences in how effectively young children and older children acquired new words in a new language during a 5-10 minute period. The older children had a greater cognitive capability and so during this limited time frame they learned more words. The results meant that the general consensus during the 1970’s was that this theory could not be applied to second language development (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2010, p. 43).

New studies were done at the end of the 1980’s these studies looked at a group of people who had learned the English language as a second language at different ages. They examined how grammatically correct they spoke and at which age they had begun to learn English. Results showed that those who had begun to learn English before the age of eight had more grammatically correct English than those who had learned it after that age (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2010, p.44). Today there is no doubt that children who learn a second language
attain a higher comprehension of the language and a more correct pronunciation than an adult who learns a second language (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam 2010, p.51). A variation on the critical period hypothesis is the maturity hypothesis which states that a second language must be introduced and learning started during the critical period for the language for it to be acquired at a native level. According to this hypothesis all language development ends at a certain age regardless of whether a normal first language has been developed (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2010, p.42).

A study on children's second language development where some children attended language immersion schools in Belgium and some attended nursery schools in different countries in Europe concluded that the children that attended an immersion nursery school out-performed those who had been introduced to a language immersion school at a later age supporting the critical period hypothesis in second language development (Buyl & Housen, 2013, p.191).

Ruben (1999, p.87-88) discusses studies of children with varying levels of hearing disorders. These showed that not only does language development have critical periods of development but that these periods differ depending on which area of language development is looked at. Studies showed that phonemic aspects of language where a child learns to distinguish between different languages, has a critical period in the first year of life. The suggested critical period for phonological development was before age two and for semantics it was not until age 15-16.

I will present the information on the age factor to the teachers in my interviews. Both from the point of view that the critical hypothesis theory cannot be applied to a second language and the view that an introduction of a second language results in better outcomes the younger the child is when the second language is introduced. I shall then use this research in my discussion of the results.

4.5 Sociocultural theory
The sociocultural theory is a complex theory that describes how learning occurs through social interaction. Within the theory I have chosen to focus on the zone of proximal development as for learning a new language it is particularly relevant and it would be too complex to focus on the entire theory within the frame of the present study. The zone of proximal development refers to a learning process where learning occurs socially between
people and where teachers first have acknowledged which developmental zone a child is in and which zone the child could potentially achieve. By providing support from someone who has reached that zone (also known as scaffolding) teachers can help the child achieve goals in the next zone of development which the child eventually will then be able to do alone (Lindö, 2009, p.33). I will use this theory to analyse the teachers’ thoughts on children’s language development and learning.

4.6 Language immersion education
Hickey & de Mejia (2014, p.132) discuss immersion education in nursery school as a high quality low risk form of immersion education. It is seen by parents as an easy way to introduce a second language without causing detrimental changes to academic progress, as the nursery school setting can allow for playful learning. The child is easily motivated and they have yet to become self-conscious about making mistakes so are more likely to acquire a good understanding of the language. There are many different ways children can be educated in a bilingual society. A nursery school or school can be monolingual in the country’s minority language or the majority of the children’s second language, for example in Sweden a nursery school could be monolingually Finnish as it is a recognised minority language and is a second language for many children. A school could instead be bilingual where both languages are used in everyday life simultaneously (Hickey & de Mejia, 2014, p.132). There are also examples of schools and nursery schools that use a second language that has a high status in the community but is not a national language such as English. Hickey & de Mejia (2014, p.135) discuss an immersion education study where children with a lower proficiency in their mother tongue (Spanish) attended either a monolingual (English) or bilingual (Spanish and English) nursery school. They found that the children who had attended the bilingual nursery school had much better outcomes in Spanish by grade one than those attending the English only nursery school. This supports the idea that bilingual immersion education is beneficial to both languages whereas monolingual immersion education is only beneficial to second language development. The study also found that the English language was equal in both groups despite different amounts of exposure showing that a bilingual nursery school does not have a detrimental effect on a child’s second language development. Problems related to immersion education are a shortage of highly educated nursery school teachers and accessibility to high quality materials for language development especially if the second language is a minority language. Despite these difficulties, immersion education offers significant educational benefits to children and job satisfaction to adults working in the
environment (Hickey & de Mejia, 2014, p.141). In analysing my results I will use Hickey & de Mejia’s research to analyse the results on the teachers’ thoughts of an introduction and their thoughts on positive and negative aspects of English in nursery schools.

4.7 Summary of theory and previous research
The English languages status has increased in Sweden but officially it is still seen as a foreign language and therefore has not been seen as relevant for the curriculum for nursery schools. However due to the increased use of English in society and growth of the internet children are becoming naturally interested in and curious of it. It is therefore relevant to discuss how the official view on the status and position in nursery schools relates to the teachers’ views. Although introducing English cannot be claimed to result in bilingualism Hyltenstam’s research on the Critical period hypothesis suggests it may be more likely if children are introduced to it earlier. How bilingualism occurs, the effects it may have and the teacher’s experiences of this are likely to affect their opinions and by presenting this information I can relate the teachers’ opinions both positive and negative to scientific research.

The Critical period hypothesis is relevant to whether an introduction of English to nursery schools is desirable. By presenting information to the teachers, both for and against an early introduction to the English language based on this theory, the aim is to gain more indepth answers as to what place the teachers feel English has in nursery schools. The sociocultural theory on learning and the proximal zone of development should help to highlight how the teachers believe language development and learning occurs. The information I have presented on Language immersion education explains how second language learning can be organised and the effects it may have. This information will also be used to analyse the teachers’ thoughts on an introduction of English in nursery schools and whether they see any benefits or hindrances.

5 Method
I have chosen to use a semi-structured qualitative interview method I have pre-written questions regarding the information I am seeking but will allow the interviewees to develop their answers and give information on their individual experiences. To answer the questions presented I have chosen to interview four nursery school teachers. Bell (2006, s.158) writes that an interview gives an opportunity to delve deeper into answers and that tone and body
language can give information that could not be gained through a written answer. An interview gives the possibility to analyse meaning in these teachers’ answers and give information on their experiences and thoughts around the subject it also gives the possibility to reinterpret information (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014, p.17 and 32). Kvale & Brinkman (2014, p.19) describe qualitative semi-structured interviews as a method where the aim is to establish what the interviewees descriptions of their experiences are in order to interpret the meaning of the subject of interest. Most of the focus will be on the teacher’s experiences and thoughts around whether English has a place in nursery schools, to what degree and what experiences they are basing these opinions on and will help me analyse the interviews and gain a deeper understanding of what these teachers opinions are and why. Kvale & Brinkman (2014, p. 43) points out that during a semi-structured interview it may sometimes be necessary to refocus the interviewee’s answer in order to gain clarity in the aspects that are of interest in the answer. I have considered this and written a variety of follow up questions in order to clarify what information is of interest if the interview should lose its focus or the interviewee is unsure how to answer.

When writing questions for the interview I used thematic ”what” questions and dynamic ”how” questions Kvale & Brinkman (2014, p.173) points out that the ”what” questions should relate to the theoretical aspects of the study in this case children’s language development and second language acquisition to gain an understanding of how much they know in this area. The ”how” questions aim to stimulate the flow of the conversation and focus more on the interviewee’s own experiences and thoughts. I have also written my questions based upon the aims and purpose of my study as suggested by Kvale & Brinkman (2014, p.174), for example ”Can you tell me about your experiences with the English language and what you feel is its place in nursery schools?”

5.1 Interviewee selection
I have chosen specifically nursery school teachers rather than nursery nurses as I seek answers based upon a pedagogical view that the nursery school is a place of learning, which I believe is more likely to be true if they have gained a degree in teaching. I have chosen four teachers that work at three different nursery schools in the middle of Sweden. The interviewees are people I have previously met and have had contact with on several occasions. I specifically chose teachers I knew in order to have a relaxed interview where the teachers felt at ease to share their thoughts and produce more in-depth answers. Kvale & Brinkman (2014, p.207)
writes that an ideal interviewee is knowledgeable, honest and motivated, which I believe these teachers are. The teachers are aware that English is my mother tongue and that I am bilingual which I am aware may affect the results. Two of the interviewees requested the questions in advance and were given the main questions and some information from my research as a guide to what we would be discussing (see appendix 1) and this information was given to the other interviewees orally during the interview.

**Teacher 1** has been working as a nursery school teacher for 24 years and completed a teaching degree in 1991. She currently works at a municipal nursery school, has worked there for 6 years and is currently working with 24 children aged 5-6.

**Teacher 2** has been working as a nursery teacher for 10 months and completed a teaching degree in January 2015. She currently works at a municipal nursery school and has worked there for three years doing supply work whilst studying. She is currently working with 11 children aged 1-3.

**Teacher 3** has been working as a nursery teacher for 23 years and completed a teaching degree in 1992. She currently works at a municipal nursery school, has worked there for two years and is currently working with 15 children aged 1-3.

**Teacher 4** has been working as a nursery teacher for 10 years (and prior to this as a school teacher) and completed a teaching degree in 2003. She is currently working at a private nursery school, has worked there for 3 months and is currently working with 18 children aged 5-6.

### 5.2 The interviews

I approached the majority of interviewees in person and informed them orally of my study and asked if they would be willing to be interviewed on the subject the English language’s place in nursery school. One teacher was asked via telephone. All four teachers were positive to the idea so dates, times and places were agreed upon.

I chose to record the interviews with my IPhone and also took notes on my IPad during the interview process in order to note certain facial expressions and body language. I was careful to show however that I was listening actively throughout the interviews, which Kvale & Brinkman (2014, p.180) writes is important in order to interpret the answers and encourage the interviewee to speak freely.
The interviews took place in a small room in the interviewee’s workplace in three cases and in
a teacher’s home in one case as per their request. The interviews were given in Swedish in
order to give as much in-depth information as possible as it was in all cases the mother tongue
of the teachers chosen. In order to present this study in English I have translated the
interviewees answers but I am aware of the risks of things being lost in translation and will
aim to prevent this occurring and present original citations in footnotes.

According to Kvale & Brinkman (2014, p.170) the first minutes of an interview affect
whether the interviewee feels able to open up and speak freely. By listening attentively to any
concerns and informing the interviewee of the purpose of the interview, form of recording and
such like I aimed to create a comfortable tone that allowed for a relaxed interview. I also
began the interview with some background questions in order to ease into the interview
process and give information on the teacher’s current work situation and background.

After each interview I immediately listened to the interview recording and wrote notes to give
an overview of what had been said in order to help in the transcription process later. I have
transcribed in protocol form the parts of the interviews that are relevant to the results. After
having done all the interviews I searched for common themes and contradictions in the
information in my notes and transcriptions I did this by marking repeating keywords and
phrases in order to categorise the results as a whole. I then analysed the results based upon the
theories and research presented earlier.

The interviews took between approximately ten and thirty minutes on two separate days.

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During the process the interviewees sometimes gave information that I was later going to ask
but I focused on getting the information as it was presented rather than asking a question that
had already been answered to. This reflects the style of a semi-structured interview. I
encouraged the interviewees to expand their answers and give as much information as
possible by following up answers with questions such as: can you expand on that? How did you act on that? Could you tell me your reasons for thinking that?

5.3 Reliability and validity
An interview’s reliability can be questionable as answers can be interpreted differently and the information given can vary depending on how the questions are asked, who is asking them and who is answering them (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014, p. 225-226). As this study is small and the results analysed only by one person I cannot be sure that the results would be the same should the same study be done by someone else. A person cannot be completely objective however I have aimed not to let my own opinions affect this study while interviewing and interpreting the results. Bias can be hard to avoid due to the fact that the interviewees have prior knowledge of my situation and this may have affected their answers and therefore the results. An interview’s validity can be even more difficult to establish, as the spoken word can be transcribed in many different ways and the meaning interpreted in different ways (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014, p. 227). Validity according to Kvale & Brinkman (2014, p.296) is often defined as something that can be measured and that the method used is able to produce results that were relevant to the aims and purpose of the study. The questions I have presented were designed to meet this requirement and the results analysed to answer the study’s questions based upon previous research. In order to strengthen the validity of the study I have stated which teacher each citation is from, included citations from all teachers and included a table with the interviews’ lengths so I can show that all interviews have contributed to the results and to what degree.

5.4 Ethics
In scientific studies there are research ethics published by Vetenskapsrådet (Hermerén 2011) these speak of the participants’ rights in the study. There are four main demands:

Information-Participants must be informed of their role in the study and the purpose of the study. I informed the interviewees of the study’s aims and purpose and how the information would be stored both orally and in writing (see Appendix 2).

Consent-Participants must consent to take part and should be informed of their right to retract this at any point. The interviewees gave written consent (see Appendix 2) to partake in the study and were informed that they could retract their consent at any point throughout the process.
Confidentiality - Participants must be offered confidentiality and the study should be written so they are unidentifiable. I informed the interviewees that their participation would be confidential and their identities would be protected by using numbers instead of their names i.e. Teacher 1.

Use of results - The material must only be used for this study. I orally informed the interviewees that the information given would only be used for this study and all recordings would be destroyed upon completion.

6 Results

Here I present the results in different areas relating to the purpose and aims of the study. I begin with the teachers’ various backgrounds, experiences and feelings towards the English language as a whole both professionally and personally in order to gain an understanding of their opinions of whether English is useful for them. I continue with presenting the results on the teachers’ thoughts about the English language’s place in nursery schools. I then focus on their opinions regarding positive and negative aspects of introducing English at a young age. Finally the results regarding what their previous experiences with children’s interest in English in nursery schools are and how they have dealt with it are presented.

6.1 Experiences and feelings towards the English language

The question of whether these teachers see English as a useful language is relevant in order to understand their opinions on whether the English language has a place in nursery schools in Sweden. All the teachers used English to some degree in their everyday lives and generally expressed a wish to improve their spoken English skills and become more comfortable and natural when speaking English. This question was asked first in order to give them “Food for thought” as to what role English plays in their lives based on how their answers developed it appeared they had not reflected on this previously. I will present the results of the teacher’s experiences first and follow with their feelings towards the English language.

The background of these teachers varied as did the groups they work in, Teacher 1 works in a group of 24 children aged 4-5 with one bilingual child in the group that spoke Swedish and Arabic. Teacher 2 works in a group with 12 children aged 1-2 with three bilingual children in the group the other languages are: Finnish, Lithuanian and English. Teacher 3 works in a
group with 15 children aged 1-3 and none of them are bilingual. Teacher 4 works in a group with 18 children aged 4-5 and several of the children are bilingual but as she was new she was uncertain of the exact number. Polish, English and Spanish were second languages. In all cases but one the bilingual children had at least one parent of a foreign descent. In the case of the bilingual child that spoke English in Teacher 4’s group the parents were both Swedish but had chosen to raise their child bilingually regardless, for reasons unknown to the teacher.

I asked the teachers about their personal experiences with the English language and to what degree they used it in their everyday life in order to gain understanding of how useful they viewed the English language and in what ways they found it useful. All of the teachers cited television and media as a common usage of English but mainly as a language read and listened to rather than spoken and they also seemed to underestimate how much they used English as the following quote from Teacher 1 demonstrates:

Yes you should speak English more than you do really... no, no I don’t use
English much I don’t.../... in school with... I have my boys and English homework
and in that way, that’s what you do.../...but I can ignore the subtitles and just
hear what they are saying. (In a film or on television).¹

At first the teacher implies that she doesn’t use much English in her everyday life and then continues by adding a variety of uses she has for English. After thinking all the teachers came up with several situations where they used English and also situations where they would have use for a larger vocabulary, better understanding and more skill in speaking English. Teacher 2 was passionate about how much she wishes she was better at English as cited below:

Yes, God yes! I would like to be much better and I believe you can be, I mean it’s not negative to start it earlier I don’t think so, it would have just have had a positive effect on me because in primary school I didn’t think it was much fun it was later when it got higher...to just sit and say words was just... it wasn’t fun²

¹"Ja man ska ju använda engelskan mer, mer än vad man gör egentligen... men nej, nej jag använder inte så mycket engelska det gör jag inte.../...i skolan... med... jag har mina pojkar och engelska läxor och på så sätt det är det man gör.../...men jag kan låta bli att titta på texten och så kan jag bara höra vad de säger..." Teacher 1

²"Ja gud ja! jag skulle vilja vara mycket bättre och det tror jag att man kan bli alltså det är inget negativt att börjar med det tidigare det tycker jag inte det skulle nog bara gjort mig positivt ... för från grundskolan då tyckte
Here she informs me that she found just learning words at age seven boring, saying that learning new words was something she viewed as an activity for much younger children and that she wished she had got that stage completed earlier. She believed it would have allowed her to enjoy learning the language and given a use for the language straight away instead of it not being fun until much later. Just knowing words without any grammar to bind it meant it was not useful until later when grammar was introduced.

When asked about how they used the English language the majority of the teachers expressed feelings of both discomfort and enjoyment in speaking English. Teacher 2 mentioned a situation when a family that didn’t speak Swedish joined the nursery ”when we have just had someone that speaks English that we had to visit at home everybody became really nervous”.

Here focus is placed on negative feelings but she also was referring largely to the feelings of her colleagues. When I asked about her English skills she was confident as expressed here: ”But I can! More than I think but I don’t speak it that often so it doesn’t develop other than when I am abroad but then I get into it fairly quickly.”

Teacher 1 who also had experienced a similar situation stated that they used English for a year and it got a lot easier and became fun:

If I spoke more English I would feel more comfortable with English than people do. A few years ago we had some parents that didn’t speak Swedish and then we had to talk, talk English for a whole year, and the more we... the more comfortable we got and then we got over this threshold, like oh God how do I explain this and what’s this called? We google and I asked you what things were, but it got more comfortable and it wasn’t as hard to talk and I thought it was a bit fun too.

jag inte att det var så kul det var mer upp på lite högre... att sitta och rabbla de här glosorna det vart inte... det var inte kul”. Teacher 2

3”När vi har bara haft en som pratar engelska som vi skulle hem till då blev alla jättenervösa för att man inte... man känner att man inte kan” teacher 2

4 “Men Ja jag kan! Mer än vad man tror det blir att man inte pratar so ofta då blir det att man inte att det inte hängs på förutom när man är utomlands då och då kommer man in i det ganska snabbt. Teacher 2

5 “Skulle jag prata mer engelska så skulle jag känna mig bekvämare med engelskan än vad man gör för några år sedan så hade vi föräldrar som inte pratade svenska och då fick vi prata, prata engelska i ett helt år och ju mer man kom ju mer bekvämare vart man och sen så kom man över den här tröskeln att åh gud hur ska jag förklara
Here Teacher 2 expressed that she believed that speaking English more frequently would make it easier and more natural. Her experience when she and her colleagues had been required to speak English to parents that didn’t understand Swedish had resulted in English becoming easier to communicate with the longer they progressed. She added that she also developed her language skills and started to enjoy speaking English. These two teachers spoke of their own and colleagues, discomfort when forced to speak English but also saw it as a temporary phase that could be passed if they continued to speak English often.

6.2 What teachers think about an introduction of the English language in nursery schools.
Here I present the results of the teachers’ thoughts on the English language’s place in nursery school. I asked what role they thought the English language had in nursery schools and the teachers responded with thoughts on its place today which I have presented first. I then will inform the reader what the teachers’ views on the role English could have in the future, describe the ways they imagine it could be implemented and the teachers’ thoughts on the feasibility of these ways.

I asked Teacher 1 what place she thought the English language had in nursery school and she told me the following:

>We haven't had English so much in nursery school because it isn't part of our job to do it but if we have noticed...//...that if a child is interested in English, We notice if the children say “I can count in English, and yes of course can we hear, or I know what this is called, of course can you tell us and then they are allowed to. But English... sometimes we have sung a song if someone knows one from home but we haven't generally worked with English as it's not part of the curriculum.6

och vad heter det här? Vi googlade och jag frågade dig vad saker var och det var inte så svårt och jag tyckte det var lite kul också

6"Vi har inte haft engelska så mycket i förskolan för det är inte i vårt uppdrag att göra det men vi har märkt...//...att om ett barn är intresserad av engelska man märker om barnen säger jag kan räkna på engelska, och visst självklart får vi höra, jag vet vad det här heter och visst kan du berätta och då får de ju göra det men engelskan
Here Teacher 1 stated that as it is not a part of the job of a nursery teacher, they occasionally however have noticed the children showing an interest in the English language and have acknowledged it. However, it is entirely dependent on the children showing an interest and whether the teachers choose to act upon that. As it is not a part of the curriculum it is not something the teachers instigate. Teacher 4 supported this and added her reasons:

\[
\text{It doesn't have an obvious place in nursery schools because in my opinion and from what I have experienced Swedish is most important as a language especially if you have children of other descents then it's even more important that they start with Swedish...//...to get that foundation...//...because they spend so much time at nursery school and we must talk to them lots so we really use our mother tongue and they gain competence in Swedish because that has got worse in recent years we don't have time to read as much as we used to for example and the groups are larger...//...everything else takes so much time.}\text{7}
\]

Here Teacher 4 discusses the aspect of time as a reason that English hasn’t got an obvious place in nursery schools and that it is a subject that is not prioritised. The teachers discussed the fact that the curriculum already has a lot in it that takes time from language development in general. Time for conversations and reading is decreasing due to the amount of children that are in the group and therefore teaching Swedish is more important, even more so in families of other descents. Here it was viewed that focus should be on learning Swedish however whether learning English as well would impact on this negatively was something they were unsure of. Also the problem of meeting so many children’s interests was approached the teachers believed that in a large group with a vast variety of interests it may not be possible to work with all the interests.

\[
\text{någon gång har man sjungit någon sång om någon kan hemifrån men vi har inte jobbat generellt med engelska i och med att det inte är vårt uppdrag” teacher 1}
\]

\[
\text{7”Engelskan har inte en självläget plats i förskolan för enligt eget tycke och hur jag har upplevt i yrket så är svenskan viktigast så, som språk att speciellt om man har barn av andra härkomst så är det ännu viktigare att de börjar med svenskan eller vad man ska säga, för att få den grunden...//...för att de spendera så mycket tid i förskolan och vi måste prata med de så mycket så att vi verkligen använder vårt hemspråk så att de få med sig .svenska kunskaper för det har blivit lite sämre med det på sista åren vi hinner inte läsa så mycket som vi gjorde förr och så där och barngrupperna blir större...//...tid att göra annat tar mycket plats.” Teacher 4}
\]
The majority of teachers discussed that although they did not see that English had a large role in nurseries today it could easily have a larger part if English was a fun natural part of the day and at a basic level that was comfortable and not forced. In this way it would be achievable. Teacher 4 spoke of children’s current use of English as an advantage, stating the following:

*I don’t really see any hindrances to their starting earlier because this thing with curiosity and they are receptive to everything in principle that we bring up, it can be a playful type of learning and they already have it in them, they already use some words like My little pony names like Rainbow Dash...//...it’s natural for them.*

Here Teacher 4 brings up the fun in learning as a factor as to why it could be easy to introduce and the fact that children today already use some English as a natural part of life. Teacher 1 supported this by saying:

*Yes English is a large part of school...//... the earlier you start with children the earlier they take it in and like you say with meeting goals and everything if you come in and don’t know anything and then are bombarded with it, I think that the earlier you take it in the easier it is and you play with words and everything and that’s where you start with different words and then maybe the meaning comes later but then it familiar in some way.*

Here she discusses that by introducing words they could be making future learning easier and more fun even if they don’t initially understand the meaning of the words it exposes them to the language and that alone could be useful. Including English words into daily activities in a

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8 "Egentligen ser inte jag något hinder i att börjar tidigare för att det här med nyfikenhet och de är mottagliga för allt vi tar upp med dem i princip de kan bli ett lekfullt lärande och att de redan har det i sig de använder en del ord som de här My Little Pony namn Rainbow Dash...//...det är naturligt för dem.” Teacher 4

9 "Ja engelska är en stor del av skolan...//...ju tidigare man börjar med barn ju tidigare man tar till sig och som du säger med måluppfyllnad och allihopa än om man ska komma och inte kan någonting och så ska man bombas in så tror jag att, ju tidigare du får in det ju lättare har du och man leka med ord och allihopa och det är där man börjar med olika ord sedan kanske orden kommer till mening längre fram men den är då bekant på något sätt.” Teacher 1
natural manner by simply saying English words or borrowing English books and including English media were suggested as ways of introducing English.

Teacher 3 brought up her thoughts on the importance of the teacher’s feelings by saying:

\begin{quote}
It should feel natural for the teachers too because if the teachers think it’s difficult it will rub off on the children, then it’s really good to google and learn the song the children are interested in then it gets easier.\end{quote} \textsuperscript{10}

Here she states that it is not just it being natural for the children that is important but for the teachers as well. Her suggestion that the teachers learn the songs the children are interested in was to enable the teachers to encourage the children’s interest in English without risking them picking up on any potential discomfort from them.

Teachers 1 and 4 discussed an addition of English to the curriculum for nursery schools and said that it should not include an added demand in the curriculum or on the teacher’s workload and that it should not take time away from other activities. The subject of if English were to become a part of the curriculum was often mentioned with doubt from these two teachers. It was believed that it would involve teachers having to retrain and for it to become a part of the nursery school teaching program, in order to be able to integrate it. Even if it was introduced locally at a nursery school it would be vital that everyone was cooperative. The teachers viewed however that a discussion of how to introduce English in the nursery school would cause feelings of inadequacy and be too difficult for many teachers who cannot speak English and do not want to learn. Teacher 1 here discussed a local addition of English in a nursery school:

\begin{quote}
Yeah sure one word a month and in English, in that easy a kind of way, but then it relies on everybody being on-board participating and agreeing that it’s like there has been a discussion and everyone is in agreement.\end{quote}\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} Det ska vara naturligt för pedagogerna också för tycker pedagogerna att det är besvärligt och jobbigt så smittar det av sig på barnen då är det jättebra att gå in på Google och lära sig den sången barnen är intresserad av då bli det lättare” teacher 3

\textsuperscript{11} Ja visst ett ord i månaden och på engelska, på ett så lätt sätt men då gäller det att alla på förskolan ska vara med och är delaktiga och tycker att det är liksom, det har varit en diskussion att alla är med.”
She then compares this to an introduction of English to the curriculum:

*If we are going to start with English in nursery school then we need a new curriculum and we need to go back to school...//...if it’s going to be a part of the curriculum it has to start there ...//...if it comes as a demand then it will be super difficult.¹²*

She believed that if a decision was made locally to introduce English at a nursery school it could be done if everyone was in agreement but as a demand in the curriculum it would be harder to implement as training would have to be given.

She then contradicts this by saying that in order for English to be introduced into nursery schools in Sweden it would have to become a part of the curriculum and that all staff would need to be given more training. It seems that in order for teachers to actively introduce English into nursery schools, Teacher 1 believed it needed to be part of the curriculum but also that by making it so official it would cause problems and essentially make it very difficult. She also appeared to believe that a discussion to introduce it locally would not be successful. However it was to become a part of the curriculum that if everyone was forced to implement it, it would be necessary for more training to be given to the teachers to enable them to do it properly and this then would most likely not be viewed as positive this was expressed in words, body language and tone.

The idea of English as a part of nursery schools was generally met positively. I am aware however that this positive view may be a bias due to the fact that they know that English is my mother tongue. The idea that English could be introduced in a fun way by simply including English words in everyday activities, games and mealtimes was seen as achievable by all teachers including Teacher 1 who on a personal level would be happy to choose to encourage children’s English language development but saw problems for others. This

¹² Ska man börja med engelska i förskolan då krävs en hel ny läroplan det krävs att vi får gå i skolbänken igen...//... då ska det börja i förskollärarutbildning...//... om det ska bli en del i läroplanen så ska det börjar där...//... kommer det som ett krav då blir det superjobbigt” Teacher 1
positive view however was only on the condition that it was fun and a natural part of everyday life. It appeared that all these teachers were comfortable with using English on a basic level but that they believed that this was not necessarily the case for many other teachers.

A local or national demand to include English in nursery school education was seen as a problem for Teachers 1 and 4 despite Teacher 1 seeing an introduction to the curriculum as a necessity for teachers to choose to teach it.

Teachers 2 and 3 however disagreed a simple addition to the language section of the curriculum to include a development of English was Teacher 3’s suggestion. She implied that it didn’t mean it had to be that difficult as teachers would still be able to choose to what degree and how they included it as with all the other areas of learning. As long as some training was offered in a fun manner the teachers could enjoy it and learn from it as much as the children. Teacher 2 thought it was odd that it was not already a part of the curriculum as it is an important subject later in life.

6.3 Positive aspects of introducing English in nursery schools
In this section I will present the results of the teachers’ beliefs on the positive effects of introducing English to nursery schools. When asked about their opinions on whether introducing English earlier would be beneficial to children or be pointless due to their stage of cognitive development, all the teachers stated disbelief at the idea that children at nursery school age would learn slower than school aged children and that it would not be beneficial to them to introduce it at nursery school age. Teacher 3 said the following:

I think they learn now, when they are this little they learn to sing in English it’s probably better the earlier you learn.../... I think children before age seven find it easier to learn new things.13

Here she has a firm belief that earlier is better and has even during her experience come to the conclusion that a critical period of before age seven exists she was however unsure of why she thought this.

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13 Jag tror de lär sig nu när de är så här små de lär sig sjunga på engelska det är nog bättre ju tidigare man lär sig.../... Jag tror att barn före sjuårsänder har lättare att lära sig nya saker. Teacher 3
Teacher 2 agreed with this and she thought it was both easy for teachers and beneficial to the children to start in nursery school and expressed this by saying:

*I think it will go faster, I mean that you can, It’s no problem throwing in a few words, You can see that they keep up when they listen, they hear something different so they get interested, What’s that?...//... they mimic so much when they are little and I think it sticks.*

Teacher 4 commented on the potential gain from an earlier education in English, she said:

*The foundation is laid earlier, they get further in their language development I believe in that, if they start earlier they will get farther they are exposed to it during a longer period and then they will get a bit further even if they don’t go on to further education.*

She believed that starting English even younger would only improve children’s language skills as did the other teachers. She also believed that if children started learning English in nursery school they would most likely find it easier and reach a higher level without having to go to any extra academic effort.

The teachers were all in agreement that language development is achieved socially through mimicking others and listening and interacting with other people. They viewed the nursery school as a sociocultural place of learning and as such was an excellent environment for language development to occur, Teacher 4 said:

*Languages are fun they are interested, they want to know about the world and widen their perspectives at this age...//...I believe in starting early and it is a good*

14 "Jag tänker att det går fortare, alltså att man kan, det gör väl inget att slänga in några ord, man ser att de hänger på när de lyssnar när de hör någonting annat så blir de intresserad, vad är det för någonting?...//... de härmar så mycket när de är små då tror jag det kan sitta. Teacher 2

15 "Grunden läggs tidigare att de hinner längre i sin språkutveckling jag tro nog på det börjar man tidigare så kommer man längre, man utsätts för det under en längre period och då kommer man en liten bit till även om man inte pluggar vidare.
idea based upon how internationalised the world is today, we need to know English well because we travel so much...//...we always talk to the children whatever we are doing...//...it’s important for them to be seen, whether we speak English instead of Swedish sometimes doesn’t need to matter that we talk to them is the important bit!16

Here she discusses the need to know English well in today’s society and that starting English early is beneficial to that. She also discusses the social needs children have and the fact that this can be combined without causing extra work for the teacher.

Another positive aspect that was brought up was the teacher’s language development, Teacher 3 said ”it would be good for the teachers to learn new words too”17. The other teachers also agreed that if English was introduced in a manner that did not add to the work load and adequate training in a fun manner was offered it would also be beneficial to the teachers in their own language development and their everyday lives as they would become more comfortable with speaking English. The teachers all agreed that in learning a new language, motivation is vital and that children would be more motivated and interested in learning English at nursery school age. Teacher 4 said that:

Children are receptive to most things, curious and children can learn though playing...//...it doesn’t have to be so advanced. It can be done like a game with English and their interest can be captured early18

She believed in the advantages of the playful setting of the nursery as a positive element to children’s learning and the other teachers believed that this could also result in the children learning more quickly and being more open to learning English. The way adults and children

16 ”Det är kul med språk de är intresserade, de vill veta om världen och sådär de vigda sina perspektiv i den här åldern...//...jag tror på att börja tidigt enligt eget tycke och det är bra med tanke på hur internationaliserad världen är idag vi behöver kunna engelska väl för att vi rör oss så mycket...//...vi pratar alltid med barnen vad vi än gör...//...det är viktigt att barnen bli sedda sen att man pratar engelska med de istället för svenska ibland det kanske inte behöver betyda så mycket.” Teacher 4

17 ”Det är bra för personalen att lära sig nya ord också” Teacher 3

18 ”Barnen är mottagliga för det mesta nyfikenhet att det är barn de kan leka in lärandet...//... det behöver inte vara så avancerat utan kan göra det som en lek med engelska man fängar ett intresse tidigt för det här språket samtidigt som det finns runtomkring de hela tiden.” Teacher 4
feel about learning and speaking a new language is also different, whereas adults often find it uncomfortable and embarrassing to make mistakes. Teacher 3 said “children aren’t as self-conscious”\(^{19}\). She believed that as the children at this age have yet to become self-conscious so problems which occur when children are older such as not wanting to look stupid if they get a word wrong, can be avoided.

The use of English as an interpretative language was also discussed. Teacher 4 described this as a language that both parties could communicate in together but that was not a mother tongue for either party. In many cases English is the common language between non-Swedes and Swedes. Teacher 4 spoke of a situation where they used English as an interpretative language and she said that:

\[I've	ext{ }written	ext{ }that	ext{ }it's	ext{ }an	ext{ }advantage	ext{ }for	ext{ }multicultural	ext{ }children	ext{ }because	ext{ }we	ext{ }have\]
\[noticed	ext{ }that	ext{ }it	ext{ }can	ext{ }be	ext{ }used	ext{ }as	ext{ }an	ext{ }interpreter	ext{ }language	ext{ }between	ext{ }parents	ext{ }and	ext{ }staff\]
\[and	ext{ }the	ext{ }children	ext{ }partly	ext{ }that	ext{ }the	ext{ }adults	ext{ }can	ext{ }speak	ext{ }to	ext{ }each	ext{ }other	ext{ }in	ext{ }English	ext{ }and\]
\[partly	ext{ }that	ext{ }the	ext{ }children	ext{ }could	ext{ }then	ext{ }understand	ext{ }what	ext{ }we	ext{ }are	ext{ }talking	ext{ }about	ext{ }if	ext{ }they\]
\[understand	ext{ }English...//...we	ext{ }have	ext{ }also	ext{ }noticed	ext{ }that	ext{ }multicultural	ext{ }children	ext{ }often\]
\[bring	ext{ }English	ext{ }with	ext{ }them	ext{ }more	ext{ }naturally	ext{ }because	ext{ }they	ext{ }have	ext{ }used	ext{ }it...//...then	ext{ }it's	ext{ }an\]
\[advantage	ext{ }to	ext{ }have	ext{ }English	ext{ }at	ext{ }nursery	ext{ }school.\text{ }^{20}\]

Here she puts emphasis on the positive aspects of English. For multicultural families it is often the common language and therefore is often used in nursery schools with families of other descents. In such cases it is hard to involve the children in a conversation about them, and she believes that an introduction to English in nursery schools would improve this. With children that speak another mother tongue than Swedish it was also believed that an introduction of English may help them feel more included and encourage them to use their own mother tongue more and therefore lead to a positive development in their first language.

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\(^{19}\) “De är inte så självkritiska, barn” Teacher 3

\(^{20}\) ”Fördel för mångkulturella barn har jag skrivit för att vi har märkt att det kan användas som ett tolkspråk mellan pedagogerna och föräldern och barnen dels att de vuxna på förskolan kan prata med varandra på engelska och dels att barnen kan då förstå vad vi pratar om de kan engelskan ...//...vi har också märkt att mångkulturella barn ofta ha engelska med sig lite mer naturligt att de har använt det, det är en fördel då med engelska.” teacher 4
6.4 Negative aspects of introducing English to nursery schools.

Here I will present the teachers’ thoughts on negative aspects of an introduction to English in nursery schools. I will begin with negative aspects regarding the children and continue with negative aspects and hindrances they see in introducing English.

Teachers 2 and 3 saw no negative aspects regarding the children’s development. However Teachers 1 and 4 discussed what effect it would have on the children’s development, Teacher 4 said that:

*They need to gain Swedish knowledge it depends on if a lot of English is introduced, they need to catch up with Swedish because they don’t have that foundation with them from early in life if they have come to Sweden a bit later...//... the Swedish Language might suffer and their vocabulary might be smaller, maybe what do I know?*

She believed that if children of another descent were developing Swedish as a second language it was possible that adding English may slow down their progress in Swedish. However she was unsure as to whether this was the case but was something she felt would need to be considered.

The main negative aspect discussed by all teachers was the fact that many teachers would find it difficult to introduce English as their own skills were limited or possibly even non-existent. They thought that some teachers would not want to introduce it or it would be very basic and therefore not very educational for the children.

Teacher 1 compared English with for example singing that can also be uncomfortable for some teachers, she said:

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21 “De behöver få mycket svenska med sig, i...//...det beror på om det blir mycket engelska...//...de behöver komma ifatt med svenskan eftersom de inte har med sig det från deras grund tidigt i livet om de har kommit till Sverige lite senare...//...svenska språket kan bli lidande med ett sämre ordförråd kanske vad vet jag?” teacher 4
You can have colleagues that aren’t comfortable with this, that think things like this are really hard, to need to do and work with, they can’t speak English either not everyone can no matter how old they are and then it is really difficult to put it simply...//... English is more special than everything else, it is a whole different language, what if you can’t even...//... then it could almost be a conflict.22

Here she expresses concern that a teacher’s lack of knowledge could cause conflict in the workplace. I asked if teachers that felt uncomfortable could avoid speaking English and leave it to those more competent in a way that a teacher who is not comfortable singing might avoid song time. She did not believe that it would work and that it could not be compared as everyone can sing but not everyone can speak English. It would not be a choice, but rather something they were not able to do due to a lack of knowledge and that would be negative for the teacher.

6.5 Children’s interests and teachers’ reactions
Teachers 1, 3 and 4 that had been working many years commented that they saw a major difference in how much interest the children showed in the English language today, Teacher 3 said:

There is more English now than 5-10 years ago, children learn a lot of English though their IPad and TV programmes, they sing songs for example in English, they sing the finger family. I try to learn the songs the children know so I can sing with them.23

This was believed to be due to the increased amount of English in media in Sweden and the growth of the internet and how it is used by children and the development of IPad and similar products. She reacted by learning the songs the children were interested in to be able to join in.

22 ”Man kan ha kollegor som inte är bekväma med det här som tycker sådant här är jättejobbigt att behöver liksom göra och jobba med, man kan inte engelska heller, alla kan inte det oavsett ålder och då blir det jättesvårt helt enkelt...//...engelska är lite mer speciellt än allt annat det är ett helt annat språk tänk om man inte kan ens...//...då bli det nästan konflikt” Teacher 1

23 ”Det är mer engelska nu än 5-10 år barnen lär sig mycket engelska genom sina Ipads och tv program de sjunger sånger t.ex. på engelska den här ”finger family” sjunger de jag försöker lära mig sångerna som barnen kan så jag kan sjunger med dem” Teacher 3
All the teachers had seen children demonstrating an interest in the English language and they all believed that most influences in the English language come from media. The film Frozen was mentioned by Teacher 2 as a source for both songs and the English language. Teacher 3 had also seen children using English words whilst playing role-play games such as Spiderman where the word *Spiderman* appeared to be more popular than the Swedish word *Spindelmannen*. Children’s experiences with other songs from YouTube and television programmes were also frequently seen in nursery.

Teacher 3 had seen children showing an interest on various occasions and spoke generally of their response:

*If a child is interested in English, we notice if the children say I can count in English, and yes of course can we hear? Or I know what this is called of course can you tell us? And then they are allowed to. But English... sometimes we have sung a song if someone knows one from home but we haven’t generally worked with English as it’s not part of the curriculum.*

Here she discusses that they have acknowledged the interest and allowed the child to share their knowledge but as it is not included in the curriculum they have not sought to include it other than in the fleeting moments a child has shown interest in English.

Teacher 4 seemed to have noticed the children showing an interest in English very often during play, at mealtimes and by an explicit wish to listen to English music. She commented that:

*The children use the English names for the horses (My Little Ponies) and I don’t really react to the fact that they use it but I often try to translate the words to Swedish both for myself and the children. We have one child that also, I don’t think the parents are English but I think the dad works abroad a lot so they speak*
English with him at home...//...it’s interesting because he uses English swear words at the dining table the others don’t know what it means but I do and it sets me off and I explain that we don’t say that and sometimes I respond in English sometimes in Swedish.  

Here she reflects on the fact that she sees English being used but doesn’t always react and when she does she attempts to translate the names into Swedish such as Rainbow Dash. She appears to see a value in giving these words meaning for herself and the children, so they are not using words they don’t understand. She said this in connection with an English speaking child using swear words and how this has become a problem because the child has been provoking staff by using English and they are not sure how to deal with it. The other children don’t understand but she did and that was a problem. Teacher 2, who had the least experience commented on the fact that it can be hard to see an interest she said:

*It’s hard if you don’t have any earlier experience, to notice that they show an interest for it...//...I remember a child from last term that sang that farm song in English and Swedish...//...but you don’t think about it you probably need to have it in the back of your head all the time...//...we have started to count in English at song time...//...and they are interested and join in pointing.*

Because they had a child with English as a mother tongue she explained that in order to support her in her language development they were allowing English to have a larger part in nurseries day-to-day activities. This including counting and that the other children had shown an interest so it was becoming more for all the children rather than just for one child. She also

25 ”Barnen använder den Engelska benämningen på hästarna (My Little Ponies) det bli också att jag reagera inte egentligen det används men det blir att jag försöker översätta dem till svenska både för mig själv och barnet. Vi har ett barn som också jag tror inte föräldrarna är engelska men jag tror pappan är och jobbar utomlands mycket så de pratar engelska med honom hemma...//...det är intressant för han använder engelska svordomar och sådär vid matbordet de andra vet inte vad det betyder men jag vet så jag går igång på det och förklarar att det där säger man inte och ibland säger jag på svenska ibland på engelska.” Teacher 4

26 ”Det är svårt om man inte har någon erfarenhet sedan tidigare att komma på att de visar något intresse för det, de hör ju vad hon säger så då... jag vet inte ... det är nog de lite äldre...//... jag kommer ihåg en som förra terminen som sjung om den där farmen på svenska och engelska...//...men man tänker inte på det man måste nog ha det i bakhuvudet hela tiden. Vi har börjat räkna på engelska i samlingen...//...och de är intresserad och är med och pekar” Teacher 2
reflected that she had seen an interest for English last term as well but that generally in her group of young children she hadn’t noticed much interest but seemed to believe that this could be due to her lack of experience.
7 Discussion

In this section I discuss the results of the interviews in relation to the theory and previous research which I have presented earlier. Firstly I discuss the teachers’ experiences and thoughts about the English language and an introduction of English in nursery schools. Secondly the teachers’ answers on positive versus negative aspects of an introduction of English into nursery schools is discussed. I will then finish by discussing the teachers’ experiences with children’s interests and how they have reacted.

7.1 What teachers think about an introduction of the English language in nursery schools
Here I shall discuss the teachers’ thoughts in relation to the theory and previous research I presented. I will first focus on the teachers thoughts of the usefulness of the English language and continue to what they believe the English language’s place is in nursery schools today and finally analyse their thoughts on an introduction in nursery schools on a practical level.

The teachers’ answers regarding how useful the English language is were on first reflection limited but often expanded after thinking, implying that they don’t often reflect upon how much they use English, in which situations and how they use English. For example Teacher 1 said: "I don’t use it much...//...in school...//...homework...//...I can ignore the subtitles...” and "We had to talk English for a whole year..." Teacher 1 also said that she felt: "I should speak more English than I do”. This was supported by Teacher 2 who said: "Yes god yes I would like to be much better...". They both seemed to express that they believed that English was a subject that they were expected to have a certain level of understanding in why this was. The reasons for this were not discussed, however I imagine that as teachers they feel it is their job to lay the foundations of all learning and knowing that English is an important part of the children’s future that they currently are not stimulating consciously and they may feel a certain level of inadequacy. Sigurd & Håkansson’s (2007, p.157) statistics demonstrate that the status of the English language is high in Sweden and Hyltenstam (In Arnberg 2004, p.8) wrote that English is seen as the most useful modern language in today’s western society. It appeared that these teachers also saw English as something that was valued highly in society. The committee for the Swedish language also states that the status of the English language is high and the teacher’s statement reflects this (Kommittéen för svenska språket, 2002a, p.21).
The teachers viewed language learning as sociocultural (Lindö 2009, p.33). One way this was expressed was when Teacher 2 spoke of how the other children had become interested when they had increased the amount of English for a child with English as a mother tongue. She commented that: "they mimic so much at this age”. This indicates that the nursery school would be an optimal environment for English language development.

However Teacher 1 said that: "it has to be a part of the curriculum.../... it isn’t part of our job” this was supported by Teacher 4 who said: "it doesn’t have an obvious place in nursery schools” and "Swedish is most important”. These statements reflect the committee for the Swedish language’s document (Kommittéen för svenska språket, 2002a, p.70-72) where they state that education in nursery school should be primarily in Swedish and point out the importance of increasing the status of the Swedish language. Without being included in the curriculum it is not a must and if only some teachers start, it would be difficult to implement according to Teacher 1.

Teacher 3 brought up that she thought that the teachers needed to be comfortable in speaking English and that it would also be good for them to learn new words. Teacher 1 commented that after a year of using English she had become more comfortable in using English and had started to find it was fun. This was supported in literature where it is said that bilingual education facilities offer job satisfaction to adults (Hickey & de Meija, 2014, p.141).

7.2 Positive and negative aspects of introducing English in nursery schools
I will now present a discussion regarding the teachers’ thoughts on positive versus negative aspects of introducing English in nursery schools in connection to the theories presented earlier.

When I asked about what age a new language should be introduced all the teachers were in agreement that earlier is better. For example Teacher 2 said: "I think it will go faster” and Teacher 2 said: "I think they learn now when they are little”. Teacher 4 commented that: "If they start earlier they will get further”. These comments reflect the findings in the immersion education studies which saw improved results in children that had started learning a second language at nursery school age when compared to those who started at school age (Buyl & Housen, 2013, p.191). The critical period hypothesis is something the teachers believed in to some degree. Learning a second language was seen as possible at an older age but it was cited
as easier and more likely to lead to a higher level of the language if introduced earlier in agreement with the studies on adults who had learned English at various ages (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2010, p.44).

Teacher 4 pointed out that children at nursery school age are: ”receptive to most things, curious and children can learn though playing...”. This was reflected in Hickey & de Meija’s study (2014, p.132) where they commented that children at nursery school age are easily motivated and the setting allows for playful learning. Their study also commented on the fact that at this age children are yet to become self-conscious which Teacher 3 saw as a reason for introducing English in nursery school.

A concern that Swedish may be affected negatively in children that didn’t speak Swedish as a mother tongue was also discussed briefly when Teacher 4 said: ”the Swedish language might suffer and their vocabulary might be smaller, maybe what do I know?”. This was a wondering more than an actual belief. It is however partly confirmed as a possible concern in literature (Kommittéen för svenska språket p.71). However in other studies it has been shown that vocabulary in one language may be slightly smaller than that of a monolingual child but their vocabulary in both languages together would not be smaller (Arnberg 2004, p47).

Another negative aspect that the teachers brought up was that it would be difficult to motivate teachers if they couldn’t speak English, the problem of a shortage of highly educated teachers is also discussed in literature (Hickey & de Meija, 2014, p.141). This problem could be met with further education and by investigating the use of other methods of teaching for example using the many applications available digitally.

7.3 Children’s interests and teachers’ reactions
This section will provide an answer to the ways in which the teachers have seen children expressing an interest in the English language and how they have reacted or used it as part of the children’s education. It will also discuss how the children’s interest and the teachers’ reactions relate to the research presented earlier.

The teachers with longer experience commented on the increase in children’s interest in the English language and claimed that it was seen to be due to the children’s use of the internet
and media. Teacher 3 said that: “There is more English now than 5-10 years ago, children learn a lot of English though their IPad and TV programmes”, She had noticed the increase of children’s internet usage and access to IPad and similar that is reflected in the statistics (Findahl, 2010, p.10; Davidsson & Findahl, 2015, chapter 6, p.4). Teacher 1 believed that the internet was where children were mainly exposed to the English language and was the greatest source of their interest. Her choice to meet this interest by searching for the songs herself and learning them was to acknowledge the children’s interest and show them it could also be included in the nursery school and a way in which the teachers provide an environment for learning based on the children’s interests (Läroplanen för förskolan, 2010, p.12). However in order for it to provide a development in their interest, further scaffolding would be required (Lindö, 2009, p.33).

Teacher 4 commented on the children’s use of English for toys whilst playing. She said that: “they use the English names for the horses”. The teacher did not offer an explanation for why this is but in my experience children see a lot of advertisements on the internet in English so it is likely that the children have heard the English names more often than Swedish names. In addition to this the boxes also have the English names on them. Her choice to translate these word to give them meaning was educational for the children and may lead to a deeper understanding of the words they are using and broaden the use of the words. This action maybe a way of strengthening the Swedish languages status. This is seen to be important according to the committee for the Swedish language (Kommittéen för svenska språket, 2002a, p.21). It also a way of providing scaffolding towards a future development of the children’s understanding of the English language (Lindö, 2009, p.33).

Teacher 1 discussed some occasions she had seen the children showing an interest in the English language, she said: ”We notice if the children say “I can count in English”, and yes of course can we hear?” Here she states that the children on occasion wish to demonstrate what they know in English and that the teachers then ask to hear it. She also stated however that they do not expand on this as it is not part of the curriculum. Here she demonstrates an agreement with the committee for the Swedish language’s document that states that the nursery school education should primarily be in Swedish. (Kommittéen för svenska språket, 2002a, p.70). However it could be questioned that whilst doing this, the children’s interest in this area is not being met in accordance to the curriculum (Läroplan för förskolan, 2010, p.12).
In teacher 1’s case, an introduction of English had taken place before an interest had been expressed. She said: “we have started to count in English at song time.../...and they are interested and joining in pointing.” Here the introduction was for the benefit of a child with English as a mother tongue but as the other children had shown an interest they were included and joined in. Here she provided scaffolding (Lindö, 2009, p.33) for the children and was enabling a development in the children’s English language skills and including the children who were interested in the activity.

The ways in which the children had expressed an interest in the English language varied from using words in role-play to swearing in English and by actively seeking to take part in an activity where English was being used. The teachers had reacted in various ways by translating, listening, learning more and including it in activities. It appeared however that although these teachers discussed various ways they had seen children show an interest in the English language the teachers’ reactions had mainly been to acknowledge the interest rather than encouraging it and providing scaffolding for development (Lindö, 2009, p.33) with exception to Teacher 2’s statement. This may be due to the teachers’ own experiences with the English language as difficult and embarrassing and their belief that as English is not part of the curriculum it is not their job.

8 Final Reflections

Upon reflection all the teachers viewed that English had a place in society but its place in nursery schools was limited. They appeared to believe that they could work towards a development in the children’s English language skills fairly easily and with a low risk for detrimental effects on other areas of learning. They also expressed that they personally felt it would not have to be that difficult and was achievable. They saw many positive aspects to this idea based upon the positive outcomes for children, though they did see some negative aspects mainly based on the teachers’ knowledge and confidence in using the English language. It was unclear as to what level of English they believed was required to be able to teach it and depending on which age group was being taught this would vary. Whether more training in teaching English was required would no doubt vary depending on the individual teacher’s current level of knowledge. I also have reflected on what the teachers said about their own
development improving if they used English more. Speaking English to children is probably less difficult than to adults as feelings of inadequacy are less prominent, but given the fact that all the teachers believed that children learn faster I wonder if there is a fear that the children will quickly outlearn the teachers and they will not be able to provide scaffolding (Lindö, 2009, p.33) for the children if this occurs.

They had all had seen children showing an interest in the English language in free play, song time and other areas and had acknowledged, and in some cases worked toward, including it in the daily activities at nursery schools.

It was interesting to see that the teachers working in groups with children aged 1-3 appeared to be more positive to an introduction of English to nursery schools than the teacher working in groups with children aged 5. I wondered if this is due to what Teacher 4 said about skills in Swedish being worse now than in the past and this being less noticeable at a younger age. The fact that these groups also had more children in them may also limit the amount of time available for teaching, which was stated as a possible hindrance in introducing English.

Another area of education that does not have a clear place in the curriculum is ICT. In areas such as ICT it is common for one teacher per unit to train and then hold responsibility for teaching others and leading educational activities in that area. ICT is a subject that I have seen is similar to English as neither is formally expressed in the curriculum as something teachers have to do although it has become a large part of nursery schools regardless. There are however limited statistics on children’s use of English whereas statistics on children’s use of ICT are widespread which could explain this. The early studies on the critical period hypothesis may be the reason that language learning has been saved for school years as older children appeared to be quicker at learning a second language so introducing it earlier seemed to have no benefits. The fact that the committee for Swedish language had also expressed fears for the development of the Swedish language in foreign language and subject integrated teaching may be the reason it has not since then been introduced formally in the curriculum.

Effects on children’s cognitive development, intelligence and social development were not brought up by the teachers and therefore not discussed. This area could be interesting for future research.
References

Books


Chapter in book with editor


Articles


**Curriculum**


**Electronic resources**


Appendix 1

*Kan du berättar lite om dina upplevelser kring engelska språket och vad du anser är dess plats i dagens förskola.

*Kan du berätta lite om dina tankar om hur barn utvecklar sitt språk?

*En del forskare har diskuterat hur ålder påverkar inlärandet av ett andra språk, en del anser att om man börjar lär sig i en ung ålder kan man nå en högre slutnivå i ett nytt språk. Medan andra tycker att barns begränsade kognitiv förmåga i förskoleåldern saktar ner inlärandet och därför är det bättre att vänta till barnen är äldre.

*Kan du förklara hur du tänker och känner kring införandet av engelska i förskolan med syftet att barnen ska lättare tillägna sig engelska eller nå en högre nivå i engelska i framtiden?

*Vad är dina tankar om eventuella för och nackdelar med att introducera engelska i förskolan?

*Vilka erfarenheter har du av barns intresse för engelska (där engelska inte är ett modersmål) i förskolan?
Appendix 2

Till förskollärare

Medgivande till deltagande i en studie

Studien, som kommer att handla om engelskans plats i förskolan, kommer att utföras inom ramen för ett självständigt arbete. Studien utförs av Susan Tärngren som går sista terminen på förskollärarprogrammet, Institutionen för pedagogik, didaktik och utbildningsstudier vid Uppsala universitet.

Jag ger härmed mitt medgivande till att medverka i ovan nämnda studie.

Jag har tagit del av informationen om studien. Jag är införstådd med att Jag kommer att intervjus och att det ska inspelas och filen förvaras i en låst Iphone.

Jag vet att ingen obehörig får ta del av insamlade data, och att data förvaras på ett sådant sätt att deltagarna inte kan identifieras.

Jag har informerats om att ingen ekonomisk ersättning utgår samt att mitt medverkan är frivillig och när som helst kan avbrytas.

Förskollärarens namn: .................................................................

Adress: .................................................................

Telefon: .................................................................

.................................................................

Ort och datum

.................................................................

Underskrift
Till Förskolläraren

Information om en studie om engelskans plats i förskolan

Jag är lärarstudent som går sista terminen på förskollärarprogrammet och har påbörjat ett självständigt arbete vid Institutionen för pedagogik, didaktik och utbildningsstudier, Uppsala universitet.

Syftet med studien är att ta reda på förskollärens tankar och erfarenheter om det Engelska språket i förskolan.

Deltagandet i studien innebär att jag kommer att genomföra en intervju.

Datainsamlingen kommer att ske under oktober månad. Insamlade data kommer att analyseras under innevarande termin. Data kommer att hanteras och förvaras på sådant sätt att ingen obehörig kan ta del av den, samt avskilt från personuppgifter. I redovisningar av studien kommer alla personuppgifter vara borttagna.

Deltagandet i studien är frivilligt. Deltagandet kan avbrytas när som helst, även efter att datainsamlingen är genomförd. Ingen ekonomisk ersättning utgår.

Om ni är positiva till deltagande, undertecknar ni den medföljande blanketten om medgivande

Om ni har ytterligare frågor angående studien går det bra att kontakta mig eller min handledare

Studiens handledare:Cecilia Rodehn  e-post:cecilia.rodehn@abm.uu.se
Uppsala den 23.e oktober 2015

Susan Tärngren  e-post: susan.tarngren.4209@student.uu.se