

Multilingual Learners in Sweden: Exploring Language Presence and Absence in English Classes

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In recent decades, Sweden has experienced a significant influx of immigrants, many of whom lack the necessary language skills to participate fully in Swedish society. As a result, Swedish courses for immigrants (such as SFI and SVA) have become an essential component of the Swedish education system. However, given the critical role of English in Swedish society and education, proficiency in this language has almost become a requirement for these new immigrants. Despite the significance of these English language classes, concerns have been raised about their equity and accessibility.

One issue is using the majority language, Swedish as the language of instruction in English classes, even though many students lack the necessary Swedish language skills to fully understand the content. This presumably places Swedish learner students at a disadvantage compared to their Swedish L1 classmates. While Swedish is the target language for Swedish classes and there is no common language to instruct between teachers and learners, the medium of instruction for English classes is generally Swedish. This disparity raises concerns about equity and access to education for newly arrived multilinguals in Sweden. Although some undergraduate theses (Halimi & Johanovic, 2021; Roberts, 2021; Sparreskog, 2007) and Skolverket's (2018) report on English education mention that the majority of educational instruction in English courses is conducted in Swedish across various educational tiers, no extensive or comprehensive investigation exists on how learners perceive the presence or absences of languages in English classes and how the teachers justify the language (or languages) of choice. This study addresses these issues by investigating the perspectives of language, teachers, and learners, as well as language transfer among secondary school students in Sweden.

From an ecology perspective, the different tiers of the ecological system need to be considered to understand phenomena. Hence, this study will focus on analyzing different layers of the educational scene. This study aims to contribute to developing more effective language education programs that promote equity and access for multilingual students in Sweden.