

Institutionen för pedagogik och specialpedagogik

Young students' Language Choice in Swedish
compulsory school – expectations, learning and
assessment

av

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Abstract

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In the Swedish curriculum, the second foreign language, referred to as Modern Languages, begins no later than year 6. Swedish students normally make a Language Choice ("Språkval") in year 5 and begin their learning of the chosen language in year 6. Almost nine out of ten students choose to learn a Modern Language (normally French, German or Spanish). However, the drop-out rates are substantial and in school year 9 the percentage of students learning a Modern Language is usually around 70%. This thesis explores the attitudes, perceptions and experiences that young language learners (11 to 12 years old) hold prior to and during their first year of learning French, German or Spanish in a Swedish compulsory school. Three Modern Language classes (one for each language) were followed during one school year (2019/2020). The students' perspectives are essential, and the study investigates their experiences concerning language learning, teaching and assessment. Employing a mixed methods approach, qualitative methods (based on classroom observations, field notes and interviews) were used in conjunction with quantitative methods (three questionnaires). Findings show that the students' Language Choice was primarily inspired by families and friends and by visits to a country where the language is spoken. Motivation for learning a Modern Language was high prior to the students' Language Choice, as well as during and after their first year of learning. However, a small decrease in motivation was noticeable at the end of the first year. Findings also show a certain ambiguity towards language learning; although many students stated that they liked and thought that they would have good use of their Modern Language in the future, some still believed that they would manage well without knowing any other foreign languages besides English. One overall finding is that contextual parameters play a significant role in relation to the Language Choice. Organizational and administrative features influenced the teaching and learning practices in the language classroom as well as the teachers' assessment. The conditions for learning a Modern Language also varied between the three languages, mainly due to the large groups of students learning Spanish. These differences can be considered problematic from a comparability perspective.