Self-Assessment of Academic Vocabulary among Swedish Upper Secondary School Pupils

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ABSTRACT

Academic vocabulary, an essential aspect of higher education, is becoming increasingly important for pupils to master as larger groups go on to university studies. There is however little research done on how well-prepared Swedish pupils deem themselves to be for the higher educational requirements in English as a foreign language and whether they are able to assess their vocabulary skills with any degree of accuracy. In this article, a mixed method approach was used to explore a group of pupils' (N=45) self-efficacy, and self-assessment with regards to vocabulary size and mastery using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) proficiency scales. A vocabulary test was then administered and the results were compared to their self-assessments. A few follow up interviews were conducted to get a deeper understanding the pupils' reasoning. The results indicate that high performing pupils consider themselves well prepared for university studies but tend to overestimate their vocabulary skills, indicating that Swedish pupils may not meet the curriculum's goals of having developed a realistic view of their language level and competence.

Keywords: Academic vocabulary, CEFR, EFL, self-assessment

INTRODUCTION

Swedish speakers of English consider themselves to be some of the best in the world, and many feel they fall short only to native speakers. According to Education First's English Proficiency Index (Education First, 2015), Sweden also ranks number one among the seventy queried countries.

However, during one of the author's teacher training period, pupils at the end of upper secondary school were asked to read a 7-page long novel by Lovecraft (1920), and a large number of pupils could not read past the first page despite having two weeks to work with the text. Pupils were instead reading novels geared to a pre-adolescence level and were thus simply not encountering enough challenging vocabulary. There is at the same time a growing concern among university teachers that Swedish university students do not possess the necessary skills required to deal with the more advanced language needed at higher learning institutions (Köhlmyr, 2013; Oscarson, 2016). Airey (2009) showed that Swedish university freshmen overrated their own abilities and that there was a significant divergence between the study practices of these students when they encountered English material compared to Swedish material at a similar level. As the Swedish curriculum (Skolverket, 2011) proposes that pupils should be able to "evaluate their study results and development needs in relation to the demands of their education" it appears in light of the above questionable whether all Swedish pupils are actually able to do so. A contributing factor may be that the English Step 7 course, the highest level offered by upper secondary school in Sweden, teaches content deemed to be on the B2 level (higher degree) in general on the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale (Oscarson, 2015). Meanwhile academic language is rated as C-level, which makes it difficult for pupils to assess language they might have had few or no real encounters with.

Both Airey (2009) and Oscarson (2016) investigated students already accepted into university, either by virtue of their upper secondary school degrees or by passing a form of university pre-entry qualifications test[1]. English 7 is not a compulsory course even for university preparatory programs and therefore first year university students, may actually have stopped at English Step 6 (which is also deemed at B2). It is therefore possible that the findings by Airey (2009) and Oscarson (2016) are due to the disparity between the two different levels of the English courses at the upper secondary level, reflecting a lack of understanding of the real requirements to manage studies at an academic institution. The question is whether school pupils and university students lack a standard to compare themselves with and this makes it difficult for them to judge whether they possess the necessary proficiency in academic English. Therefore, how the pupils' self-efficacy and their self-assessments of their language skills (e.g. vocabulary) correspond with the level they are expected to reach during the last months of upper secondary schooling, when many are set on continuing on to university studies, is an important matter to understand. To what degree are upper secondary pupils actually aware of the level required of them at university, in a school system which advocates formative assessment practices such as self-assessment?

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[1] Entitled *Högskoleprovet* in Swedish

The aim of this study therefore concerns pupils' self-efficacy with regard to their language ability before the transition to university studies. In particular, the aim is to investigate if there is a difference between Swedish pupils' (at English Step 7) estimation of their vocabulary skills and their actual performance level, as well as their awareness of this level. Thus the following research questions were investigated:

- To what extent do pupils express that they feel prepared for university studies where academic English is required?

- To what extent are pupils, at the end of the highest course in English at the upper secondary level, able to assess their level of vocabulary in English accurately?

- To what degree do pupils reach the curriculum goals, regarding self-regulated learning of English at the end of the highest course in English at the upper secondary level?

There are several factors behind striving for a better educated population. Economically, a higher percentage of educated citizens leads to stronger economic growth. From a democratic perspective, well-educated citizens make well-founded decisions and work towards more equality in society as education serves as a means to limit the division created by social factors. University graduates generally have a higher pay, a lower degree of unemployment and better health (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001/02:15). Therefore, the aspiration behind the Swedish government's proposition: *Den Öppna Högskolan* [The Open University[2]] (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001/02:15) was the intention to widen the recruitment base for a broader spectrum of pupils.

Hyland (2004) believed that it was language which was the key to unlock the social change that the Government was looking for. University offers a different set of rules, values and a new language that can seem foreign to university students with non-academic backgrounds (Bron & Lönnheden, 2005). Basturkmen and Shackleford (2014) reported that international students described themselves as 'lost in a flood of terminology' when encountering academic English language. Thus, without mastering the language of academia, pupils cannot progress to higher levels of education (Belcher, 2006). Acquiring proper academic vocabulary and learning to use it is essential to prepare pupils for their future (Hyland & Tse, 2007). Basturkmen and Shackleford (2014) describe this as a 'lexical bar' that pupils need to pass.

English is often described as *the* academic lingua franca (Mauranen et al., 2010) making academic English and an academic vocabulary important stepping stones to a successful transition to the upper levels of education. However, the required level of language is not readily available to *all* pupils before they make the transition into university. Korp's (2006) and Berggren's (2013) studies of English classes in Swedish upper secondary schools showed

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[2] Authors' translation

that the upper secondary programmes pupils had chosen largely affected the content of the English courses – even when the level and content were supposed to be the same. The more academically inclined pupils received far more preparation for university studies than pupils doing vocational programmes.

Furthermore, the Swedish curriculum for upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2011) specifies life-long learning as a major goal. In the last decade, the formative assessment practice of self-assessment has therefore become an important tool to promote self-regulated learning. The curriculum goals state, for example, that pupils should become "aware of their own as well as other's competences[3]" and that they should be able to "reflect on their own experiences and use their abilities"[4] as well as become "aware of their own knowledge and insights" as "a prerequisite for personal growth"[5] . At the highest level of English learning within the upper secondary school system, Step 7, the grading criteria mention explicitly that the pupils should be able to make proper assessment of their skills (Skolverket, 2011).

The Swedish curriculum is also designed to give teachers a lot of leeway regarding the content of their classes. Neither the English Step 6 or Step 7 syllabuses (Skolverket, 2011) specifically mention vocabulary but rather the need for pupils to meet text of "different types". It is therefore up to each teacher to decide what vocabulary Swedish pupils encounter in English class.

[3] Authors' translation
[4] Authors' translation
[5] Authors' translation

Theoretical Background and Previous Research

The theory behind the idea that learning is aided by understanding one's own thought processes is usually referred to as metacognition (being able to think about your own thinking). It is based on the ability to evaluate your own results, that is, *self-assessment,* and the ability to take actions to direct your own thinking, that is, *self-management* (Rivers, 2001). Metacognition can therefore be seen as an important factor in the construction of new knowledge. By helping learners become aware of their ability to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning, participants can become active in the learning process and from there develop self-regulating strategies (Wenden, 1998). *Self-regulated learners* have better control and more autonomy over both learning processes and learning outcomes (Butler & Lee, 2006). In a meta-study by Panadero et al. (2017) exploring the effects of self-assessment on self-regulatory learning and self-efficacy, the results clearly pointed towards the importance of self-assessment practices to "promote students use of learning strategies" as well as "its impact on motivational variables such as self-efficacy" thus making pupils and students better equipped for life-long learning.

Research in the area of academic vocabulary and vocabulary learning in relation to pupils' self-efficacy and self-assessment of languages, especially EFL is briefly presented as follows.

Academic Vocabulary. Studying English for the sake of university studies is generally called English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Standard variations of words can take on new genre-specific meanings, making every day English insufficient and unreliable in academic contexts (Hyland & Tse, 2007). Vocabulary meaning and usage can rapidly change due to cultural and national factors (Tangpijaikul, 2014). Academic language shares some common features such as the use of more low frequency lexical items, a more diverse and precise vocabulary, nominalization, explicit discourse organisation, discipline specific conventions and frequent use of the passive voice (Coxhead & Byrd, 2007; Deluca, 2010).

Most Swedish adolescents encounter English at an early stage, through TV, films, videogames, and music and other activities outside the school context (Korp, 2006). Webb (2010) has, for example, shown that watching TV with discipline specific content provides opportunities for discipline specific vocabulary acquisition. Alemi and Tayebi (2011) described this as incidental learning, in comparison to explicit instruction and strategy training. The theory is that the more pupils are exposed, the easier they will learn. Nation (2005), on the other hand, indicated the evidence was not strong enough to conclude that incidental learning was better than direct instruction and held that learners did not acquire a word better by incidental learning than through direct instruction. Olsson (2016) found that while directed exposure could have an initial effect, it did not have an impact on the development of academic vocabulary over time. Academic vocabulary did *not* increase during upper secondary education, despite pupils entering with a certain academic vocabulary through previous external exposure to English. Vocabulary size is an important indicator of language proficiency and especially relevant to English for specific purposes, such as academic English (Januleviciené & Kavaliauskienè, 2007), and academic vocabulary seems to be attained through academic studies.

Self-efficacy, Self-Assessment and EFL. Learner beliefs are generally held to influence their learning. According to Mills et al. (2007) for example, the higher the learners' academic *self-efficacy*, the better they tend to self-regulate, the more accurately they tend to self-assess and the more intrinsically they tend to be interested in school subjects. There are few studies on learner beliefs and language learning, but it is generally thought that belief systems help learners to define what is expected of them (when attributed to controllable factors) and act in accordance (Hsieh & Schallert, 2008).

The foremost value of *self-assessment* lies in its promotion of learning. Brown (2004) asserted that self-assessment activated the process of life-long learning, developed learner responsibility and autonomy. Self-assessment can be said to include simple practices such as relating one's own work to set criteria, to more complex functions such as in-depth analysis of strengths and weaknesses to further

understand what is needed to learn more and to internalize these standards. In a recent meta-study, Panadero et al. (2017) explored the effects of self-assessment on self-regulatory learning and self-efficacy. The results clearly pointed towards the importance of self-assessment practices to "promote students use of learning strategies and its impact on motivational variables such as self-efficacy".

Even though it is not the foremost reason for self-assessment, there are those who voice concerns regarding the variable degree of agreement between pupil and teacher assessment (Butler & Lee, 2006). Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000), for example, found several factors affecting the validity of self-assessment such as the subject area studied. An early study by Falchikov and Boud (1989) found that science showed higher degrees of validity than social sciences and art and that accuracy increased with higher levels of achievement, while Oscarson (1997) and Ross (1998) found a high degree of validity in foreign languages. A later study by Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000) showed that the complexity of the assessment was also a factor, such that the less complex the task, the higher validity of self-assessed understanding related to teacher assessment.

Self-Assessment and EFL. Research in the area of self-assessment of language learning (Blanche & Merino, 1989; Brown, 2004; Oscarson, 1997, 1998/2019; Ross, 1998, 2006; Taras, 2010) provide generally positive results for self-assessment. The

indication is that the understanding of own learning processes in developing language skills foster self-regulatory and responsible study habits and in this way leads to higher motivation and encourages life-long language learning skills. Duque and Medina (2017) also pointed to an additional aspect, that was, goalsetting. "When students self-assess, they are able to acknowledge their learning strengths […] this practice enabled students to set learning commitments, use learning strategies that also allow them to raise awareness and take further actions". This is in line with other research findings, "[s]elf-assessments are more accurate when based on task content closely tied to students' situations as potential users of the language in question", and "[t]he evidence is that it is easier for learners to assess their ability in relation to concrete descriptions of more narrowly defined linguistic situations" (Oscarson, 1997). In other words, learners need to comprehend the relevant language level they need to reach, that is, in this case, the academic language required of them at university. Authentic "can-do" statements such as those provided by the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) can facilitate this understanding. As Brown et al. (2014) pointed out, it was often lack of exposure to the expected language level or criteria which made the more unskilled pupils had a tendency to overrate their ability.

Self-Assessment and EFL Vocabulary. In a study by Duque and Medina (2017) the researchers looked at the influence of self-assessment of *vocabulary* on pupils'

oral fluency. They found that through self-assessment the learners were able to acknowledge their learning strengths and weaknesses. The approach enabled learners to set learning goals regarding vocabulary use, use different strategies on how to reach these goals and become aware themselves of different courses of action. Through this process they gradually became more independent learners. The goal setting raised awareness learning needs and was seen as an essential component of this process. Duque and Medina (2017) thus found that learners thought self-assessment was beneficial for their vocabulary development and helped their goal-setting, that was, resulted in raised awareness of their learning needs.

Januleviciené and Kavaliauskienè (2007) found that vocabulary was an important indicator of language proficiency and especially relevant to ESP, such as academic English. 5% who assessed their vocabulary as excellent displayed the same results in the tests, and 40% of the learners overestimated their knowledge of ESP vocabulary (i.e. two thirds of the learners overestimated their ESP vocabulary). Their conclusions were that learners needed to recognize both their lack of knowledge as well as be able to recognize accomplishments and the importance of developing learner awareness of needs. They found that training learners in self-monitoring and self-evaluating was essential in achieving goals and that learners needed to be taught strategies for self-monitoring.

In her work, Oscarson (2009, 2016) studied Swedish pupils' and university students' self- assessment of their *writing proficiency*, but apart from that there is, in spite of its importance, little published research regarding how Swedish language learners assess their academic vocabulary. The present study therefore fills an important gap, considering the importance it has on pupils' further education.

METHOD

Design

The study was conducted using a mixed method approach to highlight any discrepancy between *the established performance* and the pupils' own evaluations. In comparison with qualitative data, quantitative data derived from questionnaires/surveys and tests allow for larger generalization and has a greater built in protection against interpretive bias. Meanwhile it provides little depth as to the reasoning behind the learner's own assessment. To explore the latter feature, three follow up interviews provided a more qualitative insight into a complex situation, allowing the pupils the chance to motivate the decisions in their own words. The results from Airey's (2009) and Oscarson's (2016) studies suggested that there could be a discrepancy between the pupils' assessments and their performance. The interviews were therefore conducted in order to reach a more penetrating analysis to the quantitative phase.

Participants

In Sweden children start school at the age of 7 after a year of compulsory pre-school. After another six years of compulsory schooling, 95% continue on to a non-

compulsory upper secondary school (https://www.globalis.se/Statistik/Gymnasial-utbildning) where they choose a three year, vocational or theoretical program of study. The participants, who were between 17 and 19 years of age, came from three theoretical programs at the school in a large Swedish town where one of the authors (Lindqvist) was doing his pre-service teaching. The sample is thus one of convenience. All the pupils doing course 7 and in their final year were included and were enrolled in either Natural Sciences (n=16), Economics (n=15), or Social Sciences (n=14). In total there were 45 participants of which 16 (38%) were male and 27 (61%) were female. 1 person (1%) chose not to define as either. The participants were from ethnically diverse backgrounds and many did not speak Swedish as their first language.

The Swedish grading system is based on a six-letter scale, from F to A (where F is the lowest grade and signifies a failing mark, and A the highest). Each subject/course has defined standards for grades E (*Pass*), C (*Pass with Distinction*) and A (*Pass with Special Distinction*) that express what the pupil needs to achieve in order to be awarded a particular grade. Grades B and D mean that the pupil has fulfilled all the criteria for the respective grades below but not yet reached all the criteria for the grades above. Grades were assigned a

number where F = 1 and A = 6 and the group had a mean score of M=4.27 SD=0.81(i.e. C on average), signifying that the sample may be regarded as a fairly high achieving group (with no pupils below the grade D) (See Table 1).

Instruments and Materials

A questionnaire, a vocabulary test and an interview guide were used in the collection of data for the study.

Questionnaire. Part I (Appendix A) covered attitudes towards further education, English usage and grades as well as pupils' self-efficacy for using English at higher learning institutions. **Part II** used the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages) self-assessment scales to assess at what level the pupils rated their vocabulary level, as well as reading (finding information and arguments) and writing (reports and essays) skills.

Vocabulary Test. A *cloze*-test with an initial letter provided (Appendix B), was used to enable comparison of the pupils' test results with their self-assessments. Despite agreement about certain features of academic language, there is no agreed upon list of essential academic words even

Table 1
Grades of participating pupils in numbers and percent as well as mean grade

Grade	F (1)	E (2)	D (3)	C (4)	B (5)	A (6)	Mean Grade
N=45 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (15.6%)	22 (48.9%)	13 (28.9%)	3 (6.7%)	4.27

though several attempts have been made. In the vocabulary test used in the study, words and sentences were collected from *The English Vocabulary Profile* (English Profile, 2012) a part of the English Profile Programme which is a long-term research programme sponsored by the Council of Europe and based upon extensive research using the Cambridge Learner Corpus (CLC). The C2 level words were matched with Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List (AWL). The words in the test were randomly selected and sentences created by using the EVP dictionary example sentences. Once the sentences were constructed, all but the first letter of the key word to be tested was removed and replaced with a blank. Underneath each blank, an explanation from the AWL was given. There were five sentences with different words for each CEFR-level, randomly presented in the test.

Interview Guide. The interview guide (Appendix C) was semi-structured and the questions were based upon Part I of the *Questionnaire* regarding attitudes as well as the pupil's reaction to the results of Part II and and the *Vocabulary test*, that is, how well their self-assessments corresponded to the results of the vocabulary test.

Procedure

Before being given the first part of the questionnaire during an ordinary lesson and informed that the data would be used as a part of a small study, the pupils received a walkthrough of the complete questionnaire.

They were also informed in regards to confidentiality and that they were free to opt out at any time. All the instructions and the questionnaire, with the exception of the vocabulary test, were in Swedish to avoid any misunderstandings due to language. Pupils were then given each part of the three-part questionnaire separately and upon completion asked to raise their hand so they could be given the next part. The pupils had a total of 45 minutes to complete the questionnaire, due to the time constraint of the lesson.

In order to get a better understanding of why the pupils answered as they did on the questionnaire and allow them to comment on the results of the vocabulary test, semi-structured interviews were held two to three weeks after the questionnaire with three of the pupils. Pupils were asked to volunteer for follow up interviews during the initial data collection, and three agreed. The interviews were conducted at a local café and their reflections and responses on the first eight questions were recorded before they received the results on the vocabulary test. The questions were asked one by one and the only follow up questions were requests for clarifications or elaborations, and thus situational responses, to the pupils' answers. They were then shown the results which in all three cases prompted questions regarding their performance. Before the last three questions regarding the results of the vocabulary test were finally asked, they were told that they were expected to be at the CEFR B2 level.

Analysis

The questionnaire data, including the vocabulary test results, were analysed using the statistical program SPSS.

The vocabulary test was scored with each correct answer giving one point to its corresponding CEFR-level, that is, an A1 question scored one A1 point. If a pupil had more than three points at one level, they were deemed to have reached mastery of that level. When a pupil gave a correct answer, but used another word than the expected one, the word was looked up in the English Vocabulary Profile (English Profile, 2012) and scored according to corresponding level. For example: If a pupil managed to answer a C1 question with an appropriate B1 word they scored an extra B1 point. It was thus theoretically possible to score more than the 'maximum' five at any given level, but this did in fact not occur. The mastered CEFR levels were then compared to the pupil's self-assessments.

The interviews were transcribed and then read numerous times in search of pupils' thoughts. In essence, questions probed pupils' perceptions of how well they felt prepared for university studies where academic English was required, the extent to which they felt they were able to assess their vocabulary competence accurately (with regard to both mastery and size) and thus reach the curriculum goals regarding self-regulated learning of English.

Validity

The current view of validity relates, among other questions, to how well an instrument measures what it should measure. The measure thus encompasses the concept of reliability ("without reliability no validity"). Instruments which do not provide consistent measurement do not yield high validity either (Chapelle, 2012; Eliasson, 2013). The CEFR's scale system is based on empirical research and is often used as a benchmark for tests and examinations across languages and national boundaries (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR scales regarding for example vocabulary and the vocabulary test based on the English Vocabulary Profile can thus be said to be valid in a general sense, even though statistical reliability can only be ascertained by an analysis of the data emanating from its use.

Triangulation, using several forms of data collection to study a single phenomenon, is another method for increasing validity. By collecting data from several sources, each individual data point is strengthened (Cresswell, 2014). This study has used a mixed method approach where the follow up interviews, even if only three individual ones, served as in-depth support to the initial quantitative data collection. It has been stressed that qualitative data input needs to be recorded (Eliasson, 2013; Tracy, 2010), and in the case of our voice recordings they were transcribed immediately to preserve accuracy and detail. As the sample consisted of middle to high performing pupils, generalisations of results can only by made regarding similar samples.

Limitations

The given time frame of the project meant that the amount of data available for collection was limited to a single school. As in any questionnaire, it was conducted on a voluntary basis and this may thus have limited the range of participating pupils. On the other hand, as the questionnaire was done at the end of the school year, the pupils who chose to participate in the follow up interviews were all middle to high-achieving pupils who were likely to continue on to academia. Despite the limitations, it is therefore reasonable to assume that it is possible to gain a certain insight into the self-efficacy and self-assessment abilities of middle to well performing pupils attending similar schools.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted following The Swedish Research Council's ethical principles as presented in *Good Research Practice* (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011). The researcher informed the participants and explained the purpose of the study. The purpose, to investigate self-efficacy and performance, was not revealed until after they had filled out the questionnaire as that knowledge may have otherwise affected the outcome. Instead this was revealed after they had handed in their questionnaire and they were free to withdraw. The three interviewed pupils volunteered and were called Alpha, Bravo and Charlie to ensure confidentiality, and in keeping with American Psychological Association (APA)'s recommended practice of removing gender bias as far as possible (APA, 2018).

RESULTS

The results are presented first through the quantitative data generated from the pupils' questionnaires, and then illustrated by the pupils' interviews. Only some of the more significant results can be reported in this brief article.

The Extent to which Pupils Express that they Feel Prepared for University Studies where Academic English is Required

The pupils were asked to rate, on a *Likert* scale ranging between 1-10 , to what degree they agreed with given statements regarding self-efficacy when it came to how well upper secondary school versus own preparation had prepared them for academic English at university (see Appendix A). The numeric values are set out in Figure 1.

Asked if they felt school had prepared them for academic English, pupils answered that this was largely so. More than half of the pupils (N=32) placed themselves to the right of the middle of the scale (M=6.56) and almost the same number (N=26) considered that they had prepared themselves well (M=5.67).

Further the pupils claimed that it did not matter whether their future education was in English or in Swedish (M=6.07), even though a considerable number of the pupils expected the English they were to encounter at university would be challenging (M= 9.42).

Two areas where academic English at university may be particularly challenging, are reading to find information and argument
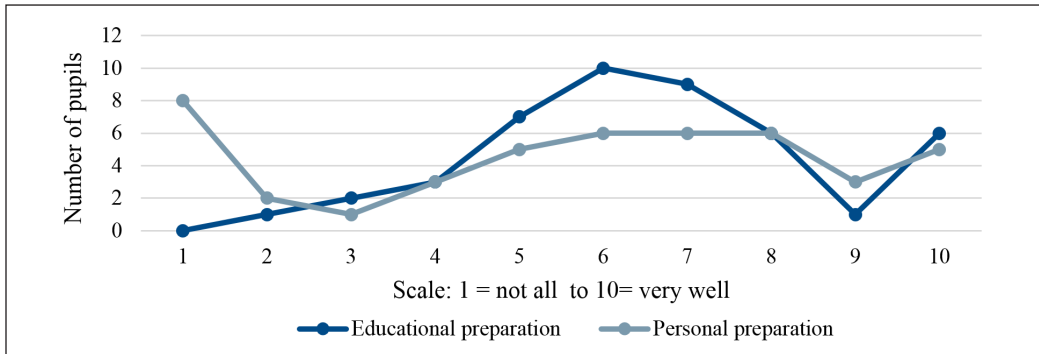
Figure 1. The extent to which pupils express that they feel prepared for university studies where academic English is required, i.e. "My education has prepared me/ I have personally prepared myself for academic English at University" (N=45)

as well as writing reports and essays. The CEFR-levels were used as a self-assessment tool to verify the perceived self-efficacy of the pupils. Table 2 displays the pupils' responses to the CEFR statements. (NB: the CEFR scale regarding *reading to find information and arguments* contains no C2 level and thus hits the ceiling at C1).

The majority of pupils considered themselves to be at the B2 level with regard to both reading to find information and argument (N=45) as well as writing reports and essays (N=43) (*M*=4.22 and *M*=4.63 respectively). This indicates that they see themselves having reached the level of the course they are doing (i.e. English Step 7) that is deemed to be at B2 (high) (Oscarson, 2015) and qualified to proceed to university studies. When it comes to reading, almost one third believe that they have mastered

the C1 level suggesting they have moved past the content of the course being taught.

Interview Responses. All three interviewed pupils reported that they intended to go on to university. While Alpha and Bravo already had plans for certain programmes, Charlie intended to study courses of personal interest. They all expressed concern that the English they would encounter at a university would be far more difficult than what they had experienced so far, partly due to their teacher's insistence that what they were studying now was just "in preparation for the real difficulties at a university".

There were two issues they found particularly worrisome: the vocabulary and the belief that everything would be in English and thus they would not be allowed to ask for clarifications in Swedish. The pupils

Table 2

Pupils' self-assessment of reading (finding information and arguments) (N=45) and writing (reports and essays) (N=43) levels using the CEFR scale. Distributions and mean scores

Skill	Missing	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	Mean
Reading	0	0 (0%)	1 (2.2%)	3 (6.7%)	26 (57.8%)	15 (33.3%)	-	4.22
Writing	2	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	21 (48.8%)	17 (39.5%)	5 (11.6%)	4.63

reported they had gone through "scientific texts" and "certain academic words" yet all three pupils expressed specific concern regarding "advanced vocabulary". Bravo and Charlie had received persistent feedback that they did not use "advanced words" but expressed uncertainty about what "advanced vocabulary" actually entailed. They were also concerned about the structure of the more advanced texts they were expected to write. Bravo felt those who were "school smart"[6] were unfairly favoured, meaning that pupils who conformed academically and produced the texts that followed academic standards were given preference regardless of content. Charlie believed that certain ways of writing, for example by using advanced and difficult words, was required in order to get high grades, but accepted this. However, both of these pupils were unfamiliar and to a certain degree uncomfortable with academic language, expressing that it was "too posh, too strict" and "it feels like we are just copying. It's not natural".

All three pupils believed that their receptive skills were at a higher level than their productive skills and thus they were sure that they would be able to understand university material, at least if given time to study and "look things up". On the

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[6] Authors' translation of *Gymnasiesmart*

other hand, they were unsure about their productive skills especially if there were stress factors involved such as a set time limit, a high stakes assignment or a group activity where peer pressure could affect their performance.

The Extent to which Pupils are Able to Self-Assess their Vocabulary Level in English

Self-assessments of Vocabulary Range and Vocabulary Control. The pupils assessed their vocabulary skills on two CEFR scales: *vocabulary range*, that is how large the pupils deemed their vocabulary, including both number of lexical items, as well as their ability to understand associations connected to words (in both every day and idiomatic usage) and *vocabulary control*, the degree to which they were able to use their vocabulary correctly (Table 3).

The results of the self-assessments show that the majority believe themselves to be at the B2 – C1 level, with a mean vocabulary range M=4.53 (N=45) and vocabulary control M=4.82 (N=44).

Vocabulary Test Results. The pupils participated in a vocabulary test with 30 items (5 items for each level). An extra point was given for words produced at a higher

Table 3

Pupils' self-assessment of vocabulary range (n=45) and vocabulary control (N=44) using the CEFR scale. Distributions and mean scores

Skill	Missing	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	Mean
Vocabulary range		0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (15.6%)	14 (31.1%)	17 (37.8%)	7 (15.6%)	4.53
Vocabulary control	1	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (6.8%)	12 (27.3%)	19 (43.2%)	10 (22.7%)	4.82

level than the item required, that is, if they were able to use a word from a higher CEFR level to fill in the word correctly the item was scored correspondingly (according to the EVP English Profile, 2012).

The acceptable or "passing point" for each CEFR-level was set at having marked three out of five words correct on the vocabulary test. The number of points reached by the pupil is presented in Table 4. The number of pupils who reached the different CEFR-levels are presented in Table 5.

As can be seen in Table 5, there is a marked decline of points at the C1 level (only 7 out of 45 pupils reached the C1 level having 3 or more correct answers). On the other hand, as seen in Table 4, 17 out of 45 pupils reached a minimum of two C1 points showing that they progressed beyond the B2 level even if mastery was not yet attained.

The difference between the pupils' self-assessments of vocabulary control and vocabulary range, and their results on the vocabulary test, are set out in Figure 2.

Table 4
Pupils who reached the various levels on the academic vocabulary test related to each CEFR level (N=45)

Points	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
5	8 (17.8%)	10 (22.2%)	3 (6.7%)	8 (17.8%)	0	0
4	27 (60%)	14 (31.1%)	12 (26.7%)	3 (6.7%)	0	0
3	6 (13.3%)	12 (26.7%)	21 (46.7%)	8 (17.8%)	7 (15.6%)	0
2	2 (4.4%)	6 (13.3%)	5 (11.1%)	12 (26.7%)	17 (37.8%)	2 (4.4%)
1	1 (2.2%)	1 (2.2%)	1 (2.2%)	4 (8.9%)	13 (28.9%)	10 (22.2%)
0	1 (2.2%)	2 (4.4%)	3 (6.7%)	10 (22.2%)	8 (17.8%)	33 (73.3%)

Table 5
Pupils who reached the different CEFR-levels on the vocabulary Test (N=45)

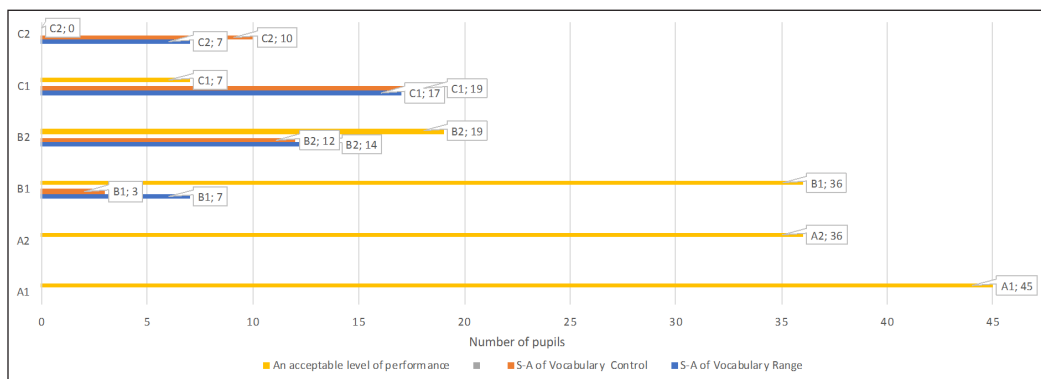|	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Acceptable level	45 (100%)	36 (80%)	36 (80%)	19 (42%)	7 (16%)	0

Figure 2. Pupils' self-assessment of vocabulary range and vocabulary control compared to reached acceptable levels on the vocabulary test (N=45)

In Figure 2 it is apparent that fewer pupils reached the higher CEFR-levels. No pupils reached the C2 level, despite the fact that 7 out of 44 (Vocabulary range) and 10 out of 45 (Vocabulary control) pupils assessed themselves to be at this level. All the pupils assessed themselves above the basic A-level, yet there were also four pupils, who did not reach the A2 level on the tests (by getting 3 points or more). The A2 level tests consisted of lexical items related to routine everyday actions and lexical items related to basic needs and content. This is vocabulary that teachers in Sweden expect pupils to have mastered before entering upper secondary school.

The largest difference is seen between B1 and B2, where 36 out of 45 pupils (80%) reached the B1 level on the test, but only 19 out of 45 (42%) reached the B2 level. Considering the grades received by the pupils in the group, one could have expected B2 (high) level. The C2 level describes a well-educated native speaker, well able to understand idiomatic as well as everyday expressions, their connotations as well as consistently being able to use their vocabulary appropriately in different contexts. 24 pupils assessed themselves to have reached level C1 – C2 when it came to vocabulary range, and 29 pupils assessed themselves to have reached level C1 – C2 when it came to vocabulary control. The mean for the pupil groups' self-assessment of their vocabulary range (M=4.53) and Vocabulary control (M=4.82) (B2 – C1 level) are higher than the mean result on the vocabulary test (M=3.13) (slightly above B1-level). Here there is a difference between the pupils' ability as shown in the test, and their own assessments as only 7 out of the 45 pupils reached the C1 level and no one C2.

Interview Responses. The three interviewed pupils expressed surprise that they did not reach the highest level (C2) on the vocabulary test. Alpha's explanation was that it was merely a dip in performance, having recently spent time working on another school project. Bravo did admit to having felt insecure when taking the test but Charlie had expected to receive a full score. In spite of high expectations they did not give any specific explanations for their failure to reach these.

All three pupils either believed themselves to be, or felt that it was expected of them to be, at a higher level than they actually were. Bravo and Charlie were thus relieved to understand that the course expectation was set at the B2 level but were still not satisfied with falling short of the C2 level. Bravo in particular was "shocked" at not being able to assess own abilities as it should have been an "easy win". Alpha simply shook it off as being unprepared while Charlie, admitted it was a "reality check"[7] and a sobering moment but was grateful for the realization.

The Degree to which Pupils Reach the Curriculum Goals, Regarding Self-Regulated Learning of English

One important aspect of self-regulated learning is the ability to self-assess one's own knowledge level and ability in different

_____
[7] Authors' translation of *Nertagen på jorden*

language skills, in this case academic English. This includes such aspects as being able to comprehend and write low frequency words and lexical items as well as specific words for specific disciplines and academia in general. As seen above, the pupils as a group were able to do so to varying degrees, but not as well as one would expect after twelve years of schooling in a country where this is part of the curriculum.

In the interviews, all three pupils confessed to having a hard time accurately assessing their abilities. Charlie had problems assessing the correct level of what was expected even though there was an understanding that there was a more advanced level to strive for. Alpha made the most accurate assessment but could not reflect around own learning or level. Rather, the explanation was, "things just happen" that is, outer circumstances were responsible for the results more than own activity and effort. Alpha simply saw this ability as "something that would develop with time". Bravo on the other hand had more varied reflections around the assessment and expressed worry, stemming from comparisons with where "one was supposed to be". The realization that own skills were not up to par was evident, but there was also a failure to take responsibility. The fact that there is an accepted and even required way of writing and structuring texts was "bizzare and boring". Bravo does not reflect on how to improve but is more concerned with the unfairness of the fact that there is a set norm, an academic genre and that performance was not considered qualified

enough when not followed. The three pupils thus demonstrate a lack of insight into their own performance as none of them are able to explain why their assessments differed from their test results. The central content in the English 7 course focuses on scientific texts, yet they are unable to recognise academic vocabulary and express what it is that they need to learn and strive for, more than at a very basic level.

Summary of Results

The pupils in the study considered themselves well prepared for university studies when it came to academic vocabulary in English but expected to find it difficult. The majority of pupils in the study, taking the English Step 7, are at the B1 level. Only a small group (n=7) of the highest performing pupils recognized C1 level vocabulary and no pupil showed any greater familiarity with C2 level vocabulary. The pupils in the study overestimated their abilities, on average believing themselves to be at or close to the C1 level. The three interviewed pupils were able to reflect on their own performance on the given vocabulary test but not at any deeper level. They were inaccurate in their assessments of their own results, and had problems anticipating what was expected of them at the next level.

DISCUSSION

Self-regulated learning and an ability to self-assess is knowledge pupils are expected to have mastered when they reach higher education, where teachers are not directly going to intervene on an individual level.

Therefore, the aim of this study concerned pupils' self-efficacy with regard to language ability before the transition to university studies, to investigate whether there was any difference between Swedish pupils' beliefs in their vocabulary skills, their actual performance as well as their awareness of their reached level.

The results of the questionnaire showed the extent to which the pupils in the study expressed that they felt prepared for university studies where academic English was required. It showed a fairly confident group of pupils who had, like many Swedish adolecents, encountered English from an early age, through school and other activities outside the school context (Korp, 2006). The pupils expressed that they were at ease speaking English, but also that they might encounter difficulties further ahead, especially when it came to writing. There was also a certain discrepancy between their awareness of the challenging nature of academic English at university and their relative indifference as to which language would be used in their further education (i.e. instruction in English or Swedish). In the questionnaire they stated that they would manage equally well in the two languages. Airey's (2009) study also showed that when English was used in a non-English classroom, pupils believed themselves to be unaffected by the complications of a foreign language. However, in reality, they required more time and more work to reach similar results than when their first language was used. The three interviewed pupils, for example, all said that they believed they would be able to work within an academic setting both with regards to reading academic texts and writing reports and essays, while at the same time expressing a certain uncertainty about what advanced vocabulary actually entailed. This is an example of how upper secondary education can miss giving pupils a clear understanding of the goals they need to reach. The pupils had not worked with any "can-do" statements or other understandable criteria to give them a realistic expectation of the discourse they would encounter later on in their studies. The Swedish grading criteria are generally considered vague and difficult to understand, even for many teachers, and thus one may expect even more so for most pupils. If pupils believe themselves to be able to manage a skill or develop a competence, and yet cannot define exactly what is expected of them, they will have difficulties seeing what is actually within their own control, as Hsieh and Schallert (2008) pointed out.

The study also showed that the pupils in the study, who were at the end of the highest course in English at the upper secondary level, tended to overestimate their level of vocabulary knowledge in English to a large extent. A third of the group believed themselves to had already reached the reading and writing level *above* the courses taught at upper secondary school and in particular overestimated their abilities when dealing with a specific skill set. The required academic vocabulary was not readily accessible to them. This was somewhat better than the results of

Januleviviene and Kavaliauskiene's (2007) study but still a fairly stark mismatch. On the other hand, this lack of fluency in academic vocabulary is not surprising in itself, given that the pupils, on average, can be said to be at the B1 level, which is below the academic standard later expected at universities. The common belief that Swedish pupils have a high level of proficiency in English, may also influence them to over-estimate their ability and to expect to perform well at the next step, that of academic English.

The investigated medium to high proficiency Swedish pupils do not seem to possess the necessary self-assessment skills, nor the vocabulary level expected, when leaving upper secondary school. There are several possible reasons for this. The most obvious reason behind their inaccurate self-assessments would be that they lacked practice, a factor which Oscarson (2009) and Januleviviene and Kavaliauskiene's (2007) also found. The investigated pupils had never self-assessed previously, nor had they had any contact with the CEFR scales. It was the first time they were ever given bench-mark statements describing the level expected from them with regards to academic skills such as writing reports and essays or vocabulary range. The interviewed pupils revealed this, when they rather than basing their results on any known criteria instead compared themselves with each other, "Am I better than my classmate?" One may argue that the CEFR scales are also rather vague and that this could have influenced the pupils' inaccurate self-assessments, but other studies have shown

that it is often easier to assess general, non-complex tasks and abilities compared to specific skills (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000; Oscarson, 2009). The important factor seems to be an understanding of the relevant language level they need to reach, in this case when it comes to academic vocabulary, in relation to defined and concrete situations (Oscarson, 1997). A more reasonable explanation is therefore that they have not yet been exposed to or have any experience of a higher level, of what may be called academic vocabulary. As they have not had sufficient contact, they do not know what they may not understand. Brown et al. (2014) also emphasized that lack of exposure to the expected language level could cause pupils to overrate their ability. These findings point towards an area (i.e. vocabulary) where Swedish upper secondary English teaching may need to pay more attention. The communicative approach to language teaching *may* have led to less focus being paid to vocabulary and grammar in spite of their importance for communication and communicative competence. The interviewed pupils actively derided vocabulary learning in class, but a simple way to increase vocabulary range is by exposing pupils to and supplying texts which are difficult enough to prepare them for the demands of university level material. The pupils do not seem to be challenged enough to realise their need of improvement. English Step 7 is often the last chance for most pupils to improve their English skills within the ordinary school system and there should not be too large a gap between what is covered at upper secondary school and

university level. One of interviewed pupils, Charlie, appreciated the self-assessment task as awareness raising, expressing need to understand the coming "reality", something which was also suggested in a study by Duque and Medina (2017) where self-assessment was found beneficial for goalsetting and for learners taking further action on their own part towards mastery on their own.

The pupils in the present study do not seem to reach the curriculum goals regarding self-regulated learning and self-assessment abilities of English at the end of the highest course in English at the upper secondary level. This is interesting considering the fact that this goal has been part of the Swedish curriculum and syllabus of English from grade one for more than a decade. To help develop both self-regulation and *learning*, self-assessment needs to be practiced throughout compulsory and non-compulsory school, in all language courses and classes, and be seen as a key element in that it entails that the learner understands their own learning process. If pupils were trained to self-assess their language ability, they should be able to apply the skill at the end of upper secondary education. In many universities lecturers' experience, this is however not the case (Köhlmyr, 2013; Oscarson, 2016), a circumstance also manifested in the continuing debate about university students lack of writing skills, both in English and in Swedish. A large part of writing practice at university consists of training students to understand and manage academic vocabulary without teacher intervention.

Jönsson (2017) described the discussion on formative assessment practices in Sweden as unfocused and the terminology as unclear. This may be a reason for teachers, who are uncertain of its purpose, to disregard the training of self-assessment in class. Also, if it is only seen as a way of gathering information for further instructional input in the classroom, from the teachers' point of view, other ways may seem easier and it may thus be neglected. The interviewed pupils all confessed to having a hard time accurately assessing their abilities. One pupil, Charlie, had problems both assessing own level and expectations, even when understanding that there existed a more advanced level. Another pupil, Bravo, realized that present skills were not up to par, but failed to take any responsibility. The third pupil, Alpha, with the most accurate self-assessment, used external and irrelevant circumstances as an excuse, rather than own inadequate input of activity and effort. All three pupils thus showed a surprising lack of insight. Despite the proclaimed aim to develop self-regulating learners and the fact that the central language content was scientific texts during the last upper secondary course in English, the pupils were unable to identify and comprehend academic vocabulary or express what it was that they needed to master more thoroughly.

CONCLUSION

Despite the limitations, this study offers some insights into the self-efficacy and self-assessment abilities of medium to high performing pupils with a focus on

academic vocabulary. It gives support to previous conclusions drawn concerning self-assessment and writing proficiency (Oscarson, 2009, 2016) with regard to the need of self-assessment training, and Swedish pupils' overconfidence in their English abilities (Airey, 2009). Similar to Olsson's (2016) findings, the mastery of academic vocabulary did not seem to increase at an expected rate during upper secondary education. The pupils entered with differing academic vocabulary knowledge due to, among other things, variable outside school exposure to the language. In spite of being medium to high performance learners, they did not gain sufficient academic vocabulary size to be fully prepared for academic studies. The results of this study point to the fact that pupils are not being challenged enough when it comes to lexicon – neither in reading nor in writing – and are, moreover, not aware of expected levels at the next stage. In other words, the level of English vocabulary taught does not adequately prepare the pupils for university studies. Further, in spite of clear curriculum goals, the pupils' self-assessments are not realistic enough and they do not seem to be trained to become the independent, self-regulated learners with life-long learning skills that the educational system aspires them to be.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Readiness and Attitudes Questionnaire

Namn:

Kön: Man   Kvinna

Klass/Program:

Kurs: 5   6   7

Senast jag fick betyg i engelska fick jag betyget _____

Välj från skalan 1-10 hur mycket du anser påståendena stämmer överrens med dig.

Sätt ett kryss i den ruta som passar.

A: "Jag avser att fortsätta mina studier vid ett högre lärosäte (universitet/ motsvarande)."

1: Stämmer inte alls   10: Stämmer mycket väl överrens

B: "Jag tycker om att använda det engelska språket."

1:Stämmer inte alls   10: Stämmer mycket väl överrens

C: "Jag använder ofta engelska på min fritid."

1: Stämmer inte alls   10: Stämmer mycket väl överrens

D: "Jag känner mig utmanad av engelskan i skolan."

1: Stämmer inte alls   10: Stämmer mycket väl överrens

E: "Jag tror att engelskan vid högre lärosäte (universitet/motsvarande) är utmanande."

1: Stämmer inte alls   10: Stämmer mycket väl överrens

F: "Jag anser min skolgång har förberett mig för att använda engelska vid universitetet."

1: Stämmer inte alls   10: Stämmer mycket väl överrens

G: "Jag har på egen hand förberett mig för att använda engelska vid universitetet."

1:Stämmer inte alls   10: Stämmer mycket väl överrens

H: "Det spelar ingen roll för mig om min utbildning är på engelska eller svenska."

1:Stämmer inte alls   10: Stämmer mycket väl överrens

Appendix B
Vocabulary Test

Tack för att du deltar i min studie. Nedanför finns flera engelska meningar som saknar ett ord. Fyll i vilket ord du tror att det är. Till din hjälp har du en förklaring av ordet samt första bokstaven. Detta test kommer endast att användas till min studie och inte som bedömningsmaterial. All information är konfidentiell. Det vill säga, endast jag vet vem som har svarat. i min uppsats kommer ni sedan att anonymiseras (dvs. era namn, samt skola, kommer ersättas med påhittade namn).

1. She's even decorated the spare room in a_____ of your visit.
- *expecting something to happen or in preparation for something happening*
2. A c_____ to the authority of the President
- *an expression of disagreement with ideas, rules, or someone's authority*
3. The original idea for the novel was c_____ in Rome.
- *to think of an idea or plan*
 4. The stock market crash marked the start of a severe d_____.
- *a time when there is not much business activity*
5. Her book is i_____ personal.
- *extremely*
6. The delays are due to the s_____ volume of traffic.
- *used to emphasize the large size or amount of something*
7. People like them need to compete for time as travelling via public transport may mean a loss of   r_____.
- *large amounts of money received by a government as tax, or by a company*
 8. She was born into a life of p_____.
- *an advantage that only one person or group has, usually because of their position or because they are rich*
9. Good n_____ is essential for growing children.
- *the food that you eat and the way that it affects your health*
10. The troops eventually o_____ most of the island.
- *to move into a place and take control of it*
11. They were planning to mount an i_____ of the north of the country.
 - *when an army enters a country by force in order to take control of it*
12. Please i_____ which free gift you would like to receive.
- *to say something or give a signal to show what you mean or what you intend to do*
13. There is scientific e_____ that the drug is addictive.
- *something that makes you believe that something is true or exists*
14. I'm just amazed at the q_____of food that gets eaten.
- *a lot of something*
15. He's a f_____ Russian speaker.
- *able to use a language naturally without stopping or making mistakes*
16. John has been a_____ from school for three days now.
- *not in the place where you are expected to be, especially at school or work*
17. Strong winds had caused serious d_____ to the roof.
- *harm or injury*
18. She was p_____ employed as a tour guide.
- *before the present time or the time referred to*
19. Just at that m_____ the phone rang.
- *a point in time*

20. A close couple should have no s_____ from each other.
- *something that you tell no one about or only a few people*
21. The t_____ from York to Newcastle takes about an hour by train.
- *a journey in which you visit a place for a short time and come back again*
22. All the horses are finding it difficult to j_____ the last fence.
- *to go over something by moving up into the air*
23. There were 90 g_____at their wedding.
- *someone who comes to visit you in your home, at a party, etc.*
24. Her car is in e_____ condition.
- *extremely good*
25. The service will be held at 12 n_____.
- *12 o'clock in the middle of the day*
26. When she left college, she got a j_____ as an editor in a publishing company.
- *the regular work that you do in order to earn money*
27. Liz and Phil have a d_____ and three sons.
- *your female child*
28. The show will be on u_____ the end of the month.
- *continuing to happen before a particular time or event and then stopping*
29. Philippa is the y_____ person in the family.
- *having lived or existed for only a short time and not old*
30. He shaved off his b_____but kept his moustache.
- *the hair that grows on a man's chin*

Appendix C
Interview Guide[1]
Hello and thank you for participating in this study.

- What are you planning to study in the future/Why are you not planning to go on to further studies?
- Do you use English in your spare time? If so, in what manner?
- Why/why not, do you feel challenged by the level of English you study at school?
- In what manner do you feel that school has/has not prepared you for further higher education?
- Do you think English is different at university? If so, in what manner do you think it's different?
- Why/why not would there be a difference for you if your courses are in English?
- What does it feel like to self-assess yourself?
- You wrote that you were at level X. After having done the test, do you feel the same way? Do you think that your self-assessment is in alignment with the results of the test? Why? Why not? (*Show them the results of the test at this point*)
- How come the results look as they do? Was it expected?
- Do you feel that your self-assessment was correct? Do you think that you would have been able to assess other skills, reading skills or listening skills? Would it have been easier or more difficult? Why?
- Who do you feel has the ultimate responsibility for your education?
- Would it be OK for me to contact you again if there is something else I need to ask?

Thank you for participating in my study!

[1] Translated into English by the authors