



## Learning to Learn

Multiple intelligences and listening in the language classroom

Christina Johansson

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## Abstract

Fifty-two students in year nine and three teachers in rural Sweden have taken part in an investigation on learning preferences in general and listening in particular. The starting-point for the study is Gardner's multiple intelligences and the purpose is to investigate how well students know their own learning abilities or strategies and how that knowledge corresponds with work at school. The result shows that students are aware of their preferred strategy but many of them need to work with developing additional abilities in order to improve their English. There is also an apparent difference between students' relation to listening and teachers' approach to the same though some of the difference is due to the lack of possibilities in the conventional classroom. This small and limited study briefly discusses the possible implications for teaching and learning in the diversified classroom.

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## 1. Introduction

Many teenagers find English lessons in school boring or, at least, unsatisfying today (Henry & Cliffordson 2015). There are a number of factors related to this perception of unsatisfactory lessons. Firstly, Henry & Cliffordson have concluded that, since young people in Sweden spend much of their spare time in an English speaking environment, the classroom activities are not regarded as useful or creative, especially not if a textbook is involved. Instead, a majority of Swedish teenagers, 95%, use the Internet every day for activities that feel personally meaningful and the main activity is watching film and video (Swedes and the Internet 2015). Secondly, a study concerning young British learners of French concludes that the feeling of success and progress are important factors for these children when they participate, more or less willingly, in the different activities suggested. As they become older, the importance these factors seem to have for learning increases (Courtney, Graham, Tonkin & Marini 2015). Finally, it is also generally believed that when students know how they learn, they are able to learn in an easier way than those who do not (Tseng, Dörnyei & Schmitt 2006). The Swedish Board of Education has recommended the European Language Portfolio (ELP) for schools to work with to help students become aware of their learning strategy and motivate further studies. Thus, multiple intelligences and learning strategies are likely to have a great impact on students' second language learning. The hypothesis for this study is that the awareness of superior intelligence as well as the possibility to choose strategy could motivate more students in compulsory school to achieve better knowledge of English.

Against this background the questions for this study are:

Do these students in year nine feel they know their preferred learning abilities?  
How do teachers adapt their teachings to the theory of different learning strategies?  
To what extent is listening in different ways an accepted strategy for vocabulary acquisition?

Students in year nine have been asked to complete a questionnaire concerning their knowledge of their personal intelligence, activities and needs to improve their English and teachers have been interviewed about the same subject though the questions are differently expressed.

## 2. Theoretical background

The theoretical background is divided into a first part on multiple intelligences and learning strategies and a second part on listening as a means to acquiring new vocabulary.

### 2.1 Multiple intelligences or strategies for learning

The most important theory for this study is Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1983, 1999). Armstrong (2009) names these intelligences, or abilities as some prefer to say, as spatial, logical-mathematical, linguistic, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist. The theory states that everybody, unless suffering from disease or disability, owns all of the intelligences, but usually one or two have become superior to the others because of nurturing and environment. This means that certain ways of learning are favoured over others. According to the theory, a spatial intelligent individual prefers to visualize in different ways, a logical-mathematical intelligent may prefer to know the system of a language, the structure, before starting the production of language while a musical intelligent needs to listen and repeat first. The linguistic intelligent would be able to benefit by all methods of teaching, whereas a person with a bodily-kinaesthetic ability is a more hands-on learner; drama and physical touch are usually preferred. An interpersonal student would like to discuss the matter and an intrapersonal keeps the newly learned in mind and needs time to reflect on it, while a naturalist needs to connect the matter to living things and the environment. It is obvious, if this theory of multiple intelligences is accepted, that learning

and teaching a second language can be difficult when so many variations of intelligence are present in the classroom.

The Swedish educational system has adapted the language education to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) which is recommended by the Board of Education. In the ELP, the definitions of intelligences from Gardner's theory are used to explain to students some different ways of learning though, in the Swedish version of ELP, they are somewhat intertwined with other intelligences and are named as follows: visual, auditory, tactile and kinaesthetic. These are the ones used in the questionnaire and this study. The descriptions of the four intelligences are simplified to indicate the different approaches to learning a language. First, there is the visual intelligent who learns by reading and writing, drawing or studying pictures. This learner takes notes and makes mind maps and prefers to read about new things, preferably in a quiet environment. Then there is the opposite, the auditory intelligent, who learns by listening to and participating in discussions. This learner prefers that someone explains new things and usually does not like to read in silence, but is helped by listening to texts. The third kind is the kinaesthetic intelligent: this individual learns through playing games and when someone shows what to do. There is often an immediate need for using the newly learned and sometimes the learner becomes restless at times when waiting is necessary. This sometimes leads to an undesired behaviour of moving around the room. The fourth intelligent is the tactile learner who prefers touching the objects or using pictures to learn and is more hands-on, in need of drawing or painting to learn.

These four different preferences demand visual presentations, songs and rhymes, simulations and drama, just to mention some of the activities needed to teach and to make sure that all students in a class have learned at a satisfactory level. There is a difference in receiving instructions for, and working with, tasks too: some students need an individual instruction

while others are satisfied with a general presentation, some prefer working alone while others cooperate (Armstrong 2009). In the Swedish curriculum, it specifies that the education shall be adjusted to each individual's qualifications and needs, which is an understanding of and adaption to the theory of multiple intelligences that more or less permeates through CEFR.

There is other research that hints in the direction of multiple intelligences and the fact that students learn in various ways. Input and feedback from sources of various origins have different impact on students' learning depending on talent and preferences for various reasons. Stevick (1989) interviewed seven adults who each learned a new language by themselves, and he accounts for each person's totally different approach to learning. Some listened and repeated before reading, some started with text, and then listened, while others chose the grammar and structure first, and so on. This agrees with the theory of multiple intelligences and, though Stevick's result concerns adult learners, it is useful for the present study because of the individual approaches accounted for. For the educator, this emphasizes the difficult task of reaching everybody in the heterogeneous language classroom when several different ways of learning exist. The present study investigates how some students use English in their spare time and the degree to which that use is connected to their believed intelligence.

## 2.2 Acquiring vocabulary through listening

When we are children and learn our maternal language, we listen and imitate, picture books are read to us, educational books and films are introduced, the adults around us talk to us and later on we can repeat what they say. This process means that learning vocabulary orally usually comes before using it in read or written form. When our vocabulary contains about 7,000 words, around the age of seven, we go to school to learn how to use this vocabulary in reading and writing. If we go on reading, listening and talking regularly, our vocabulary

grows to approximately 70,000 words ten years later. If we do not, our vocabulary only grows with 10,000 words between the ages of seven and seventeen (Kers 2014).

Comprehension of about 3,200 of the most common words or word roots is satisfactory for understanding about 95% in a text or film in general. Around 500 new English words are expected to be learned every year in secondary school, starting on 1,500 in year 6 (Björklund 2015, Nation 2006). This means that, for passing English as a subject at the lowest level in year 9, the vocabulary required is less than half of the vocabulary a seven-year-old Swedish student has before starting to learn how to read and write. In English class, the vocabulary also has to be produced in written and spoken form. However, the written form is the most often used form of English and even an ordinary listening test usually demands the answers in writing. Since the present study is concerned with listening as a possibly preferred strategy for learning new vocabulary, the articles mentioned show how important listening is for learning a language and the possible contradiction in the expectations on every student to read and write in English class after only a few years of studying.

Though first language learning follows this procedure of listening, imitating and so on, there has been little research undertaken in the field of listening as an alternative means to acquire new vocabulary in second language learning. For younger students, listening appears to be a more accepted strategy for learning which corresponds with the learning of a first language. Brett, Rothlein and Hurley (1996) have studied how well new words were acquired in two groups of 4<sup>th</sup> graders who listened to stories, read aloud by their teachers, with or without brief explanations of words. They found that the students who had access to word explanations while listening obtained better results on all tests, including those made several weeks later. Another way of listening with explanations, namely using pictures, is discussed in a study from Webb and Rodgers concerning “The Lexical Coverage of Movies” (2009). In their article, they refer to other studies that show that students of English prefer films to

reading for independent learning of the language. Teachers, on the other hand, may avoid using films in the classroom because of the difficult task of finding the right level of language, and to establish whether all students understand the film in question.

Another study discusses how English speaking students were helped by images and glossaries when acquiring vocabulary in French, in this case through listening in multimedia (Jones and Plass 2002). In this study, students were divided into four different groups, where they listened to an authentic historical text with access to different annotations. The first group had access to a glossary, the second to glossary and pictures, the third to pictures only and, for the fourth group, no annotations were allowed. Their result shows that when pictures are involved the vocabulary acquired is larger and persists longer than the others, and this could explain why students in Webb and Rodgers' study preferred films for learning.

The learning of vocabulary through music is a study of some interest since musical intelligence is one of the learner strategies mentioned by Gardner. This study explains how non-African-American young people learn African-American English through listening to Hip-Hop, lyrics that are quite difficult to understand, but become easier with a video and by repeated listening (Chesley 2012). Again, the results of listening with pictures seem to agree with the previously mentioned studies as well as first language learning procedure. The present study investigates some teachers' opinions of listening as a means to acquiring new vocabulary in English class in compulsory school in Sweden.

### 3. Method and Materials

The main purpose of the study is to investigate whether students know their superior strategy using ELP definitions and how teachers work accordingly. For this purpose, 52 students in their final year of compulsory school have completed an attitudinal questionnaire (App I) and three teachers have been interviewed (App II). The questions are qualitative as they concern experiences, habits and students' personal opinions about experiences, and no answer is judged right or wrong. However, a quantitative element is the number of answers to each question which are used to discern possible conformities and/or discrepancies to literature and previous research for this study, but also between students' preferred strategy, activity and aid for exercises in school. The number of students who perceive themselves as one type of learner or the other is also important for future discussions concerning the equipment of the language classroom. Although few teachers have been interviewed, an assessment of how multiple intelligences or learning abilities are dealt with in the classroom can be achieved.

#### 3.1 The Students

The study was executed at one school in a small town in the countryside where approximately 300 of the almost 11,000 inhabitants go to school from year six till nine. Before the students were asked to participate in the study, approval from the school's headmaster was obtained and a smaller group of students scrutinized the questionnaire for difficult or dubious words and phrases. The students for the study were chosen from the perspective that the following year, in upper secondary school, they will have to be able to take on more responsibility for their own education in order to be successful; this could be facilitated in cases where they knew their own strategies. Since the participants were all over 15, they were able to decide whether to participate or not by themselves but, in this case, an e-mail was sent to the guardians with information about the purpose of the questionnaire and no objections were

received from students or guardians. The total number of students in their final year was 74; they were divided into three classes but, for various reasons, such as illness or other activities, 60 were present when the questionnaire was distributed at three different occasions during two weeks. The students numbered 21 on the first occasion, 20 on the second, and 19 on the third. All the students had their own iPads but, on the second occasion, eight had trouble with their Internet connection which resulted in 52 participants in total taking part. The number of students who did not participate was a setback for the study and limited the possibility to generalise the result for a wider population. The questionnaire was in Swedish; it was anonymous except for a time stamp, and sent to the students through Google Form via the school's e-mail. This was uncomplicated to distribute and easily compiled for the purpose of this study because of the automatic sorting on a spread sheet. The time stamp shows that each of the four intelligences or learning strategies are present in each group, which is important for any possible generalization. The participants had 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire but, since the purpose and the anonymity had been explained earlier, no one spent more than 15 minutes, and no one asked any questions. After each occasion, the overall result was presented to the group in a diagram.

The students were asked to complete the questionnaire and choose their preferred strategy when it comes to learning English, what they use English for in their spare time and what aids they want while reading and listening. There were also questions about what they work with mostly and would like to work more with in school. The sample was small and of geographic convenience but it also met with the criteria of age, level of study, and mix of grades that could be expected at schools in rural areas of Sweden. The students were between 15 and 17; they were all in year nine, with grades ranging from F to A, where A is the highest level possible and F is not acceptable knowledge. The fact that all students had iPads meant that the access to Internet was 100% during most school days. With a possible exception for the

Internet access, these criteria are applicable to most students in year nine, which makes the sample representative of a wider population, such as students in year nine in rural areas of Sweden. Excepted are schools and classes where many new immigrants participate since experience of languages varies in different countries. In this study, only four students were from other parts of the world and they had all been in Sweden for more than three years. Another exception could be that students in more populated areas have access to additional spare time activities that may be unavailable in rural areas, for example: cinemas, culture directed youth clubs, and sports, which possibly add strategy practice to students in those areas.

### 3.2 The Teachers

The three teachers interviewed all teach more than one subject and they have taught from one to three classes of English, ranging from year six to eight. None of them had taught in year nine before at this school, but they were expected to do so in the near future. There were six teachers of English at this school; two of them taught the students who answered the questionnaire and they were excluded because they were present when the students answered the questionnaire and knew the questions. One teacher could not participate due to lack of time, and time would probably have been a stressful factor for the three teachers who finally participated, since meetings in different teacher groups were held at the same time as the interviews.

The teachers were asked to give examples of how they work with students' different qualifications and needs mentioned in the Swedish curriculum. In this study, "qualifications and needs" are considered to be the same as the different intelligences and strategies used in the European Language Portfolio. The teachers were then questioned about how they work with listening in the classroom, whether they think of listening as an alternative to reading

when vocabulary acquisition is concerned and, if so, how. Finally, they were requested to give their opinions of what equipment a language classroom needs. No explicit questions were asked about ELP, which was deliberate, since that could have resulted in answers believed to be theoretically correct, rather than how work was really conducted. The exclusion of questions on ELP now appears to have been a mistake: we do not know if the teachers are aware of ELP, although their answers do not indicate the use of ELP in the classroom. To clarify the knowledge and use of ELP among the teachers, a final question could have been added but, since the researcher is a teacher too, great care was taken to not express anything but the prepared questions. The three interviews were in Swedish and less than 15 minutes duration each and were all conducted and recorded the same day. Later, the recordings were transcribed in full but, for the translation only, the quotes used for this study have been translated<sup>1</sup>. Due to anonymity, the participating teachers have not been numbered or named in any way and only referred to as “one teacher, another teacher” etcetera.

#### 4. Result and Analysis

Only the first question in the questionnaire, about strategies, was supposed to have more than one possible alternative, though several questions had the possibility of writing a separate answer which is accounted for as well. Question number 5 was provided with multiple answering possibilities by mistake, which could have excluded the result from this study. Despite this, the numbers are briefly accounted for since more than 50% marked one alternative only and the result at least hints at what students think.

The result shows that most students seem to be aware of their abilities or preferred strategies since only about 25% have marked more than one alternative. The students are quite similar

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by the author of the present study

to each other in what spare time activities they engage in and only about one third of them feel the need for reading and writing as a means to learn more in school.

#### 4.1 Strategies and awareness

The first question in the student questionnaire was about strategies and what kind of learners the students thought themselves to be. The strategies used were those from the ELP and the possibility to choose more than one was to gain an impression of how aware the students were.

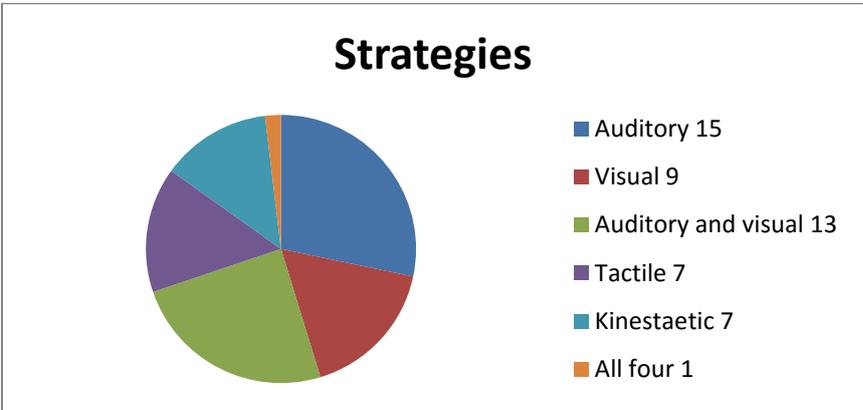


Figure 1. Question 1: How do you think you learn best?

The result of this question shows that 28 of the 52 students in this study perceive themselves as auditory or auditory/visual learners. The possibility of marking more than one answer has been used by 13 students who marked both visual and auditory and one student who has marked all four alternatives (Figure 1). Perhaps these 13 students, who think of themselves as auditory/visual, have come further in the development of learning than others and use both listening and reading for their learning. Another possible explanation is that the descriptions of the learner strategies were not clear enough and the students thought of their interest in for example film/video as being both auditory and visual. Whatever the reasons, the result indicates that, in a classroom, several students have a preferred strategy that concerns listening. Only nine students have marked the alternative visual learner which means that 80%

of this group do not see reading and writing as the most useful or interesting learning strategies. Even though all students can and should develop more abilities with time and practice, only one student seems to have reached that level at this stage in life. Another possible interpretation of this student's answer is, of course, that the student cannot decide, or does not know, what strategy is most suitable. The theory of multiple intelligences seems to be applicable here as seven of the students chose tactile intelligence and the same number decided on kinaesthetic. This would mean that all four intelligences used in the ELP are represented in this group of 52 students. When the time stamp is used, it is also clear that all four intelligences are present in each class in spite of the fact that around 30% of the total number of students did not participate.

#### 4.1.1 Teachers' answers

The teachers described how they work with the different qualifications and needs in the classroom. The teachers explained how they adapted exercises in different ways "...when I plan an exercise I have to think about how to adapt the exercise in order to give all the students the possibility to show the knowledge that I have in mind...". The examples given were levelling the exercises by degree of difficulty and reading texts on different levels. How oral production can be presented was also explained where anxious students can record their presentations instead of talking in front of the group. One teacher emphasised the importance of not doing the same thing in the same way every time "...well, once maybe present it orally, another time maybe they can read the instructions, on a third occasion they can work in groups or pairs..." and also how the students could choose from a list of exercises and do the ones that suited them best at that moment. This teacher also explained how the students could receive quick individual response on their needs since technology and the Internet facilitated this work "...sometimes it can be students who need basic spelling really while others need to improve their sentence structure and vocabulary in English...". The result shows that, in

general, there is some kind of individual adaption in the classroom, but the teachers seem mostly to have adapted the exercises to the students' levels of knowledge rather than to intelligences. However, one teacher expressed some concern for the variation of activity and individual response which could be an adaption to the different intelligences and needs. More examples of how teachers work with individual needs could possibly have been presented had time not been a stressing factor during these interviews.

#### 4.2 Spare time activities

The students could only mark one answer for question number two since each answer contained several examples such as film, television, video, and You tube: this constituted just a single alternative. Teenagers frequently use English, according to Henry & Cliffordson (2015) but, in this case, the purpose was to investigate whether the students preferred oral or written English, hence the restriction. The possibility to write a separate answer was used by two students who wrote that they used everything. The result shows that, when the students are only able to choose one kind of activity, reading is not among the most popular and nor is writing or school exercises.

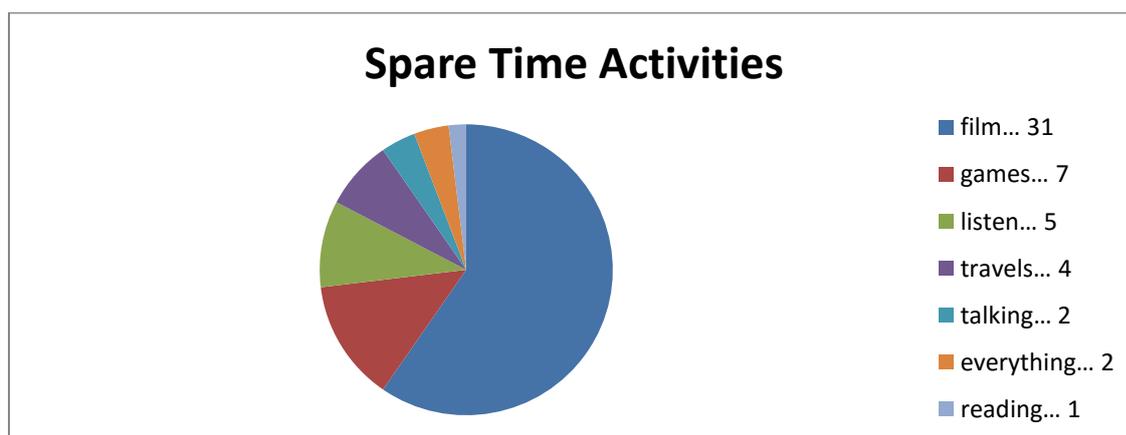


Figure 2. Question 2: How do you use English outside of school?  
These are shorter versions of the alternatives, for the complete alternatives see Appendix I.

It has become apparent that these teenagers use moving images and pictures to a large extent. When they have to choose what they do most in their spare time in connection to English, a majority, 31 students, mark the alternative “watching films, TV, You tube, video” as their number one activity (Figure 2). Of these 31 students, 16 see themselves as visual or visual/auditory learners, six auditory, six kinaesthetic, and three tactile learners. This could be a result from what the students assume is their preferred strategy which, in that case, corresponds closely with Webb and Rodgers’ statement that young learners prefer film for language learning (2009). If this is a habit that comes from being a teenager, doing what teenagers do, it emphasises what Henry & Cliffordson’s study claims, namely that Swedish students live in an English speaking environment in their spare time (2015) and that, of those with access to the Internet, 60 % of them use the Internet for films and video (Swedes and the Internet 2015). It could also be interpreted as processing the language the same way a maternal language is processed where listening, talking and discussing, come before reading and writing (Kers 2014). These students use pictures while they listen to the language which, according to Chesley (2012), makes a difficult language more understandable.

The seven students who played games, etcetera, were of all four intelligences; the five who listened were of all intelligences except for kinaesthetic. Again, this could be what students do; they play games and use the Internet for chatting, listening to music, and more. The two who marked talking were auditory and auditory/visual and may well be doing their talking via the Internet while the four who use English during travels, and consisted of participants who saw themselves as auditory, visual, and tactile learners, may avoid English in their spare time.

Only one student, a visual learner, chose reading as the first spare time activity and together with the two students who answered everything, both auditory learners, they make up less than 10 % of the whole group. This does not mean that the other students do not read or do not practise any of the other activities suggested, but it is an indication of what this group of

teenagers consider interesting and easily accessed when they can choose freely. Not one student marked writing or school exercises as a common activity, which gives the impression that homework is not sufficiently interesting to invest time and effort, or it is such a small part of their spare time that it does not count.

### 4.3 Reading and Listening

The purpose of the two questions is to investigate whether students feel the need for aids of any kind concerning reading and listening and, if so, what additional material or aid they prefer. It is also interesting to explore how their needs correspond with their believed intelligence. The hypothesis is that different intelligences prefer different educational aids and that the students have developed their abilities in various degrees.

#### 4.3.1 Reading

Here, the question was what aids the students want when they read in English (Table 3). The alternatives contained different glossaries, discussing and listening, as fixed alternatives and there was also an alternative where the students could write an answer of their own choice.

Aid needed while reading	Visual	Auditory /visual	Auditory	Tactile	Kinaesthetic	Total number of students
Glossary in English	4	3	3	1	3	14
Glossary in Swedish	1	3	2	1	-	7
Picture glossary	1	2	-	-	1	4
Someone to discuss with	2	3	6	3	3	17
Listening to the text	1	1	3	3	-	8
Other	-	1	1	-	-	2
Total number of learners	9	13	15	8	7	52

Table 3. Question 3: What kind of help do you want when reading?

The numbers from table 3 show that the possibility to discuss the text is what 17 students want while reading. All intelligences are represented in both the glossary part and the oral part and some correspond with what signifies the intelligence in particular. The auditory-visual and visual learners have mostly marked glossary as their preferred aid/annotation and, in the ELP description of visual learners, the reading and pictures are mentioned. The kinaesthetic learners have marked English glossary, picture glossary and someone with whom to discuss it. These are all three aids that give immediate response and the newly learned words can be used. The alternative 'listening' could be considered too demanding when it comes to patience for these learners; they easily become restless according to the ELP. In total, there are 25 students who have marked some kind of glossary for reading; this is the same number of students who preferred listening to the text or discussing it. For the two students in table 3 who marked 'other': one auditory-visual learner wrote 'nothing', one auditory learner 'all'. This could indicate a strong self-confidence or, for the auditory learner, the opposite, but also that this is their true experience. The auditory-visual learner may find the education in English on a level far too low and therefore does not need any aid, while the auditory learner instead struggles with English and needs everything possible to succeed. The result emphasises the importance of diverse possibilities for learning in the classroom.

#### 4.3.2 Listening

The question was what aids the students want when they listen to English (Table 4). As for the question concerning reading, the alternatives contained different glossaries, discussing, and for this question, reading as fixed alternatives. There was also an alternative where the students could write an answer of their own choice.

This part is also connected to how the teachers work with listening in the classroom and whether there is a similar view on that.

Aid needed while listening	Visual	Auditory /visual	Auditory	Tactile	Kinaesthetic	Total number of students
Glossary in English	1	5	2	1	-	9
Glossary in Swedish	1	1	2	1	1	6
Picture glossary	2	3	1	-	-	6
Someone to discuss with	-	2	7	3	3	15
Reading the text	5	1	3	3	3	15
Other	-	1	-	-	-	1
<b>Total number of learners</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>52</b>

Table 4. Question 4: What kind of help do you want when listening?

In table 4, the result shows that the glossary is the most desired alternative in total; 21 students have marked a glossary of some sort, but there are still 15 who want to discuss what they have listened to and 15 who want to see the text in written while they listen. The auditory-visual learner who marked 'other' is the same individual who did so for reading, and has on both questions written 'nothing'. While none of the visual learners wanted to discuss what they had listened to, seven of the auditory learners did. This indicates that the need for a silent place to read while listening is essential for the visual learner; the opposite could be said about the auditory learner. The same five auditory learners have marked someone to discuss the matter with for both reading and listening, which is what the ELP suggests is characteristic for this category of learner. Fifteen students have marked the possibility to read the text while listening and they represent all groups of intelligences. This could indicate that these students want the text in front of them: to be able to look up words, to learn pronunciation, and to learn spelling at the same time, which is a development of their abilities if that is a correct analysis. The result for reading could be interpreted as reading being considered slightly more important for learning new vocabulary than listening is, since the use of glossary seems to be somewhat more useful when it comes to reading; 25 students wanted

some kind of glossary while reading, compared to 20 for listening. This could also be explained by some students' opinion of reading as demanding more detailed understanding than listening. There is more time for looking up words when a text is in front of the student and the word is correct already. This makes it easier than when listening to something where spelling has to be more or less guessed if the word or word root is unknown. Again, the different needs are important factors for everybody's possibilities to learn.

#### 4.3.3 Teachers' answers

The Internet is obviously a source for much of the part of listening for these teachers. "YouTube is infinite and free and easy, you can get lost but you can also find what you want", was one teacher's opinion. The teachers all use various sites for the practice of listening but none of them mentions any kind of workbook exercise. This might indicate that these teachers do not use workbooks at all or not specifically for the listening part. It is important to the teachers that the language is authentic English and also that the students hear all kinds of English, from all over the world. Clips showing how to carry out different activities was an important factor to one teacher, and the well-known chef Jamie Oliver was mentioned, "I almost found a clip with Jamie Oliver that worked but then he talked too fast and I thought it would be too hard for them". This is what Webb and Rodgers mention in their study (2009) when they point out the teachers' avoidance of using film in the classroom because of the risk that the film is too difficult for the students. The teachers seem to put some time into the task of finding the right level of English for their students "...had I had another hour I might have found something but instead I had to improvise", were the words from one teacher.

The different purposes of listening were also expressed: how listening could be simply enjoying music and lyrics, sensing a feeling, seeing pictures at the same time, or searching for certain words while listening "...just listen to hear times and dates, at what time is this person

meeting this other person...” . One teacher used a site where the students could choose an area of interest and difficulty level ”...and it tells how many % correct answers you get, and you can go back and look at what you missed, you can listen again and you can have the script too if that is needed...”. The teacher’s opinion was that the use of this site made listening individual and educational which is a difference from the other teachers since their work with listening seem mostly or completely to involve the whole group at the same time. It is possible that the teachers who did not explicitly mention the individual listening in the classroom use the same site, or others similar to this, but for different purposes, such as exercises to confirm what has been presented to the whole group. It is also possible that those teachers forgot to mention the sites and their work with them.

#### 4.4 Vocabulary acquisition through listening

One question was: “Could listening be an alternative to reading when learning new vocabulary?” One of the teachers believed it was quite possible, but there had to be real ambition and work to achieve the same goal as students could by reading. The teacher proposed the use of music sites to be the best method in this case “...they must listen and fill in words and if they are really committed to it and really work with their listening I think they can get as far as the others...” This corresponds with Chesney’s findings in connection to hip-hop and difficult lyrics where repeated listening and video to illustrate the story helped young people learn a very special and different dialect of the English language. Learning by listening appears to require more ambition and hard work than learning by reading, according to this teacher.

Another teacher claimed it was necessary to follow the text and see the words while listening if vocabulary was to be learned. That way, in the opinion of this teacher, the students would learn the spelling at the same time as pronunciation. None of the teachers mentioned anything

about students with reading difficulties; this is possibly because they do not have any in their classes or it did not occur to them in this interview (though the first question was about meeting every student at the appropriate level). The third teacher expressed the opinion that both reading and listening in English are vital to learning but that both elements are introduced too early for many of the students. "...but for many of the students I think we take in texts too soon and take away the oral parts too soon and I see that when they reach year seven and eight that they have quite a large vocabulary but they are very insecure of how to pronounce and spell...". This teacher emphasised the importance of learning the language correctly orally before using words in written production. Spelling can be hard in English and quite a few words look alike, but are pronounced differently or the other way around, i.e. pronounced the same but spelled differently. This third opinion, about learning it correctly orally first, does seem to be connected to learning procedures and follows the first language learning process where reading and writing are introduced later, when a satisfactory vocabulary has been built orally (Kers 2014). The differences between students' opinions of needs and teachers' answers emphasize the difficulties teachers encounter when planning and executing lessons for everyone in the classroom.

#### 4.5 English class activities

The result from question five could have been excluded from this study since multiple answers were allowed by mistake, and the 'one cross only' was passed over by 20 students. In spite of this, the distribution of answers gives an impression of what students in this study believe they work with mostly in class. This is of some importance for the theory of multiple intelligences and the feeling of success that Courtney, Graham, Tonkin & Marini discuss (2015). The alternatives were listening, reading, writing, talking/speaking and social science. There was also one alternative where the students could express themselves in their own words, but it was not used for this question. There were 32 students who only marked one

answer, 12 of them marked writing and nine reading and, when all the answers are counted, there are 27 marks for writing, 24 for reading, 21 for talking/speaking, 19 for listening and three for social science. Writing and reading do seem to play an important role in the classroom.

#### 4.6 Developing Skills

The students were asked what activities they wanted to work with more in order to improve their English skills. Secondary schools usually work with all the elements mentioned in table 5, but only one answer was permitted in order to ascertain whether or not the students had come to understand the need of less popular activities like reading and writing. The teachers were asked to express opinions of what they thought was needed for the perfect language classroom in order to reach every individual with their needs and qualifications (The Swedish Curriculum 2011). The belief is that what the students believe they need for developing their skills is not always available in the classroom.

Activity	Visual	Visual /auditory	Auditory	Tactile	Kinaesthetic	Total number of students
Reading	3	2	5	3	3	16
Watching film etc.	5	2	4	2	3	16
Talking	-	5	1	2	-	8
Playing games etc.	1	1	4	1	-	7
Listening	-	1	1	-	-	2
Writing	-	2	-	-	1	3
<b>Total number of learners</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>52</b>

Table 5. Question 6: If you could choose, what would you like to work with in class?  
These are shorter versions of the activity alternatives, for the complete alternatives see Appendix I

The result in table 5 indicates that, since only one student worked with reading as the activity chosen during spare time (table 2), the 16 who have chosen it for improving their English now understand the need for reading at school. Three students have marked writing as the activity

with which they need to work more. This could mean that they are interested in writing or that they feel the other parts of English are otherwise satisfied, and this is something they do not practise enough. Only two students have marked that they need more listening at school. One explanation is that this is something the rest of them do anyway, as Henry & Cliffordson (2015) show in their study, or that they feel that they have worked sufficiently with it in school. Another possible interpretation is that the students do not believe that listening exercises in class give them what they need since most of them seem to do it altogether, according to the teachers' interviews. Still, the table shows that the oral parts like film, talking, and playing games, are what most of the students believe they need; this is an indication that they may not be ready for the reading and writing parts, as one teacher put it, or that they do not understand what they need, but choose what they like to do.

#### 4.6.1 Teachers' answers

The final question to the teachers was related to whether they had any thoughts about the perfect language classroom. The purpose was to investigate whether the classroom itself in terms of its orientation, arrangement or equipment, offered possibilities in terms of teaching in a more varied way and by that to accommodate the different intelligences in a class. All three wanted more possibilities in the classroom, desks positioned individually and in groups, all desks facing different views for different purposes, and separated by movable screens: all this is in order to have students working with what they need even if it is not the same as everybody else. One teacher put it this way: "A classroom that invites the students to many different activities." These answers show that the teachers are aware of the different abilities within the students, but feel constrained by the lack of possibilities.

## 5. Discussion

Most students in this study prefer all kinds of oral input for learning English though some are more open to other types of input. This could mean either that many of them are aware of their superior intelligence or that they ‘follow the crowd’ and do what others do at their age, as Henry and Ciffordson have concluded (2015). A total of 75% of the students in this study watch films, play games and talk in English, although only about 35% of them consider themselves auditory or auditory/visual learners. It is notable that 60% of those who watch film, television, videos, and YouTube in their spare time also consider those activities the best way to further develop their skills in English. This could indicate that students find it easier to learn by listening with pictures and through other oral input, which corresponds with the findings from Webb and Rodgers (2009) and Plass and Jones (2002); listening with pictures is preferred by English learners and gives the optimal result in the long run. There is a risk that, when students who struggle with reading for some reason have to read and write at the same time and speed as others, they lose their possibilities of reaching all of the goals that are set for everybody. If they cannot use their listening skills more often than other students who can read successfully, their feelings of successful progress might be lost, which Courtney, Graham, Tonkin & Marini (2015) mention as one crucial factor for learning. In addition to this, it is worth mentioning that about 20% of children in Swedish primary schools have difficulty learning to read and write in Swedish, about 8% of whom due to neurological reasons: dyslexia (the Swedish Dyslexia Association 2016). If learning to read and write in a maternal language is difficult then it might be assumed that learning the same in a second language becomes even more problematic.

Individual differences are also of importance when it comes to how much effort students are willing to put into the activity presented to them. The choice of strategy, and by that the choice of activity, is supposed to be the most appropriate for the individual when learning,

(which is also recommended from the Swedish Board of Education in the curriculum and through the ELP) until the learner is ready or mature enough to apply themselves fully in terms of working on other parts of language learning. In this small study, almost 50% of the students indicated that they needed some kind of glossary while reading texts in class and the other half expressed the need of someone to discuss the text with or the possibility of listening to the text. Among the latter group, 50% thought of themselves as auditory or auditory/visual learners.

The teachers try to diversify their classroom activities, for individuals or the whole class, by levelling and giving alternatives for showing productive skills. However, activities for the whole class seem to be the dominant teaching method even though only three teachers are involved. One reason for this appears to be the classroom itself: the possibilities to diversify the education and individualise the same are, to some extent, hindered by space and furnishings.

Listening is a part of language learning, but it seems mostly to be connected to pronunciation, and only one teacher explicitly believed listening to be a possible alternative, though this alternative demands more work than reading, for example. Most students marked alternatives with oral contents for questions concerning activities, needs and development, which could be regarded as listening with annotations, as mentioned in the theoretical background. However, a clear result could not be seen, though listening in itself is regarded as very important as students need to hear examples of all the different dialects that there are. English is one of the subjects necessary to pass to even have the right to try to enrol into any of the upper secondary schools. A final possibility for the students to show their knowledge comes with the national tests in the end of spring. Focus is on reading and writing; the oral test demands the ability to read instructions, questions or statements on the cards used for the test. The listening test demands the ability to read the questions and alternatives, but also the ability to

express oneself in written English when no alternatives are available. Exceptions are allowed only in special circumstances such as, for example, disabilities that make it impossible for a test taker to go through with the part in question. In that case, a student can be allowed to listen to a reading test, or have the questions and alternatives read aloud for a listening test. A student with severe dyslexia may write the essay that is part of the national test on computer for the letters to be definable, but no other aid is accepted (as far as can be established), despite the fact that there are so many possibilities with technology today.

The differentiated classroom, where all sorts of learning is occurring at the same time, could help students reach higher goals, and listening as one option could make learning easier for some. Again, the technology of today could be helpful and erase the differences between students with and without any form of disability, but the classroom has to be furnished for this purpose.

## 6. Conclusion and further research

Do the students in this study know their superior intelligence, or ability, where learning English is concerned? The students perceive themselves as certain types of learners though their answers to activities, needs and what they believe will develop their skills in the language, do not always coincide. Research with more detailed information would be necessary to reach certainty on whether students are aware or not. The students could discuss different ideas of their own along with methods and means for language learning and, with facts about the human brain and body, ideas and examples could be developed together with teachers into useful information of how to move on to practise in education. It would also be of value to study the result of the use of ELP in a classroom. If students are aware of their learning intelligence, they are more motivated and learn more easily according to previous

research. Motivation is one of the most important factors in language learning and the explicit work with different strategies could teach us more about what could be done.

Do the teachers work according to students' different abilities? The answer is that they try, but probably are constrained by definitions and furnishing or by lack of time. It is likely that, since the teachers in this study work in a rural area, the possibilities to develop their own skills are fewer than in other, more populated, areas since distance and economic factors together may hinder this. The furnishing of the classroom and its purpose has begun to capture the attention from researchers (Tanahashi 2007, Miller 2016). However, this research needs more scientific investigation in order to convince leaders in the educational system to invest money in furniture adapted for the language classroom, and not only technology, books, and teachers.

To what extent could listening be an alternative to reading for vocabulary acquisition in second language learning? The answers supplied by teachers are conflicting on this question while the answers from the students make it tempting to believe that most students learn their vocabulary in oral English through films and videos, but that reading and writing the vocabulary is taught at school. There is a paucity of research on vocabulary acquisition through listening, although it is generally expected that teenagers are regular listeners via media, such as the Internet. Research in this field could help teachers find alternatives for teaching students who struggle with the language for different reasons and these may include dyslexia, or motivational factors. When students learn their maternal language in Sweden, the expression 'reading' includes listening to audio-books and technology could help many readers as it would also be a positive development for audio-books to be accepted as 'reading' books in second language learning.

The findings of this study are of limited usability, both concerning students and teachers, but still indicate a direction that is supported by previous research. It emphasises the importance of cooperation and peer learning, the possibility of participating in research, having time for discussions, and exchanging knowledge about how English is learned, and can be learned more efficiently, in the future. Both students and teachers would probably develop their skills through this mutual interactive research.

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## Appendix I

### Questionnaire for the students

#### **Vocabulary acquisition**

Visual (I use my eyes)

I learn by reading and writing, drawing or studying pictures. I take notes and make mind maps and prefer to read about new things.

Auditory (I use my ears)

I learn by listening and repeating words and to things being discussed.

I prefer that someone explains new things to me.

Kinaesthetic (I use my whole body)

I learn through playing games and when someone shows me what to do. I like to use what I've learned immediately and sometimes find it hard to wait for my turn.

Tactile (I use my hands)

I learn best when I can touch the objects or use pictures and practise with my hands by drawing or painting.

#### **How do you think you learn best?**

Put a cross in the box that suits you best.

- Visual (I use my eyes).
- Auditory (I use my ears)
- Kinaesthetic (I use my whole body).
- Tactile (I use my hands)

#### **How do you use English outside of school?**

How do you get in contact with English?

- Reading texts, books, cartoons, news, articles etc.
- Listening to audio-books, music, news etc.
- Watching films, television, YouTube, videos etc.
- Playing games, chatting on the internet etc.
- Talking to friends, family etc.
- Writing letters, e-mails, novels etc.
- Travelling, taking part in exchanges etc.
- Working with school exercises in my spare time
- Other

#### **What kind of help do you want when reading English?**

How do you get to understand new words?

- Dictionary in English (words)

- Dictionary in Swedish (words)
- Dictionary with pictures
- Someone to discuss with
- Possibility to listen to the text
- Other

**What kind of help do you want when listening to English?**

How do you get to understand new words?

- Dictionary in English (words)
- Dictionary in Swedish (words)
- Dictionary with pictures
- Someone to discuss with
- Possibility to read the text
- Other

**How do you mostly work in class?**

What kind of exercises do you do most, one cross only

- Listening exercises
- Reading exercises
- Writing exercises
- Talking/speaking exercises
- Social Science (about life in English speaking countries)
- Other

**If you could choose, what would you like to work with in class?**

How do you build your vocabulary further?

- Reading texts, books, cartoons, news, articles etc.
- Listening to-audio-books, music, news etc.
- Watching- films, television, YouTube, videos etc.
- Playing games, chatting on the internet etc.
- Talking to- teachers, friends, etc.
- Writing letters, e-mails, essays etc.
- Other

## Appendix II

### Questions asked to the teachers

1. How do you work with “the education should adapt to, and emerge from every individual’s qualifications and needs?”
2. How do you work specifically with listening?
3. Do you believe listening could be an adequate alternative for vocabulary acquisition?
4. What would you want to have to make your classroom the perfect one for language learning?

## Appendix III

### The European Language Portfolio

What is a European Language Portfolio?

The Portfolio consists of three sections

1. Language Passport: The Passport is an overview of your language skills and contacts with other cultures. You can use it to inform others about your knowledge, skills and experience.

2. Language Biography: The Biography will help you to reflect on your languages: how you learn, how you can assess your skills and what experience you have of contact with other cultures. When you work with these sections you can discuss with classmates and teachers and become a better learner. Here you will also find aids to help you plan and evaluate different areas of work.

3. The Language Dossier: In the Dossier you collect samples of things you have done in your languages. This could be written texts, recordings on tape, video recordings or computer files. Perhaps you prefer to collect your whole dossier on a computer. You keep your dossier updated all the time by putting in new things and removing old material. In this way you will be able to see how you make progress; but you can also show it to teachers, your parents or anyone else who is interested in your language development.

[http://www.skolverket.se/polopoly\\_fs/1.83447!/Menu/article/attachment/portfolio\\_biografi1216.pdf](http://www.skolverket.se/polopoly_fs/1.83447!/Menu/article/attachment/portfolio_biografi1216.pdf)



A teacher of English and French in  
secondary and upper secondary  
schools



PO Box 823, SE-301 18 Halmstad  
Phone: +35 46 16 71 00  
E-mail: [registrator@hh.se](mailto:registrator@hh.se)  
[www.hh.se](http://www.hh.se)