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**Degree Project with Specialization in English Studies
and Education**
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Roll For Initiative:

**EFL Game Masters and Players' Perceptions of Using
TTRPGs in an Extramural English and Classroom
Setting**

*Slå för Initiativ: EFL Spelledare och Spelares varseblivningar av
användning av Bordsrollspel i ett Extramural English och
Klassrums sammanhang*

**Beatrice Almén
Julia Ekman**

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Examiner: Malin
Reljanovic Glimäng
Supervisor: Sindija
Franzetti

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I, Beatrice, wish to especially dedicate this study to all nerds in the TTRPG communities in Sweden, and my dear family cat Rexi who sadly passed away during the research progression. Without the love and support from all parties, I personally would not be here.

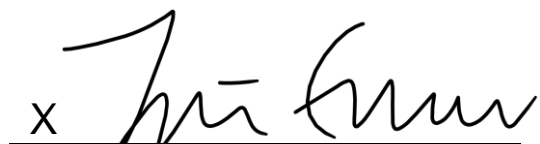
Individual Contribution

We, Beatrice Almen and Julia Ekman, hereby certify that all parts of this paper reflect the equal participation of both signatories below. During the writing of this paper Beatrice took the responsibility of contacting the participants while Julia transcribed the interviews.

- Deciding the research questions
- Planning the writing and research process
- Searching for reliable and relevant literature, theories and previous research
- Constructing interview questions and conducting the interviews
- Analysing the interviews
- Presentation of findings, discussion and conclusion

Authenticated by:

x 
Beatrice Almén

x 
Julia Ekman

Abstract

Despite many Swedish EFL primary students experiencing Extramural English (EE) learning, teachers struggle to engage and motivate students in the English classroom. The aim of this degree project is to investigate the usage of a specific EE approach, namely Tabletop Role-Playing Games (TTRPGs), as an English language learning tool. We proceeded with a qualitative research approach in the form of semi-structured interviews. The research participants consisted of three Game Masters (GMs) and six players in Sweden who have experience with playing TTRPGs in English. The participants were asked about their perceptions of their own language development and whether they believe TTRPGs can be utilized in EFL education.

The research results indicated a primarily positive outlook on TTRPGs facilitating English language skills, especially vocabulary, fluency, and communication. Players and GMs discussed how the inviting and immersive environment of TTRPGs creates a safe space for everyone involved to explore with the English language, scaffold with the help of each other, and promote social interaction. The response, in correlation with previous research, implies that TTRPGs can be viable pedagogical tools for not only enhancing language development in EFL classrooms but also social skills, collaboration skills, and critical thinking. However, challenges such as time constraints, group dynamics, and the need for extensive teacher preparation were identified.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	4
1. Introduction.....	6
2. Aim and Research Questions.....	9
3. Background.....	10
3.1 Terminology.....	10
3.1.1 English as a Foreign Language.....	10
3.1.2 Extramural English.....	10
3.1.3 Task-Based Learning.....	11
3.1.4 Gamification and Game-Based Education.....	11
3.1.5 Tabletop Role-Playing Games.....	12
3.2 Learning Theories.....	13
3.2.1 Socio-Cultural Learning.....	13
3.2.2 Behaviourism.....	14
3.2.3 Critical Pedagogy.....	14
3.3 Curriculum Justification.....	15
3.4 Literature Review.....	15
3.4.1 Gamification/Game-based Learning and Extramural English.....	15
3.4.2 Tabletop Role-Playing Games.....	17
3.4.3 Student’s Perception of TTRPGs.....	18
3.4.4 Learning Language through Role-playing.....	19
4. Method.....	20
4.1 Research Approach.....	20
4.2 Instruments.....	21
4.3 The Participants.....	21
4.4 Ethical Considerations.....	23
5. Results.....	25
5.1 Game Masters.....	25
5.1.1 Language Development.....	25
5.1.2 Confidence and Engagement.....	26
5.1.3 Perception of Using TTRPGs in School.....	28
5.2 The Players.....	29
5.2.1 Language Development.....	30
5.2.2 Confidence and Engagement.....	31
5.2.3 Perception of Using TTRPGs in School.....	32
6. Discussion.....	34

6.1	Extramural English Language Development	34
6.2	Confidence and Participation in EE	36
6.3	Perceptions of using TTRPGs in School	38
7.	Conclusion	41
8.	References	42
9.	Appendixes	44

1. Introduction

As English continues to dominate global communication, many students acquire and practice the language outside the classroom through various everyday activities (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). This is referred to as extramural English (EE), a term used to describe all engagement with English that takes place outside of the classroom setting (Jensen, 2017). While EE is commonly associated with digital media, it extends to any out-of-classroom engagement with English, including social interactions, hobbies, media consumption, and even board games (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). Despite students often interacting and using English outside of schools, we have noticed through our own experiences that many students in Swedish primary schools lack motivation and willingness to speak during English class. These students have expressed stress from performing oral exercises in English and thus dare not engage with the learning material. This, in turn, has led to many students not developing the necessary English skills that are mentioned in the National Curriculum.

Many researchers have explored innovative approaches with the developing language teaching approach through the years to enhance student stimulation, motivation, and engagement (Zarate Gonzales, 2024; Khoudri, 2024; Pálsson, 2024; Torres-Rodríguez & Martines-Grenada, 2022; Cassie, 2016). Two recent teaching approaches that have gained attraction are gamification and game-based learning (Cassie, 2016). Gamification is a strategy in which the curriculum, classroom environment, and instructions adapt game mechanics such as experience points, quests, and reward systems in order to motivate as well as stimulate students (Torres-Rodríguez & Martines-Grenada, 2022; Cassie, 2016). Game-based learning focuses on using games such as card games or Kahoot as a learning activity that engages and motivates students to learn (Zarate Gonzales, 2024). Gamification and game-based learning are becoming more popular in schools and more researched, as games are a big part of our society and the usage of video games is becoming more inevitable in students' everyday lives (Cassie, 2016). Despite this, there are also researchers who oppose such strategies. For instance, there are claims that gamification may exploit students by replacing genuine motivation with superficial rewards that make students too focused on said rewards instead of the learning (Hung, 2017).

Gamification and game-based learning include a variety of activities that include games, role-playing, and task-based teaching that have been researched to be beneficial to student engagement as well as create a more comfortable learning environment (Khoudri, 2024). One

of these specific methods will be the focus of this paper, namely Tabletop Role-Playing Games (TTRPGs). TTRPGs are different interactive story-telling games where the players create different characters and interact with each other through improvised role-playing. The narrator, who is called Game Master (GM), leads the players on different quests where the success and consequences of their actions are determined by rolling a dice (Da Rocha, 2018). TTRPGs have a creative freedom that allows for players to role-play in any kind of setting, such as medieval fantasy or modern apocalypse, but still encounter phenomena such as moral dilemmas and problem-solving that are familiar to them (Torres-Rodríguez & Martines-Grenada, 2022). From a pedagogy-theoretical standpoint, since TTRPGs predominantly focus on communication, they foster socio-cultural learning with scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Lundgren, 2020). Furthermore, the reward system and strict rules of TTRPGs can be connected to a modernised version of behaviorism (Cassie, 2016).

TTRPGs are role-playing games with roots in drama, as the players take on different characters and improvise dialogue during the games (Zarate Gonzales, 2024). This aligns with the core content for English in the National Curriculum, which mentions, “Stories and other fiction for children and adolescents, including in spoken or dramatised form.” (Skolverket, 2022). While TTRPGs are not explicitly mentioned, the mentions of dramatised form can be applied to TTRPGs. The core function in TTRPGs is about storytelling and imagination, which many, if not all, encounter at some point in their lives. According to Read (2007), children have an innate capacity for imaginative play and fantasy. Most EFL students already recognize storytelling patterns from their first language. This can help provide an enjoyable context that engages children’s imagination, interest, and attention when learning a new language as well as developing different skills like rhythm, grammar, intonation, and structure. Incorporating storytelling in the classroom can help foster social skills that are vital for language usage as well as keeping in line with the National Curriculum, such as turn-taking and respect for others, collaboration, and active listening (Read, 2007).

TTRPGs have been researched to have an impact on players’ language development as well as different learning aspects. They foster critical thinking skills, problem-solving, interaction in an almost-natural setting, creativity, and most of all, an element of fun without knowing you are learning something (Mohd Lazim et al., 2024). Although TTRPGs are commonly used for leisure in one’s free time, they can be powerful tools for EE language learning. Not only that, but the usage of TTRPGs in a school setting has also been researched to be

beneficial for language learning. For instance, Torres-Rodríguez & Martines-Grenada (2022) did a methodological study about using TTRPGs as task-based activities for fostering L2 English learning at a rural school in Colombia. They found that TTRPGs helped facilitate verbal communication through scaffolding processes, collaborative work, language experimentation, and learning awareness. The games helped students produce meaningful, pragmatic language and provided a safe, gamified environment for language experimentation, fostering social interaction, peer collaboration, and confidence (Torres-Rodríguez & Martines-Grenada, 2022).

2. Aim and Research Questions

This project aims to investigate different perspectives on how Tabletop Role-Playing Games (TTRPGs) can support English language learning among young EFL learners in extracurricular settings, with a specific focus on communication skills and learner engagement. We aim to gain insight into game masters and pupils' perceptions and experience of playing TTRPGs, as well as whether they believe TTRPGs can be implemented in a classroom setting for pupils in primary school years 4-6.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How can TTRPGs help facilitate language learning skills and willingness to communicate outside of school?
2. What strategies do game masters employ to facilitate English language learning during TTRPG sessions with young EFL learners?
3. What are the perceived benefits and challenges of using TTRPGs in a classroom setting and as EE?

3. Background

This chapter will give an overview of the terminology, learning theories, and previous research used during our study.

3.1 Terminology

The following terms that will be explained are English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Extramural English (EE), Task-based Learning, Gamification/game-based education, and Tabletop Role-Playing Games (TTRPGs).

3.1.1 English as a Foreign Language

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to English learning in a country where it is not the primary language, such as English education in Swedish schools (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). There are more terms within the same categories, such as L1 and L2 or English as a Second Language (ESL); however, these will not be mentioned further, as the focus will be on EFL. Often, EFL learning focuses mainly on structured English in a classroom with reading, grammar, writing, and speaking, which is limited by real-world experience. EFL students often receive limited exposure to different types of native, authentic English, and their motivation is often low, as EFL students deem that English is not needed outside the classroom (Gonzales Zarate, 2024; Torres-Rodríguez & Martínez-Granada, 2022; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). When learning our first language, we acquire it naturally from our surroundings and reach fluency in the early years (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). On the other hand, learning a foreign language often happens later in life and through a more structured learning process. When we learn a second or foreign language, our first language often influences the linguistic use of the new language (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

3.1.2 Extramural English

Extramural English (EE) refers to all exposure to and usage of the English language that occurs outside of formal settings. The term highlights how learners interact with English in their everyday lives through activities such as gaming, watching television, listening to music, and engaging with online content. Unlike learning in the classroom, EE is often incidental. Meaning that the language acquisition happens as learners focus on other activities that bring joy, such as gaming or speaking to friends (Jensen, 2017).

A key characteristic of EE is that it provides frequent and authentic exposure to English, often in a more engaging and personally meaningful context than what the students experience in the classroom. Research has shown that activities such as gaming, reading, and watching subtitled television contribute to vocabulary acquisition and proficiency in foreign languages (Jensen, 2017). The effectiveness of EE depends on factors such as frequency and type of exposure, with interactive activities like gaming being especially beneficial. Digital games, for example, immerse players in language-rich environments where they must process and produce English in real time (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012).

3.1.3 Task-Based Learning

Task-based learning is an instructional approach that emphasizes language learning through the completion of meaningful tasks. Unlike common language learning that focuses on grammar and vocabulary separately, task-based learning engages students in authentic communication that requires them to use the target language to achieve specific objectives (Pársson, 2024; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Torres-Rodrigues and Martines-Grenada (2022) wrote about how tasked-based learning can be effective for speaking skills. For example, task-based learning prioritises real-world language use where students communicate to solve problems or complete activities rather than simply memorizing vocabulary and grammar. It also encourages collaboration and interaction in groups, fostering both language and social skills.

3.1.4 Gamification and Game-Based Education

The usage of games or game-like strategies in education has gained attention from researchers and educators, as games have always been highly popular among students. Game-based learning is an educational strategy in which different games, all from card games to online multiplayer games, are used in the classroom to achieve specific learning outcomes (Gonzales Zarate, 2024). Gamification is defined as the application and adaptation of game design elements, mechanics, and principles from different games in the classroom (Torres-Rodríguez & Martínez-Granada, 2022). Gamification includes elements such as achievement systems, experience points, avatars, leaderboards, etc., to promote learning and problem-solving as well as increase student motivation and engagement (Cassie, 2016). Both approaches do not only focus on digital games, as board and card games are also included. The aim of a gamified and game-based classroom is to invite familiarity and enjoyment to the

lessons. However, despite many positive findings, there have also been criticisms emerging (Gonzales Zarate, 2024; Pálsson, 2024; Torres-Rodríguez & Martínez-Granada, 2022; Cassie, 2016). Researchers have noted that some gamification research shows limited impact on actual grades and can risk exploitation of motivation from the rewards that become quick dopamine kicks instead of actual motivation to learn. Another risk is that a gamified or game-based classroom could oversimplify the learning material and fail to capture the depth of what the students should learn (Hung, 2017).

Gamification and game-based education are two concepts that are often used interchangeably. However, these are not to be confused with one another. Game-based education focuses on finding specific games that already exist to integrate them directly into the curriculum. Meanwhile, gamification is about modification and the integration of game mechanics into a classroom setting. Put differently, in gamification the games themselves are not the point of the instruction or the end goal of the learning, but simply one element among many (Cassie, 2016). TTRPGs can be applied to both gamification as well as game-based education.

3.1.5 Tabletop Role-Playing Games

Tabletop Role-Playing Games (TTRPGs) are a collaborative storytelling activity where players create fictional roles and interact in a shared narrative setting. Unlike other board games, TTRPGs emphasize creativity, improvisation, and teamwork. Players create their own characters with unique abilities, which they then use to navigate fictional scenarios led by a Game Master (GM). The GM acts as the narrator, guiding the story and interpreting rules while players make decisions that shape the outcome. TTRPGs use mechanics like dice rolls and statistics to resolve challenges, adding an element of chance and strategy. These games often draw on fantasy, science-fiction, or historical settings that immerse the players in rich, detailed worlds. Dungeons & Dragons is the most famous example of a TTRPG (Torres-Rodríguez & Martines-Grenada, 2022).

TTRPGs provide more than just entertainment, they are also powerful tools for language and skill development. TTRPGs have the ability to help enhance communication, problem-solving, and teamwork skills, which makes them valuable in an educational setting (Gonzales Zarate, 2024). The improvisational and interactive nature of TTRPGs encourage players to

think critically, adapt to new challenges and engage in meaningful social interactions. In language learning, TTRPGs have been successfully integrated into classrooms to improve students' fluency, confidence, and interpersonal skills. By immersing learners in dynamic role-playing scenarios, TTRPGs create a safe and engaging space for practicing real-world conversations (da Rocha, 2018). Additionally, it is important to mention that TTRPGs work best in small groups in order to avoid disciplinary as well as social difficulties (Torres-Rodríguez & Martines-Grenada, 2022).

3.2 Learning Theories

This section explains various theories relevant to our study. The theories that will be covered are socio-cultural learning, behaviourism, and critical pedagogy.

3.2.1 Socio-Cultural Learning

One major learning theory within pedagogy today is socio-cultural learning. This learning theory, conceptualised by Vygotsky in the early 1900s, sees learning as a constant process and is interested in how people develop abilities that are cultural in nature, such as problem-solving, writing, abstract reasoning, reading, etcetera (Säljö, 2020). Language is deemed a mediating tool for transferring knowledge, a way for us to analyze the world in order to deepen our understanding of it. Socio-cultural theory suggests that learning is not an isolated process but instead occurs through engagement with others (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Within the theory of socio-cultural learning perspective, different ideas can be found, such as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding (Säljö, 2020). The principle of ZPD is that learning is always within a person's reach, but there is a gap between what they can achieve by themselves and what they can learn with the guidance of someone more knowledgeable about the specific subject (Säljö, 2020). The learner relies heavily on the support of a teacher or classmate at the start, and as the learner gets closer to reaching the intended knowledge, the support gradually gets removed. This form of support is called scaffolding. The purpose of scaffolding is to support the learner before they master the knowledge and can accumulate it on their own (Säljö, 2020).

TTRPGs are heavily communicative in nature between players and GMs as they describe their actions or surroundings and solve problems together. The games revolve around

problem-solving and improvised dialogue, creating an environment for discussion. The players and GMs can also rely on each other and ask for help or clarifications. Therefore, TTRPGs are closely related to a socio-cultural learning approach (Gonzales Zarate, 2024).

3.2.2 Behaviourism

Behaviourism was the most prevalent learning theory in schools during the 20th century in Sweden (Säljö, 2020). This learning theory suggests that learning occurs through conditioning, which is when observed behaviours become associated with consequences based on external stimuli in order to shape behaviour into a desired learning outcome (Säljö, 2020). A common example of this is reinforcements or punishments, such as grades as a reinforcement to reward desired behaviour or detention as a punishment to discourage a certain behaviour or discipline (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

The majority of all games and gamified systems have rules as well as reward and punishment systems for the players. In TTRPGs specifically, the games follow a strict set of rules for both GM and players for mechanics with character creation and dice rolling. The players encounter challenges provided by the GM and are then rewarded with in-game loot if they succeed, or their characters receive penalties on failures. The characters level up and become more powerful, which in turn makes them able to take on bigger foes or handle more difficult problems. This can be connected to the conditioning aspects of behaviourism, where these game rewards are used to reinforce student motivation and learning (Cassie, 2016).

3.2.3 Critical Pedagogy

This theory is a form of educational approach that encourages and highlights the importance of questioning and critical thinking about different social injustices and inequalities (Boronski, 2022). Critical pedagogy promotes students to take ownership of their own education and opens up for reflection and dialogue between peers. Through this theory, education is not merely transferring knowledge from one person to another but about challenging why certain aspects of our social lives are the way they are in order to engage the students to become active citizens for social justice (Boronski, 2022).

TTRPGs and many other games are often created in a way that the players encounter different social issues that lead to critical pedagogy discussions among the players and how

they wish to solve these fantasy yet almost real-life inequalities (Gonzales Zarate, 2024). Many TTRPGs draw parallels to real-life issues such as social hierarchy systems, abuse of power, racism, sexism, homophobia, or wars. It is important to note that these themes are not a necessity to all TTRPGs but can be common occurrences in most (Gonzales Zarate, 2024).

3.3 Curriculum Justification

The Swedish national curriculum for English emphasizes the development of students' communicative abilities in both spoken and written forms (Skolverket, 2024). This includes understanding and interpreting language, expressing yourself in different contexts, and adapting your language to various purposes, listeners, and readers. In line with these goals, the curriculum promotes student-centered and interdisciplinary learning approaches. This supports the use of TTRPGs as a pedagogical tool for language development since TTRPGs are learner-centered within the players. It also encourages “learning by discovery” methods as well as more pupil-centered methods, topic-based, and interdisciplinary teaching. Furthermore, the curriculum explicitly supports playful learning where drama is included as a recommended teaching activity for English in grades 4-6 (Skolverket, 2024). By incorporating TTRPGs into the language classroom, teachers can create a dynamic, student-driven environment that fosters discovery-based learning, interdisciplinary connections, and meaningful language use in both written and spoken form (Da Rocha, 2018). TTRPGs are not explicitly mentioned in the National Curriculum, which may lead to teachers struggling to justify their use as a legitimate teaching method or provide difficulty with how to assess such activities. However, there is room for interpretation by the teachers to align curriculum goals with TTRPGs.

3.4 Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of research regarding the usage of TTRPGs in learning English, both as EE and in schools. The main themes are qualitative research conducted by other teachers or teacher students about the consequences and perception of students using TTRPGs.

3.4.1 Gamification/Game-based Learning and Extramural English

The study “Gaming as Extramural English L2 Learning and L2 Proficiency Among Young Learners” by Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012) explores the connection between digital gaming

and English proficiency among Swedish students aged 11-12. It examines how extramural English activities impact L2 development, with a focus on the types of games played and the frequency of gaming. The findings indicate a strong correlation between gaming and language proficiency. Students who played games frequently (five or more hours per week) performed better on vocabulary, reading, and listening comprehension tests compared to those who played less or not at all.

A key aspect of Sylvén and Sundqvist's (2012) study is the gender differences observed in gaming habits and language outcomes of their sample population. The boys generally played more than girls and preferred multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) such as World of Warcraft, which involve interaction, collaboration and exposure to English in a rich linguistic environment. The girls, on the other hand, preferred single-player simulation games like The Sims, which provide less opportunity for communication and language development. As a result, the boys outperformed the girls in vocabulary tests, likely due to the increased linguistic engagement provided by their preferred games. Therefore, the study also highlights the importance of game type in language acquisition. MMORPGs encourage social interaction, scaffolding, and problem-solving, all of which align with second language acquisition theories that emphasize the role of comprehensible input and interaction (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012).

From an educational perspective, Sylvén and Sundqvist's (2012) study brings forward the positives of integrating elements of game-based learning into language education. Teachers can use students' interest in gaming to enhance motivation and language acquisition, particularly by encouraging both boys and girls to engage in interactive, language-rich gaming experiences. In conclusion, digital gaming, and especially MMORPGs appears to be a valuable extramural English learning tool that supports vocabulary growth and overall L2 proficiency. The study suggests that frequent gaming can contribute to language development, reinforcing the idea that interactive digital environments serve as informal yet effective spaces for learning English.

The study "Gaming as an English Language Learning Resource among Young Children in Denmark" by Signe Hannibal Jensen (2017) also explores the role of extramural English in language learning for young learners. The study focuses specifically on digital gaming and its

impact on English vocabulary acquisition. Jensen examined 107 children aged 8-10 who had received few structured English lessons, only two lessons a week for one year. Data on their EE activities were collected through self-reported diaries, and vocabulary proficiency was measured using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPTV-4). The findings showed that the most time-consuming EE activities were gaming, listening to music, and watching television. The boys in the study spent significantly more time gaming than the girls in the study (235 minutes per week vs. 47 minutes per week). The study also found a strong correlation between gaming and vocabulary scores, particularly for the boys. Games that included both oral and written English input were especially beneficial for vocabulary acquisition. Since boys engaged more with these types of games they were exposed to more English input. Many of these games featured spoken dialogue, in-game text, and even chat functions which provide repeated exposure to authentic English in a meaningful context. The research highlights that Danish children have extensive exposure to English outside of school due to the prevalence of English-language media. Despite their limited formal English lessons, many children develop English skills through these EE activities. This supports the idea that incidental learning plays a key role in second language acquisition.

Jensen's (2017) study suggests that different types of games provide varying levels of linguistic input, with those featuring both written and spoken English offering the richest learning opportunities. From an educational perspective, the study reinforces the potential of gaming as a valuable language learning tool for young learners. It suggests that educators should consider integrating game-based learning into the classroom and encourage both boys and girls to engage in interactive, language-rich gaming experiences.

3.4.2 Tabletop Role-Playing Games

Torres-Rodríguez and Martínez-Grenada (2022) studied using TTRPGs as task-based activities in an EFL classroom in a rural Colombian school where students struggled with speaking English fluently and spontaneously. Using action research methodology, they examined how TTRPGs could foster motivation and improve oral proficiency. The study involved 18 seventh-grade students and took place over a three-week period. Activities progressed from simple role-plays to full TTRPG sessions, in which students engaged in collaborative storytelling and problem-solving using English.

Findings from the study indicated that TTRPGs effectively improved students' engagement, confidence, and willingness to communicate in English. The role-playing mechanics provided a low-stress and immersive environment that allowed students to experiment with language use and interact more spontaneously. The gamified nature of the activities increased motivation and participation, while peer collaboration and scaffolding contributed to better communication strategies. However, the study also highlighted challenges, which included classroom management and the need for structured teacher guidance. The study concluded that TTRPGs are viable pedagogical tools for enhancing oral EFL communication, particularly when combined with a task-based approach. Key recommendations included careful implementation, small group sizes, and active teacher participation to maximise learning. The study provides valuable insights into how gamification and interactive storytelling can make language learning more engaging and effective for students who struggle with oral proficiency (Torres-Rodríguez and Martínez-Grenada, 2022).

3.4.3 Student's Perception of TTRPGs

José Luis Zárate González wrote the research thesis "Students' perceptions about using tabletop role-playing games as a game-based learning activity to practice English speaking skills" (2024). His work details a qualitative study done on EFL learners in Mexico with the objective of exploring their frequency and perception of using TTRPGs to practice English speaking skills (Zarate Gonzales, 2024). The data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with four students aged 21-25 who had previously engaged with TTRPGs to practice their English-speaking skills in class (Zarate Gonzales, 2024).

When summarising the interview answers, the writer explains that the most frequent TTRPG the players would play was *Dungeons & Dragons*, and the majority of the players would play TTRPGs once a week in their free time where a game would last three to five hours. Through the interviews, it was revealed that all four participants had a unanimous positive outlook on the usage of TTRPGs to practice English skills. All the participants shared that TTRPGs had aided them in learning vocabulary, and a majority of them stated they improved speaking fluency and helped overcome fear and nervousness. Not only that, but some of the participants also expressed that TTRPGs had helped them in practicing pronunciation and creating collaboration (Zarate Gonzales, 2024). This suggests that incorporating TTRPGs in a classroom setting can have positive impacts on the player's EFL development.

3.4.4 Learning Language through Role-playing

“Playing Pretend, Learning for Real – Learning English Through Role Playing Games” by Jón Einarsson Þormar Pálsson (2024) investigates the use of role-playing games (RPGs), specifically Tabletop Role-Playing Games (TTRPGs), as a tool to facilitate English language learning with a focus on oral communication. The author defines concepts connected to English language learning that TTRPGs can help integrate, such as learning through play, real-world practice, incidental learning, and choice-based learning.

Through using a combination of theoretical and practical approaches, the study suggests that TTRPGs can be an effective tool for enhancing English communication abilities, notably in terms of promoting collaboration, social interactions, and critical thinking (Pálsson, 2024). The author further claims that the role-playing aspect of TTRPGs demands players to cooperate and interact in the target language, which facilitates cross-cultural understanding, mental preparation for social interactions, language adaptability, and developing teamwork. Due to TTRPGs assimilating playful use of language, it makes learning fun and relaxing where learners can learn independently and explore the English language (Pálsson, 2024).

4. Method

In this chapter we give an overview of the process for collecting and analysing the empirical data for our study. We describe here our research approach, participant sample, instruments, and ethical considerations used for the study.

4.1 Research Approach

Considering our research questions mainly regard people's own lived experiences with TTRPGs, we therefore felt that a qualitative research procedure would be the most optimal approach. A qualitative research, in contrast to a numerical quantitative one that wishes to measure and analyze statistical values, has the purpose of exploring experiences, meanings, and social phenomena (Brinkjaer & Marianne, 2020). If we instead aimed to measure the impact of using TTRPGs to develop students' English skills in a classroom or as EE, a quantitative approach with pre-and-post tests would be more suitable to use as a statistical comparison (Dunn, 2021). While we initially wanted to explore this area, we concluded that it would be too time-consuming and difficult to conduct during this time period, but we encourage future researchers to use this research approach.

We have chosen to collect our empirical data through semi-structured interviews, a research method used for qualitative research that gains deep insights into human experiences and behaviors (Brinkjaer & Marianne, 2020). By interviewing different individuals, we can get a glimpse into their narrative, thoughts, emotions, and experiences, which can be beneficial for exploring complex topics that are otherwise hard to quantify. However, interview studies do come with their challenges, such as generalization cannot be applied, transcribing, and analysing interviews can be time-consuming (Troost, 2010). Other ways to conduct qualitative research is for instance an observational study, where the researchers observe participants in a habitat and context to capture real-life phenomena and different behaviors first-hand (Brinkjaer & Marianne, 2020). An approach for an observational study connected to our research would be to observe a group playing a TTRPG and analyze their language use and communication strategies. Although this would be an interesting addition to our research and a great way to increase the validity of our results, we struggled with finding a sample group who were willing to be observed during a game session and thus did not proceed with said approach. Some previous research, as mentioned in the Background chapter, mentions gender as an interesting variable in the correlation between language development and different role-

playing games. However, we decided not to proceed with this theme but encourage future researchers to include this in their collection of data.

When searching for academic papers and other sources to read in order to gain insight and find claims to back up our field of research, we used both EBSCO host and Google Scholar as search tools. We tried using a combination of different keywords in our searches, such as “TTRPG or TRPG or tabletop role-playing games, primary school or elementary school, EFL or ESL or L2”. Through this, we found peer-reviewed academic papers and other literature to support our cause. We also went back to previous course literature books to gain sources for the various learning theories mentioned.

4.2 Instruments

The equipment used for our interviews was an encrypted recorder that we lent from the tech department at Malmo University. This ensured that the material from the interviews is encrypted and cannot be leaked, which further strengthens the integrity of the study (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). After recording the interviews, the sound files were later translated, as we conducted the interviews in Swedish, and transcribed to use for our study.

Our interview questions were semi-structured, meaning we had some written down but did not strictly stick to those, as during the interview other questions occurred through the conversation. We aspired to have open-ended questions, avoiding “yes or no” unless with a follow-up explanation question afterwards and unbiased questions to ensure a genuine response from our participants (Trost, 2010). The interview questions and overall interviews were conducted in Swedish due to the participants having Swedish as their first language. See appendix for interview questions.

4.3 The Participants

This study intended to research the use of TTRPGs in an extramural English setting and explore if it can be applied into a school setting. We interviewed experienced GMs and players that participate in TTRPGs in their spare time. Through the interviews, we hoped to gain different perspectives as to how different people experience TTRPGs as an English language learning approach. Our primary sample method was convenience sampling, which

includes collecting sample participants due to easy accessibility to reduce resources such as economy, logistics, and time (Trost, 2010).

Through reaching out to different game communities around our area, we get a hold of one experienced GM that one of the writers knew personally as well as were contacted by two high school teachers who have been GMs for many years and have used TTRPGs with students in their English classes. The GMs received the interview questions the day before the scheduled interview in order to prepare them for the questions. This is in order to make sure not only that the participants are prepared, but also making sure they are comfortable and can get a say in what we plan on asking (Forskningsrådet, 2017). All GMs started playing TTRPGs in early years of their lives and have continuously been a part of the community with playing and GMing, both in private with friends and at local TTRPGs associations.

We initially sought out to find and include primary school students between ages 10-12 to interview, as these are our target age group for our line of teaching. However, we had to include older players in our research as it proved too difficult finding such young players. By asking the different GMs for players that might wish to participate in our study, as well as asking teachers if they have any students who might wish to participate, we gathered six players of varying ages between 17-20. The participants were selected as a sample due to their experience playing TTRPGs in English in their free time. See tables for participant information, Table 1 describes the GMs and Table 2 showcases the players.

Table 1: GM Participants.

GMs	Occupation	Years experience with TTRPGs	Date of conducted interview
GM. 1	Parish Educator	18 Years	05 February 2025
GM. 2	High School Teacher in English	25 Years	12 February 2025
GM. 3	High School Teacher in English and History	10 Years	13 February 2025

Table 2: Player Participants.

Player	Age	Years Experience with TTRPGs	Date of conducted interview
Player 1	20 Years Old	7 Years	10 February 2025
Player 2	18 Years Old	5 Years	12 February 2025
Player 3	18 Years Old	2 Years	12 February 2025
Player 4	17 Years Old	3 Years	12 February 2025
Player 5	18 Years Old	3 Years	13 February 2025
Player 6	17 Years Old	5 Years	13 February 2025

4.4 Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure the study’s academic integrity, it is essential to consider many ethical aspects and ensure the data is honest and transparent (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). Some ethical approaches to consider are to avoid unfairness in our selection of participants, ask neutral unbiased interview questions, and ensure that we protect participants' identities by anonymising them (Trost, 2010). The data and personal information will be kept in confidentiality between the two writers and later destroyed once the work has been approved.

Considering that our method of gathering information is interviews, we obtain different perspectives of how these people see language development in TTRPGs. However, it is important to keep in mind the possibility of lurking variables that affect the results and thus the internal validity of the data (Dunn, 2021). Lurking variables, also known as confounding variables, in this context means there might be other reasons than just TTRPGs that make the participants feel they do or do not develop their language skills that are “lurking” in the subconscious. They are difficult to find and include in this type of research, which is an important factor to keep in mind during the data collection process (Dunn, 2021). One of the GMs we interviewed, as well as two of the players, are people one of the writers personally know from before the study. This could possibly affect their motivation to participate or the validity of their responses in comparison to a stranger volunteering to be interviewed (Dunn, 2021).

All participants signed a copy of a consent form that was issued by Malmo University in collaboration with the Scientific Council's guide to good research practices (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). This consent form was further detailed by us writers with the framework of what the participants will be participating in (See appendix). The participants were also informed that they can choose to terminate their consent if they so wish at any time, as this is very important to mention according to research ethics (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). For the players that were minors under the age of 18, they got a different consent form for their legal guardians to sign as the legal guardians would need to consent for their children to participate in our study (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017).

5. Results

The aim for this study was to investigate different perspectives of using TTRPGs as EE and explore how these games can be adapted into a school setting for increased language learning and student participation. This chapter provides an overview of the data gathered via our interviews. The sub titles have been arranged into dividing up Game Masters and Players, with the further sub headings being language development, confidence and engagement, and perception of using TTRPGs in school.

5.1 Game Masters

As mentioned in the Methods chapter, we interviewed three GMs who have been a part of TTRPG communities for many years.

5.1.1 Language Development

All three GMs have experience with playing both Swedish and English TTRPGs, and mentioned that the majority of high-quality accessible TTRPGs are published in English. Through their own experiences, all GMs expressed noticing improvement in their own English language use as well as social interaction skills with the help of playing TTRPGs. GM 2 said they had a noticeable language development due to playing TTRPGs during their upbringing, which resulted in them getting higher grades in English during their school years. GM 1 stated they found a belonging with the role-playing community and a freedom to be another person through playing TTRPGs, which helped them develop certain communication and interaction skills in English. For GM 3 the aspect they felt they developed most was their creative freedom and communicative skills, as they love taking on different characters and play dialogue-heavy games.

When GM 1 would lead games in English, they found that while some players were comfortable and confident enough to speak English throughout the game, most of the players would speak Swedish to each other while the GM spoke to them in English. A lot of in-game handouts, such as notes or clues, are oftentimes in English and the players usually understand them or can explain to each other what the handout is saying. GM 1 mentioned the benefit of the possibility of code-switching between English and Swedish to ensure everyone understands, and compared playing with shy players to players who may be uncomfortable with playing in English. This GM suggested using simplified language while encouraging

risk-taking and the importance to put oneself out there as a GM. They also recommended being highly expressive, using gestures, and physical demonstrations rather than relying on rulebooks and the pre-written story when GMing as ways to possibly scaffold players who struggle with the language.

The other two GMs play games more frequently in English than Swedish. GM 2 helped students at the high school they work at to start the TTRPGs after school club and is very present there with the students. This GM teacher noticed that many students who play TTRPGs outside of school show noticeable improvements in their language skills in class, particularly with rich vocabulary and fluency. They also point out how the interest of TTRPGs have encouraged students to foster self-sufficing language skills because they simply want to. GM 3 reflected on how they believed that students who play TTRPGs foster discussion skills and natural authentic English, as many of their students would sometimes not notice when they speak English when interacting in class.

When asked whether the GMs believe that TTRPGs can be used for younger students in ages 10-12, all answered yes. GM 3 has previously played TTRPGs in English with children of ages nine and older in their free time. They stated that the children adapt well as long as the themes are age appropriate, and they have rarely come across problems using English with the younger children. According to this GM, children are in some ways better than adults at engaging with TTRPGs as they find it easier to immerse themselves in the imaginative aspects of the game. The children GM 3 have played with often switch between Swedish and English, but English is the default language during gaming sessions. GM 2 and GM 1 also believe TTRPGs could be successfully adapted for younger students by simplifying mechanics and focusing on puzzles rather than combat. Furthermore, GM 2 mentioned that many young students know English from an early age as they encounter it online and through social media. Thus, they deem that a TTRPG would not be too challenging as long as it is adapted to their skills and necessary scaffolding is implemented.

5.1.2 Confidence and Engagement

GM 1 pointed out how one of the most important aspects of being a GM is creating a welcoming environment for players who may be too nervous to speak. It requires the GM to be aware of the group dynamics, who is leading, who is following, and who is being quiet.

The GM spoke about how they would create situations where they could guide the quieter players to participate. For instance, the GM would create a scenario in-game where a more vocal and a more quiet players' characters separated from the group to go on a side-quest together. In the GM's experience, they found that once a hesitant player speaks for the first time they were more likely to continue engaging in English. It may take several sessions before they feel comfortable, as many players start off shy and hesitant but gradually find their voice. The key is to be consistent, patient, and being fully present in the game according to the GM.

GM 3 noticed that the students who play TTRPGs in their free time would usually be a bit more quiet and shy in general in school, but during the classroom TTRPGs they interacted and spoke more as they felt familiar with the material. However, this GM also stressed that social structures in the classroom and the GMs expectations on the players could affect student participation drastically, even if they have played TTRPGs many times before. GM 3 emphasizes that GMs should not expect players to express themselves as fluently as their characters might be expected to do in-game. Instead, they should assess what players are trying to say rather than focusing strictly on accuracy. If a player is nervous by nature and feels punished for speaking from, for instance, the GM correcting their grammar or other players mocking their pronunciation, they might withdraw and stop participating.

GM 2 stated that their students who play TTRPGs are more comfortable expressing themselves in English during class. This GM did not mention examples from playing TTRPGs as EE, but brought up an example of a group of students during their English TTRPG class. These students were very shy and had a hard time making friends, both in and outside of school. During the TTRPG English lessons, the GM decided to put these students in the same group which resulted in them creating bonds and having fun with each other. GM 2 was later told that these students formed a friend group and hung out in their free time, which also led to said students interacting and engaging more in school and daring to take more space in other social gatherings. The TTRPG had directly impacted these students' social confidence positively.

5.1.3 Perception of Using TTRPGs in School

Although GM 1 has not used TTRPGs in a classroom with students, they firmly believe it is doable and encourages teachers to try it. They stated small groups of four to six students would be ideal to ensure that everyone gets time in the spotlight. Fantasy settings work particularly well for beginners as they provide a rich and immersive world without requiring previous gaming experience. The GM also advocates for a game system that uses few rules which allows the players to focus on language, collaboration, and storytelling rather than complex gaming mechanics.

Meanwhile, both GM 2 and 3 have used TTRPGs in their educational format and explained how their games worked. GM 2 has run a homebrew (self-created) TTRPG in their English classes with 2nd year high school students for the past ten years. When describing the game, GM 2 divides the class into groups of six and would start with a few “Session Zero” lessons to prepare the students and explain how the game mechanics work by showing explanatory videos and reading texts. The players would then create their characters, character backgrounds and stats, and buy different items for their characters which functioned as indirect glossary learning. Gameplay extended over several lessons with the respective groups as the other classmates worked on separate exercises. The games have been so engaging that some students have requested additional sessions outside of class. With GM 3, they used a simplified TTRPG in the classroom once five years ago with 24 students which they divided into groups of six students each. During a period of two weeks, the student groups came to class one group at a time to play the game. The students enjoy it and have mentioned that experience as a standout moment in their education years later after graduating.

Both GM 2 and 3 expressed positive results on students’ language skills from using TTRPGs in the classroom. They noted an increase in interaction between the students, more comfort in their use of the English language, and a heightened confidence to dare speaking in the classroom. GM 2 also highlighted the relationship building between them and their students through the usage of TTRPGs. This teacher GM would incorporate different accents, intonation, and tempo with characters the students would encounter, which the teacher noticed had a positive effect on the development of the students’ interaction and listening

skills. GM 3 found that the enjoyment of the TTRPG they played with their students encouraged the students to discuss more and practice descriptive speaking.

When asked the teacher GMs about their approach to grading the students during the TTRPGs, both mentioned similar procedures. GM 3 did not assign grades to the game itself but included it in the overall assessment. They explained that grading could feel like a punishment for shy or weak students if they get a low grade, which could discourage them from participating in future exercises. Instead, GM 3 focused on giving the students space for self-reflection and providing constructive feedback during the process. GM 2 also did not grade the game directly but took it into consideration for the overall assessment. However, this GM would inform the students that they were being assessed during the game progression. This teacher GM prioritized the student's interaction and listening skills when assessing, and found grading speaking skills difficult due to the commonly informal nature of dialogue. Something that perplexed GM 2 was that the group of shy students previously mentioned would receive high marks in English writing skills but barely pass in oral exercises. This, the teacher GM later realised after the TTRPG experience, was due to them being too scared to speak. Now, the students have dared to speak more during other classroom exercises and thus been able to receive higher grades.

While the response towards using TTRPGs in a classroom setting was predominantly positive, the GMs also acknowledged challenges. The most significant obstacle was time, as sessions usually require multiple hours making it difficult to fit into a standard lesson planning. Group dynamics must also be carefully managed, ensuring that students are mixed based on learning needs. Some students dominate conversations while quieter ones may struggle to participate, hence the teacher must actively balance speaking opportunities. GM 3 acknowledged this, and to address the issue they ensure that all characters have a role in the story. In-game conflicts are minimized by emphasizing teamwork and incorporating humor to keep the environment constructive. In a school setting, a teacher GM can also directly encourage quiet students to speak.

5.2 The Players

The players, as described in our Methods chapter, are of varying age and have various experiences with playing TTRPGs in English during their free time.

5.2.1 Language Development

The majority of the players agreed that TTRPGs have significantly improved their English, especially their fluency when speaking and vocabulary. Unlike traditional learning methods that focus on memorization and structured exercises, TTRPGs provided them with an immersive, interactive environment where they had to use their English dynamically. This natural exposure to the language combined with the necessity of effective communication in the game allowed them to improve their skills in a way that felt engaging rather than forced. For Player 2, who started playing TTRPGs with poor English skills, playing with native English speakers created an environment where they were constantly hearing and using the language in real conversations. This forced them to think in English, adapt to the different speaking styles and gradually became more comfortable expressing themselves without reverting to Swedish. As a result, their English fluency improved significantly over time.

Similarly they found that their vocabulary improved. Player 1 found that describing actions, environments, and appearances in English expanded their vocabulary. Instead of learning words through repetitive tasks they picked them up naturally through using them, making it easier to retain and apply them. Player 4 whose English was already fairly strong but lacked natural flow initially spoke in a stiff and overly formal manner. However, through TTRPGs they became more accustomed to casual and spontaneous conversation. Player 6 also noticed improvements in their ability to describe things. The necessity of quickly reacting and expressing ideas in-game helped them develop the skill of paraphrasing and finding alternative ways to communicate when they did not know a specific word.

Vocabulary growth was a common experience among the players we interviewed regardless of how they perceived their English when they started playing. Player 5 who stated that they already had strong English skills when they started playing still found that they picked up new vocabulary and phrases from TTRPGs. Player 3 found that, despite being bilingual, they also learned new vocabulary and expressions through playing. Player 4 particularly highlighted how learning in-game terminology and expressions helped them develop a richer vocabulary. Meanwhile, Player 1 and Player 2 found that being exposed to new words in context made it easier to remember and learn how to use them.

Several of the players also mentioned strategies they used when they struggled to understand or find the right words when playing TTRPGs in English. Player 2 and Player 4 said that when they encountered unfamiliar words, they either asked for an explanation or tried to explain in other words if they themselves couldn't find the right words. Player 5 had seen other players do the same thing and noted how those players usually remembered and started the words they had encountered during the game. Player 6 found that rephrasing and simplifying sentences was an effective way to keep the conversation flowing.

5.2.2 Confidence and Engagement

The players mentioned how the group dynamic of TTRPGs helped ease the anxiety of speaking English. Player 1 pointed out that speaking as a part of a role-playing group felt less intimidating than giving a presentation at school. Instead of standing in front of the class and speaking alone, the players were engaged in conversation with each other which made it easier to practice speaking English without fearing mistakes. Player 5 noted that they had experienced how when another player wasn't confident in their English skills the other players would often support them by explaining words or encouraging them to continue.

Many of the players therefore found that playing TTRPGs helped them become more confident in speaking English, and some even found that they had become more confident in social interactions in general. Player 1 noticed that playing TTRPGs in English made them feel more comfortable using the language over time. Since conversations happened naturally within the game they became less worried about making mistakes. Player 2 shared a similar experience, they felt their English was weak at first, but the more they played the more comfortable they became. They also mentioned that after a summer break spent playing TTRPGs online, their friends noticed a huge improvement on their English fluency and confidence. Player 2 also emphasizes how it is hard to not make mistakes when playing TTRPGs, you simply just have to move along and accept what happens. For Player 6, TTRPGs were a way to "fake confidence" when speaking English which eventually turned into real confidence. They explained that at first they didn't know how to role-play properly and it felt awkward, but over time they learned to let go of that discomfort. Player 5 also found that playing TTRPGs in a supportive environment, especially online or with friends, made it easier to build confidence. They noted that since everyone was engaged in the story

there was less pressure on any one person, creating a safe space to practice speaking without fear of judgement.

Some of the players also found benefits beyond just speaking English. Player 4 explained how they used to feel uncomfortable in social interaction with strangers. However, through TTRPGs they gradually became more comfortable engaging with others both inside and outside of the games. Player 3 had a similar experience, while TTRPGs didn't necessarily make them more confident to speak up in class, it did help them become more comfortable talking to their classmates, forming friendships, and socializing in general.

5.2.3 Perception of Using TTRPGs in School

The players had mixed opinions on using TTRPGs in an educational setting, seeing great potential but also certain challenges. Many believed TTRPGs could be an effective way to get students to speak English while making learning more engaging. Player 1 noted that simply telling students to “speak English” in a regular classroom setting might not work because they can easily switch back to their native language. However, role-playing as characters would require them to stay in character and use English making it a more immersive and structured way to practice. Player 2 shared similar views, saying that learning happens more easily when something is fun and if students enjoy the game they would naturally use English more.

Player 4 saw additional benefits beyond language learning, suggesting that role-playing could help shy students participate more and create a new kind of social dynamic in the classroom. They believed it could be more engaging than traditional group discussions as students would be interacting through their characters rather than speaking as themselves. Player 6 also thought it could work well in schools, especially since many students already learn English through games and online interactions making TTRPGs a familiar format.

However, some players were concerned about practical issues in a school setting. Player 2 and Player 3 pointed out that not all students would be comfortable with role-playing. Some might find it embarrassing or unwilling to participate and if one student refused others might follow, making it difficult to run the activity. Player 5 doubted whether their primary school class would have taken role-playing seriously. They believed that some students would have

seen it as childish or disruptive rather than educational. Another challenge mentioned was the difficulty of organizing and managing a role-playing session in a classroom. Player 1 and Player 6 noted that TTRPGs take time to set up and play while lessons are often short which makes it difficult to fit a full game into a lesson. Player 5 suggested that the teacher should act as the GM to ensure structure as they were worried that students as GMs might struggle to keep the game on track. Player 3 added that assessing students' language skills through TTRPGs might be challenging for teachers since gameplay can be unpredictable.

Despite these concerns most players agreed that TTRPGs could be a useful tool for learning English if adapted properly. Player 6 compared it to other interactive learning methods, like using Minecraft in education, and saw the potential for TTRPGs to improve students' communication and critical thinking skills. Player 4 believed that if the activity was well-structured it could provide a fun alternative to traditional classroom exercises. Some players, like Player 2, thought it could work well as an optional activity rather than a mandatory part in the classroom to allow interested students to participate while giving others different learning options.

6. Discussion

In the following chapter, we discuss our findings from the results in correlation with previously mentioned theories and research. This chapter is divided in the following sub-categories: language development, confidence and participation, and perception of using TTRPGs in school.

6.1 Extramural English Language Development

The GMs and Players interviewed all had positive notes on TTRPGs' ability to develop English language skills. All Players agreed that they experience playing TTRPGs in English as relaxed and fun atmospheres. Torres-Rodriguez and Martínez-Granada's (2022) study also found that TTRPGs provided an environment that was low-stress and immersive which gave the players the opportunity to experiment with their English as the gamified setting increased their motivation and participation. Making learning fun is something that GM 3 and Player 2 emphasized in their interview, stating that students are far more likely to engage with English when they enjoy the activity. They explained that traditional speaking exercises in the classroom often fail to inspire students to speak and can feel very intimidating, whereas TTRPGs allow them to use English without fear of being teased. This aligns with previous mentioned studies who found that students perceive TTRPGs to have helped them practice vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency in an enjoyable and meaningful way (Pálsson, 2024; Zárate Gonzáles, 2024; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012).

Many players also emphasized that because the TTRPGs were engaging they did not realise how much they were learning. Player 1 mentioned that during gameplay their focus was on the story and character interactions rather than the language itself, allowing them to absorb English more efficiently. This supports Sylvén and Sundqvist's (2012) argument that EE activities, such as gaming, offer a unique advantage because they expose learners to the language in a context that is both meaningful and enjoyable. The exposure to EFL through TTRPGs connects to key characteristics of EE, and research has shown how such EE activities can increase learners' motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and proficiency (Mohd Lazim et al., 2024; Pálsson, 2024; Jensen, 2017; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012).

Player 6 pointed out that since TTRPGs require constant communication it offers more continuous language exposure than short classroom exercises. GM 1 reinforced this idea,

stating that the length and depth of conversations in TTRPGs mimic real-life conversations more than the typical conversations in the classroom. This natural and extended language use is particularly beneficial for fluency development. Torres-Rodriguez and Martínez-Granada (2022) also highlighted that language learners who engage in interactive and meaningful conversations are more likely to develop an ability to communicate spontaneously, reducing hesitation, and improving overall proficiency. Player 2 supported this sentiment, explaining that after a few months of playing they began thinking in English rather than translating from Swedish. This significantly improved their ability to speak more fluently. The communicative and social aspects mentioned can be connected to a socio-cultural learning perspective (Säljö, 2020).

Furthermore, the unpredictable nature of TTRPGs forces players to adapt and respond in real time, mirroring the demands of real-world conversations. Player 4 mentioned learning how to describe actions and react to unexpected situations quickly, which helped them become more confident in their English abilities. This aligns with the principles of task-based learning, where language acquisition is enhanced through problem-solving and real-time communication (Pálsson, 2024; Torres-Rodríguez & Martínez-Granada, 2022; Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

While findings from both previous research and interviews strongly suggest the effectiveness of TTRPGs in learning English, there are also discrepancies between the two and challenges that should be acknowledged. One notable difference was found between the assumption that TTRPGs provide constant English interaction and the reality reported by some of the people we interviewed regarding the actual language use during the game sessions. While players generally interact in English throughout the role-playing aspects of the game, many of the players we interviewed noted how they would often fall back on their Swedish when conversing about game rules or when conversing amongst themselves. This suggests that while TTRPGs encourage extensive English use, the degree of immersion depends on the group dynamics and the players' comfort levels. This aligns with the study by Jensen (2017) which also highlights how EE exposure varies based on each person's individual engagement with the English language.

The GMs discussed different strategies to support players in maintaining the immersion while improving their language skills as well as minimizing in-game conflicts. GM 1 pushed how important it is for the GM to be a part of the game and observe the entire group. GM 3 explained that when players struggle to find the right words they help by rephrasing their sentence or offering synonyms to ensure they understand without disrupting the flow of the game. GM 2 suggested incorporating visual aids such as character sheets with English vocabulary related to role-playing so that players have references to help them describe actions or emotions more efficiently. These methods align with socio-cultural scaffolding techniques, where structured support helps learners gain confidence in their language use while still allowing for natural communication (Torres-Rodríguez & Martínez-Granada, 2022; Çulha, 2020; Säljö, 2020).

6.2 Confidence and Participation in EE

GM 1 pointed out during our interview that one of the most important aspects of being a GM is creating a welcoming environment for players who may be too nervous to speak. This ties together with one of the many things Da Rocha (2018) highlights in his work, which is that in order for students to effectively participate in activities they must first feel safe and cared for. GM 1 stated that in order to accomplish this, GMs leading TTRPGs are responsible for being aware of group dynamics among their players and noticing social trends, such as who is being quiet and who is leading the conversations.

All players reported that playing TTRPGs had a positive impact on their overall confidence and social skills. The overall perception was that through playing, both online and in person, the players developed social skills due to the open and engaging environment at the games. The majority stated they in turn would have more confidence to perform in school, some felt they did not but instead gained confidence to interact and form friendships with classmates. This can also be connected to GM 2 stating that the TTRPG in their classroom have helped both the GM and the players form friendships, build relationships, and overall bonds. These responses are similar to the findings in Zárte González study (2024), where three out of four interview participants stated that playing TTRPGs had helped them “abate fear and nervousness”.

Players also reported that role-playing allowed them to ease into English communication in a way that was different from traditional classroom activities. Player 1 noted that unlike school presentations where students are expected to speak alone in front of the class, TTRPGs create a collaborative environment where communication occurs naturally which reduces anxiety and increases participation. Player 5 observed how more confident players would support those who were hesitant either by helping them find the right words or by encouraging them to continue speaking either way. This form of scaffolding, as mentioned by Torres-Rodríguez & Martínez-Granada (2022), contributes to an overall increase in both confidence and fluency over time.

For some players this increased confidence followed them into the English classroom, and for some even extended beyond the use of the English language. Player 2 explained that after playing TTRPGs in English they found themselves speaking more freely and participating more actively in the classroom. This aligns with research on EE by Jensen (2017) which found that frequent engagement with English in informal settings turns into improved communication skills in academic and social contexts. Some of the players, like Player 3, also contributed their experience with playing TTRPGs to their confidence in making friends and talking to classmates outside of the classroom.

The Swedish curriculum (2024) states: “Language is the primary tool human beings use for thinking, communicating and learning. Knowing more than one language can provide new perspectives on the world, greater opportunities for interaction, and a better understanding of different ways of living” (p. 43). Speaking English enables students to express their thoughts, build confidence and engage in meaningful interactions in the classroom as well as outside of it. Developing speaking skills can also help students overcome common challenges like anxiety and fear of being judged as they gain fluency in speaking (Mohd Lazim et al., 2024; Torres-Rodríguez & Martines-Grenada, 2022; Çulha, 2020).

It is important to note that our findings are from qualitative interviews, meaning generalization cannot be applied and thus these experiences are not to be generalized across all TTRPG players. With that said, one can confidently state that there is a suggested hypothesis that there is a high possibility that players experience development in their social

skills and speaking confidence due to the communicative, open and inviting nature of TTRPGs.

6.3 Perceptions of using TTRPGs in School

The GMs, teachers, and players interviewed were predominantly positive towards the idea of using TTRPGs in school. A common theme was enjoyment, as it would make education fun and thus engage the students more than methods they usually encounter. Players, in particular, emphasized the importance of having an enjoyable education as it would increase student interaction with learning material. Motivation and enjoyable education is mentioned in Lightbown and Spadas' book (2013), where they highlight the link between positive attitudes and motivation with willingness to continue language learning. The authors also mention that teachers can positively affect students' motivation to learn in the classroom through different means such as making the environment places that students enjoy being in, have challenging yet manageable learning goals, a supportive atmosphere, and have interesting relevant content to the students' age and knowledge levels (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). The GMs all mentioned using simplified rule systems but clear learning goals to ensure maximized learning outcomes, which can be aligned with a behaviorist teaching approach (Cassie, 2016).

All players interviewed stated that they feel more motivated to study if the subject or task was fun and enjoyable. Although enjoyment in education is not explicitly mentioned in the National Curriculum, it does mention that the teaching in English shall "stimulate pupils' interest in languages and cultures, additionally convey the benefits of language skills" (Skolverket, 2022). The National curriculum does not explicitly mention the usage of TTRPGs either, providing difficulties in the form of lack of official recognition and assessment guidelines. However, since the national curriculum does not explicitly tell teachers how the education should proceed, there is room for interpretation and implementation from individual teachers to align TTRPGs with curriculum goals.

When asked about language development during TTRPGs, the GMs primarily noted improvements in fluency and confidence. This correlates well with the findings of Torres-Rodríguez and Martínez-Grenadas' study (2022) as well as Zárate González study (2024), as they came to a similar result in enhanced students' engagement, confidence, and willingness

to communicate in English. GM 2 also highlighted vocabulary training and listening skills, but that speaking skills was secondary. This was a fascinating observation, considering speaking is a large part of playing TTRPGs and what we writers would assume to be predominately graded. This the GM explained was due to the fact that the speaking in TTRPGs is often informal and it is hard to reach above the lowest passing grade on high school level. Other language skills such as pronunciation, writing, reading, and more were not mentioned by the teacher GMs. Considering they did not grade or assess the games from those specific learning outcomes, this is not surprising.

Despite positive responses, the interview participants also identified challenges with incorporating TTRPGs into classrooms. GM 2 and 3 mentioned time constraints as it is difficult to fit preparations and sessions into standard lesson planning. GMs and Players all mentioned group sizes, as large classes are hard to manage in a single game. When asked about ideal group sizes, the most common answer was four to six players plus one GM to ensure balanced participation and easier group management for the GM. Similar challenges were found in Torres-Rodríguez and Martínez-Grenadas' (2022) study, where classroom management issues and need for structured teacher guidance were mentioned. The teacher GMs also stressed that classroom management could prove difficult and that the teacher role comes first with the implementation of games. Cassie (2016) highlights the importance of putting the learning outcomes first and making sure there are clear structures to perform gamified activities without issues occurring. If the teachers do not have clear learning goals and are not highly invested in the game, there is a high risk that students will not actually learn what is intended through the game (Hung, 2017).

Some players also raised concerns that, despite the positive social effects TTRPGs had for them, introducing them into classrooms could lead to negative social dynamics. Player 2 noted that if one student with a lot of social influence in a class believes TTRPGs are “boring” or outright refuses, chances are more students will follow along. Player 1 also highlighted the likelihood that students might be grouped together with classmates they are not comfortable with, that one group member will speak all the time and won't let others speak during the game, or that conflicts could occur. These are common challenges with group assignments in schools that teachers handle and are hard to avoid. It is important to mix students in groups based on learning needs and speaking balances. This is partially why

GM 2 explained they predominately host their classroom TTRPG with 2nd year students as they want to get to know the students and their group dynamics beforehand. Da Rocha (2018) mentions that building social bonds is an important factor to ensure the TTRPG players feel welcomed, relaxed, and engaged.

Teachers can motivate students to speak more or let other group members speak by reminding the students of grading or from their general authority in the classroom. However, GM 3 cautioned that even though such strategies work for the high school students, there is a risk that it might have an opposite effect on younger students and can plant seeds of speaking anxiety. GM 3 noted that some of their shy students had experienced this when they were younger. Nonetheless, this GM does believe younger students might be more engaged with TTRPGs as young kids have easier to live in the fantasy and “play pretend”, which also correlates with Read (2007) theorising that young students have an innate imagination and inclination towards playful expressions.

Overall, the interviews revealed high confidence, drive, and interest in the possibility of using TTRPGs in a school environment for English language learning. The teacher GMs have observed an increase in student participation as well as prospered fluency and communicative skills. These observations correlate with Torres-Rodríguez and Martínez-Grenada (2022), Pálsson (2024), and Zarate Gonzales (2024), who also perceived that TTRPGs can effectively enhance students’ confidence, willingness to communicate, and engagement in English. This is due to the open, low-stress environment that allowed the students to experiment with the language in a spontaneous way. This implies that TTRPGs can be viable pedagogical tools for enhancing oral communication in EFL classrooms.

7. Conclusion

Our data shows that the usage of TTRPGs can have positive impacts on EE as well as be incorporated into English language education in Swedish primary schools. Through the enjoyment and welcoming environment of TTRPGs, the players have been more engaged with wanting to communicate in English and thus facilitated language skills such as fluency and interaction. Some strategies that were found by GMs to facilitate language learning were using body language, visual aid, language-switching, strategic grouping, and simpler vocabulary when describing. Through the interviews it was found that TTRPGs can be adapted into a school setting and have positive outcomes, but also have complications. According to the interview samples, some perceived benefits of implementing TTRPGs as a language learning tool were communication skills, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence. Possible challenges mentioned were time, group dynamics, and engaging unwilling students.

During this study one limitation that quickly became apparent was the lack of students aged 10-12 who played TTRPGs in English that we could find. Therefore, we decided to interview older students who had a few years experience playing TTRPGs and could give their experience on how their English had changed since they started playing. The TTRPG community is also a fairly small and generally quite tight knit community. This resulted in the fact that most of the people we interviewed knew each other. To enhance the validity for our study we would have liked to interview people from different TTRPG communities to widen the range of answers and perspectives. We suggest for future researchers to test TTRPGs in a classroom setting for younger years and conduct a qualitative and/or quantitative approach to see what game mechanics work and what language learning effects occur.

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9. Appendixes

9.1 Interview Questions

Spelledare frågor

Personliga frågor:

- Vad fick dig att komma in i rollspelsvärlden? Kommer du ihåg det första bordsrollspelet du spelade? Kommer du ihåg din första gång när du var spelledare? Hur var dem upplevelserna?
- Hur länge har du varit spelledare?
- Vad för rollspel är din favorit att vara spelledare för? Varför?
- Vad är det bästa med att vara rollspelsledare?

Rollspelsgrupp:

- Kan du berätta lite om [Redacted]? Vad är det för grupp? Hur länge har ni funnits?
- Vilka åldrar är de ungdomar/barn som kommer på spel-träffar? Vilken åldersgrupp är mest förekommande i dina spel?
- Vilka språk kör ni bordsrollspel på?
- Vad för spel engagerar/tycker ungdomar mest om vad du märker?
- Nu söker väl sig barn till er för att spela rollspel? Tror du det hade varit svårt att engagera barn som inte visat intresse för rollspel spel tidigare? I till exempel ett klassrum?
- Vad engagerar dig att hålla rollspel för ungdomar med just [Redacted]?

Språkutveckling:

- Har du varit spelledare i ett spel på ett språk som inte var deltagarnas förstaspråk? Ifall ja, vad för strategier använde du dig av för att stödja spelarens förståelse?
- Om spel hålls på andraspråk, kan vara vilka språk som helst som inte är spelarens första språk, vad för svårigheter upplever du spelaren stöter på i form av kommunikation och förståelse?
- Vilka aspekter av språket (t.ex. ordförråd, grammatik, berättande, social interaktion) tycker du utvecklas mest genom rollspel?
- Hur hanterar du situationer där en spelare har svårt att uttrycka sig eller delta språkligt i spelet?

- Vad för skillnad märker du på deltagarnas självförtroende/engagemang efter att ha spelat under en längre period?
- Har du märkt någon förändring i ungdomarnas språkförmåga genom deras deltagande i rollspel? I så fall, på vilket sätt?
- Har du några exempel på särskilt lyckade spelmoment där du sett tydliga språkliga framsteg hos en eller flera spelare?
- Finns det teman eller berättelser som fungerar särskilt bra i ett mångkulturellt sammanhang?
- Hur hanterar du situationer där barnen känner sig osäkra eller rädda för att göra fel?
- Några tips till lärare om de vill spela rollspel med sina elever

Spelare frågor

Personligt:

- Hur länge har du spelat rollspel?
- Varför började du spela rollspel?
- Hur spelar du rollspel? Online, i person?
- Vilket rollspel är din favorit att spela och varför?

Språkutveckling:

- Vad känner du att du utvecklar mest genom att spela rollspel i språkväg?
- När du kör ett rollspel på engelska, hur mycket pratar ni engelska vid bordet/med varandra?
- Vad förväntar du dig av din spelledare och spelare för att du ska känna dig trygg att vilja aktivt delta i rollspelet?
- Hur brukar du använda språket när du spelar rollspel? Märker du någon skillnad jämfört med hur du använder språket i andra sammanhang?
- Har du någon gång haft svårt att finna rätt ord när ni spelat på Engelska? Hur har du löst situationen?
- Tror du att rollspel på till exempel engelska kan minska ångesten av att säga fel ord?
- Hur viktigt tror du det är med språket för att sätta tonen eller atmosfären i ett rollspel?
- Har du någon gång spelat med någon annan som är osäker på sin engelska förmåga? Hur stöttar ni den personen? De andra spelarna/GM.
- Vad tycker du om idén att använda rollspel som en del av undervisningen i skolan?

- Hur tror du att rollspel kan hjälpa elever att utveckla sina språkfärdigheter? Finns det några specifika moment du tycker fungerar extra bra?
- Vilka utmaningar tror du att det skulle kunna finnas med att använda rollspel i skolan?
- Om du fick välja, hur skulle ett perfekt rollspel baserat lektionsupplägg se ut?
- Skulle du vilja att fler skolämnen använde rollspel i undervisningen? Varför eller varför inte?
- Finns det något i rollspelandet som har gjort dig mer självsäker i att prata och skriva på språket?
- Tänk tillbaka till när du gick i mellanstadiet. Hade du kunnat se dig själv spela rollspel i skolan på engelska lektioner då? Varför/varför inte?
- Mer självsäker i skolan efter EE?
- obekvämt ett spel

Lärare frågor

Personligt:

- Hur länge har du jobbat som lärare & hur länge har du jobbat på denna skolan?
- Vad fick dig att komma in i rollspelsvärlden?
- Hur länge har du spelat samt varit GM i rollspel?
- Vilket rollspel är din favorit att spela/spelleda? Varför?

Språkutveckling:

- Du har nämnt att du använder dig av rollspel i din undervisning. Vad inspirerade dig till detta? Vad är tanken/syftet bakom det?
- Hur ser din rollspels-influerade lektioner ut? Hur är det utformat i klassrummet?
- Använder du hela spel eller spel-influerade strategier (game-based or gamified)
- Vilka rollspel spel använder du? Varför valde du dessa?
- Hur presenterar du spelen för de elever som inte har någon erfarenhet eller eget intresse för dessa spel?
- Hur anser du att rollspel kan hjälpa elever att utveckla sina språkfärdigheter i engelska? Finns det några specifika moment du tycker fungerar extra bra?
- Vilka utmaningar ser du med att använda rollspel i skolan?
- Hur hanterar du konflikter eller liknande som uppstår under spelets gång?

- Hur uppmuntrar du dina elever till att använda hela meningar istället för korta svar?
- Upplever du att elever som tycker det är jobbigt att prata framför klassen tycker det är lättare att prata under rollspel aktiviteter?
- Vad för stöttningsstrategier erbjuder du dina elever i dessa rollspels-aktiviteter?
- Hur hanterar du elever som är väldigt aktiva jämfört med de elever som kanske är lite tystare och följer mer? T.ex. så alla får samma möjlighet att prata.
- Hur betygsätter du rollspels aktiviteterna i klassrummet? Vad tittar du på som lärare bedömningsmässigt?
- Har du någon gång låtit en elever vara GM? Hur var den erfarenheten i så fall?
- Om du fick välja, hur skulle ett perfekt rollspel baserat lektionsupplägg se ut?
- Vad skulle du ge för tips och råd till en lärarkollega som också hade velat använda sig av bordsrollspel i sin undervisning?
- Du undervisar på gymnasienivå, men utifrån dina erfarenheter och kunskaper, anser du att det är möjligt att utföra liknande rollspels-undervisning som du gör på grundskole-nivå? Varför/varför inte?
- Många elever spelar spel som bordsrollspel på sin fritid. Vad för påverkan ser du det har på elevernas engelska språkutveckling och hur de interagerar med varandra i skolan?



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Kontaktuppgifter till student (tfn nr, e-post):

0767884848, beatricealmen@gmail.com

.....
Studentens underskrift och namnförtydligande

Kontaktuppgifter till student (tfn nr, e-post):

076-8848902, juliae99@live.se

Ansvarig handledare på Malmö universitet: Sindija Franzetti

Kursansvarig på Malmö universitet: Malin Glimäng

Kontaktuppgifter Malmö universitet:

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Namnförtydligande:

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Malmö universitet kommer spara dina personuppgifter så länge de behövs för ovan angivet ändamål eller till dess att du återkallar ditt samtycke. Efter genomförd kurs/program kommer personuppgifterna att raderas. Malmö universitet kan dock i vissa fall bli skyldiga att arkivera och spara personuppgifter enligt Arkivlagen och Riksarkivets föreskrifter.

Dina rättigheter

Du har rätt att kontakta Malmö universitet för att 1) få information om vilka uppgifter Malmö universitet har om dig och 2) begära rättelse av dina uppgifter. Vidare, och under de förutsättningar som närmare anges i dataskyddslagstiftningen, har du rätt att 3) begära radering av dina uppgifter, 4) begära en överföring av dina uppgifter (dataportabilitet), eller 5) begära att Malmö universitet begränsar behandlingen av dina uppgifter. När Malmö universitet behandlar personuppgifter med stöd av ditt samtycke, har du rätt att när som helst återkalla ditt samtycke genom skriftligt meddelande till Malmö universitet. Du har rätt att inge klagomål om Malmö universitets behandling av dina personuppgifter genom att kontakta Datainspektionen, Box 8114, 104 20 Stockholm.



Samtycke

Härmed samtyckes till att nedanstående elev får medverka i ovan beskrivna studentprojekt, samt bekräftas att vi som vårdnadshavare har tagit del av informationen om Malmö universitets behandling av personuppgifter, och Vetenskapsrådets forskningsetiska principer, som säger att

- medverkan baseras på samtycke och detta samtycke kan när som helst återkallas. Alla som tillfrågas har alltså rätt att tacka nej till att delta, eller (om de först tackar ja) rätt att avbryta sin medverkan när som helst, utan några negativa konsekvenser.
- deltagarna kommer att avidentifieras i det färdiga arbetet.
- materialet kommer enbart att användas för aktuell studie och kommer att förstöras när denna är examinerad.¹

Elevens namn:

Skola:

Dagens datum:

.....
Namn, vårdnadshavare 1

.....
Namn, vårdnadshavare 2

Vid gemensam vårdnad måste båda vårdnadshavare underteckna blanketten.

¹ [God forskningssed 2017](#)