A comparative study of the English language syllabus for the secondary school level in Sweden and Japan with a focus on communicative competence

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Abstract

The aim of this master's thesis is to compare the English syllabus for secondary school in Sweden and the English syllabus for (the age equivalent) junior high school level in Japan, with a focus on communicative competence as it is defined by Canale and Swain (1980). Moreover, the results of the syllabus analysis are compared with qualitative data gathered from in depth, semi-structured interviews with three active English teachers from secondary school in each of the respective countries. The qualitative data is discussed on its own and the teachers' views, their teaching practices and their interpretations of the syllabus are contrasted with the directives and teaching guidelines described in the two formal syllabi.

The objective of this thesis is to shed light on similarities and differences between what the English language syllabus for secondary school in Sweden and Japan suggest about communicative competence, and compare the findings with teachers' interpretation and implementation of the syllabus.

The findings of the study reveal significant differences in the way the syllabi treat communicative competence and this is corroborated by the teacher interviews. Though both syllabi have set developing communication skills as an outcome, the analysis highlights key distinctions between the documents. Qualitative data gathered from respondents further distinguishes the way CLT has been implemented in Sweden and Japan.

Keywords

Communicative Syllabus Design, Communicative Competence, Syllabus analysis, Communicative Language Teaching, English in secondary school, English teaching in Sweden and Japan

Contents

1. Introduction

The importance of acquiring communication skills in English is undeniable, given that the world is becoming increasingly more knowledge-based, globalized and interconnected. In countries whose first language is not English, there is a continuous interest and effort directed towards developing school syllabi that are suitable for the learners' needs and helpful in achieving society's educational goals. Having new generations of students become competent speakers of English is a relevant issue in many countries in the world where English has the status of Foreign Language (EFL).

The Communicative language teaching (CLT) approach started growing in popularity in the 70s and has been generally influential around the world, leaving its mark on the EFL syllabi created by many educational institutions, while also being included in a number of national educational reforms. CLT is still a highly regarded perspective on language teaching and is currently being used in national syllabi for language learning in many countries.

Teaching in an EFL context by using the CLT approach sets out to develop the students' communicative competence in real-life situations. In other words, the primary goal of the instruction is that students acquire the ability to communicate satisfactorily about common topics affecting them and be able to speak, write, read and listen to EFL in an effective manner. It is widely understood nowadays that communication in a foreign language requires mastering much more than the sum of linguistic components such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

For this research paper, the EFL syllabi for secondary school in two countries with different educational cultures and different levels of English proficiency were compared in regard to the way they reflect a focus on communicative competence. The countries that were selected are Sweden and Japan, both highly developed nations, situated in different parts of the world. Teacher beliefs were also included in the research, given that the role of the instructor in the field of language learning is significant, regardless of the approach used. Studies on EFL syllabi and language teaching approaches help shed light on the interaction between educational policies and classroom realities, and are helpful asset for examining the outcomes of educational reforms.

This paper starts out by providing some background information regarding EFL in Sweden and Japan in the introductory part. In the next section, the literature review describes the theories and concepts that are used in this thesis: the framework of communicative competence and its sub-components as outlined by Canale and Swain (1980), the underpinnings of the CLT approach, the definition of a syllabus and the types of syllabi relevant to the study. Later, the methods part explains how I conducted the syllabus analysis and the interviews. In the Results section, the findings are summarized and presented visually in tables. Finally, the Discussion section directly addresses the research questions, delves into the importance of communicative competence and discusses the syllabus and its implications for EFL fluency.

1.1 The status of English in Sweden

Aside from Swedish, English is the most widely spoken language in Sweden, according to a survey by Eurobarometer, where 86% of Swedish respondents said they can hold a conversation in English. The same study also revealed that 93% of the 1016 Swedes interviewed thought that English is the language that is most useful for their personal development (Eurobarometer 386, 2012).

According to a detailed report on the languages of Sweden by Parkvall (2009), English is undisputedly the biggest of the "school languages" in Sweden and enjoys the status of "privileged foreign language" (p.14). The report shows that English is perceived as one of the most important school subjects by both pupils and parents, while more and more Swedes attain good English language skills. Due to the status of English in Sweden, there is scholarly debate on whether English in Sweden may be considered ESL or EFL (Hult, 2012).

Sweden is well-known to be one of the countries that has among the world's best non-native speakers of English and an example of success regarding teaching English (Kim-Rivera, 1999). This is also supported by the findings of an annual report conducted by a global language training company called Education First (EF). The EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) ranked Sweden as number 1 in the world in 2015 based on an EPI score of 70,94 which corresponds to the Very High Proficiency band. The score is based on two English language tests taken by 910,000 adults in 2014. The Very High Proficiency score is considered equivalent to CEFR level B2. Sweden has consistently ranked high in this report (number 4 in 2011, number 1 in 2012 and 2013, number 3 in 2014) (EF English Proficiency Index, 2015).

Another language study conducted in 2011 on the initiative of the EU Commission is the ESLC (European Survey of Language Competences), which surveyed 53,000 pupils in 14 countries. In Sweden, 3,000 pupils in ninth grade were tested in order to measure their English language skills, with the levels described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a standard. The results showed that 66% of the pupils reach the highest level in reading comprehension, 77% perform to the same high standard in listening comprehension, while only 28% of the Swedish pupils achieve the highest level in writing ability. This is a top score, situated on par with Malta, a country where English is an official language (Skolverket, 2015). Sweden appears in the *Test and Score Data Summary for TOEFL iBT* from 2019 as averaging a total score of 93 (out of a maximum possible of 120).

1.2 The status of English in Japan

Aside from Japanese, English is the most prominent language in Japan even though it holds no official status in Japan. It is the most taught foreign language on all educational levels, with some authors estimating that 9% of Japan's population are learners of English (Kubota, 2019). In addition, English is seen as a tool for international communication, competitiveness and career development as well as a symbol of wealth and entrepreneurship (Kubota, 2019). Therefore, boosting proficiency levels in English has been an area of continued interest in recent years as Japan is going through the process of

opening up more to a globalized world. English owes its popularity in Japan due to it being socially linked to increased professional mobility and greater economic opportunities for business (OECD, 2018).

Despite Japanese people's investment of time and effort, it is reported that the majority of Japanese students of English do not acquire a level of communication skills that they feel satisfied with (Saito, 2019; Kubota, 2019). Test scores tend to aggregate around the lower tier of English proficiency when measured by competence tests such as TOEFL or IELTS. For example, the *Test and Score Data Summary for TOEFL iBT*® from 2019 shows Japan earning a mean total score of only 74 (out of a maximum possible of 120). A survey conducted by Education First in 2017 ranked Japan 35 out of 70 countries that were included in the questionnaire regarding proficiency in English (OECD, 2018). This documented low level of proficiency in English in Japan is attributed to reasons such as Japan being a homogeneous society where citizens can go about their daily life without needing English skills, as well as the significant linguistic differences between English and Japanese regarding grammar, politeness and even the two writing systems (Saito, 2019).

As a school subject, English is one of the core subjects (along with Japanese language and mathematics). Consequently, knowledge of English is vital given that students are required to take admissions exams before entering upper secondary school and university studies (OECD, 2018). Japan is well-known for having an educational system that is celebrated for its efficiency and effectiveness, but also criticized for a certain lack of flexibility and emphasis on standardization, the latter part being a motivation behind recent educational reforms (Kitamura, 2019). Another criticism is the prevalent practice of memorizing and cramming information in school, which is continually being addressed through changes in the national curriculum and educational policies initiated by The Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology (hereinafter MEXT) (OECD, 2018).

1.3 Objective and research questions

The aim of this paper is to answer the following research questions:

1) How do the EFL syllabi in Sweden and Japan compare in regard to what they suggest about communicative competence? What commonalities and differences can be found?
2) To what extent do teacher views and reported practices correspond with the EFL syllabus in each country?

1.4 Significance of this research and need for the study

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to growing a body of research on EFL syllabi based on or influenced by the CLT approach and compare the syllabi documents with teacher views of the syllabi and teaching practices for implementation in the classroom. The research will be useful to teachers and educational policymakers in Sweden and Japan, as it can point to noteworthy shortcomings of the syllabi, but also showcase the

strengths of the steering documents being used. In addition, the study can also shed light on the need for teacher education and support to put the syllabi into practice.

Syllabi are documents that are regularly subjected to discussion and change based on factors such as culture, changing societal needs and learner goals. Research on syllabi used in compulsory schools on a national level is helpful for establishing whether the documents are aligned with the individual and society's needs. Entire generations of students are directly affected by the educational goals and guidelines described in the syllabi and as a result, this is a key area of concern for linguists, educators, and policymakers.

Moreover, I believe that more research needs to be devoted to studying national EFL syllabi from a cross-cultural perspective. It is interesting to compare how the CLT approach has been applied in diverse countries around the world and start a discussion on whether this has anything to do with the level of English fluency exhibited in different areas of the world.

2. Literature review

2.1 The concept of communicative competence

Previous research on the topic of communicative competence is rather ample, unfolding over several decades and involving contributions from many scholars, notably: Hymes (1971), Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990). Notwithstanding the many definitions of the term and sometimes diverging opinions in the literature regarding what components it entails, the concept of communicative competence has nevertheless had a significant impact on foreign language teaching policies and practices, including on the way CLT syllabi have been designed in many countries around the world.

The theoretical background that constitutes the basis of this study is Canale and Swain's framework of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). According to Canale and Swain's proposed model for communicative competence, the notion is divided into four sub-competences: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence, as summarized in the table below:

Table 1. The communicative competence framework proposed by Canale and Swain (1980)

C O M M U N I C A T I V E C O M P E T E N C E	
Sub-competence	**Definition**
Grammatical competence	It refers to the ability to recognize, understand and produce accurate utterances in a language. It involves grasping the way the linguistic code works on several levels, including vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonetics, orthography etc.

	It deals with literal meanings and the rules that need to be followed in order to create correct utterances.
Sociolinguistic competence	This involves awareness of appropriateness in different contexts and situations, as well as being able to adapt one's language according to the receiver and nature of the interaction. It requires understanding rules and conventions that are related to sociolinguistic and sociocultural factors affecting language (for example, using the appropriate level of formality, expressing politeness and so on).
Discourse competence	This refers to mastery of the rules regarding how to combine sentences, paragraphs and meaning for the purpose of achieving coherence and cohesiveness in written or spoken language. It is employed while creating different types of written discourse (emails, essays, letters, etc.) or in oral production (speeches, presentations, sales pitches and more).
Strategic competence	It comprises the ability to effectively use a variety of strategies for facilitating comprehension or re-establishing communication if there are breakdowns in understanding each other. Rephrasing or repeating one's utterances, asking for clarification, explaining oneself, are all examples of common language strategies for communication. This element can be further divided into communication strategies relating to grammatical competence and those connected to sociolinguistic competence.

According to Canale and Swain (1980), having communicative skills in a language requires meeting the minimum level needed to face daily, common real-life situations. The scholars suggest that the starting point of the instruction should be encouraging the learner to become capable of getting his or her point across and they stress the importance of using authentic, meaningful materials in the classroom. Canale and Swain (1980) also note that the best outcome of language learning is obtained when all sub-competences are given equal attention. Canale (1983) recommends that students should be encouraged to make use of strategic competence when there are difficulties in communication, instead of remaining quiet.

Based on this theory of language, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach was developed, which subsequently led to the emergence of different types of

syllabi for foreign language learning. Therefore, these are the four aspects that have been the focus of the syllabus analysis and the teacher interviews in this study.

2.2 The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach to language instruction that has as the main goal the learners' development of communicative competence (Richards, 2005). CLT is based on the idea that interaction is both the means, as well as the goal of learning a foreign language. In other words, during the entire learning process, students are encouraged to practice communication in many varied ways, as this will prepare them for interactions in the target language outside the classroom. The main objective to achieve according to CLT is developing the ability to communicate effectively in the foreign language, while grammatical correctness assumes a subordinate role. The priority of CLT is to help the students get their message across in an appropriate manner and develop their capacity to respond to a variety of situations (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Nunan, 2015). Duff (2014) suggests that the CLT classroom should be centred around activities used to practice communication skills: talking about daily routines and situations, expressing opinions on common conversation topics, writing emails, sharing thoughts and feelings, reviewing a book or discussing a recent news item.

As described by Richards and Rodgers (2014), the main views that underpin the CLT theoretical framework are:

1. Language is a system for the expression of meaning.
2. The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication.
3. The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
4. The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

The Council of Europe (2001) was influential in popularizing CLT by developing the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which is an internationally recognized standard for determining language ability, and by contributing to the development of language learning syllabuses in many European countries.

CLT is currently the recommended approach to language instruction by The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). CLT currently entails many facets and approaches to language teaching. Nevertheless, CLT is rooted in the core belief that learners have an innate desire to communicate, and this should be encouraged by the teacher as much as possible. In CLT the teacher serves more as a guide than a strict enforcer of language rules, and interruptions or frequent corrections of errors made by the learners are discouraged, as this can stifle and inhibit the learning process. Thus, it is safe to say that CLT puts the communicative function in the limelight, while the linguistic form/grammar is viewed as an ancillary (Lundahl, 2009).

2.3 Fluency versus accuracy

Though the idea of *fluency* is not mentioned specifically by Canale and Swain (1980), the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) makes note of the concept of fluency and includes it within the category of pragmatic competence (corresponding to Canale and Swain's term

of sociolinguistic competence). Savignon (2005) interprets Canale and Swain's theory of language (1980) as a framework that views accuracy as necessary and important, but that nevertheless positions it as merely one component (grammatical competence) within the broader context of communicative skills.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), accuracy refers to correct usage of the linguistic forms. Accuracy is frequently trained through using classroom phrases, focusing on correct utterances, and practising small linguistic items outside of a specific, natural context. On the other hand, the scholars define fluency as the ability to communicate in a meaningful, spontaneous, and natural way, while using communication strategies for support and adapting one's language use to the respective context.

This paper will examine the steering documents to see the extent to which they explicitly address accuracy and fluency, given that these two aspects are connected to the broader concept of communicative competence. The interviews with EFL teachers also included questions aimed at revealing the pedagogues' views and classroom practices related to the development of accuracy and fluency.

2.4 Teacher roles

On a societal and professional level, the teachers' role and responsibility is to put the syllabus in practice, according to the way it has been formulated by linguists and educational agencies (Nunan, 1988). There is also an implicit expectation placed on teachers to comply with the language ideology and assessment practices that are common in their country or workplace. For example, in Japan language proficiency assessment is done most frequently through summative tests and standardized examinations targeting grammar, reading and vocabulary, leading to an emphasis on memorization as a remedy for insufficient language skills (Kubota, 2019; OECD, 2018). On the other hand, in Sweden teachers are required to regularly offer formative assessment focused on language production and to provide ample opportunities for students to show the quality of all four macro-skills in different ways, including individualized assessment forms (Skolverket, 2011).

Within the context of teaching a foreign language by using CLT, the teacher's role is primarily one of facilitator, guide and monitor. The teacher's role in CLT is multifaceted and nuanced as it involves playing many different parts, stretching far beyond the conventional image of the pedagogue that functions as an authority figure and model for correct language usage (Richards, 2005; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). There can sometimes be a certain divergence between the cultural expectations placed on teachers and the type of role the pedagogues need to fill in the context of different kinds of classroom assignments or language learning activities (Hedge, 2000). Moreover, when using CLT, the teacher is expected to be rather tolerant of language errors committed by the learners and refrain from correcting errors that do not hinder comprehension or seriously disrupt the flow of communication. CLT assumes that only in the situation when the errors affect the learner's ability to be understood should the teacher take action and correct their speech or writing (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

2.5 Definition and purpose of a syllabus

In this research paper, the term *syllabus* is used to refer to the course of study for one individual subject, in this case EFL (a speaker of American English would refer to this document as *curriculum*). In addition, the word *curriculum* is used in this thesis to refer to the broader steering document detailing the totality of educational goals on a national level along with the course of study for all school subjects. Both syllabi and school curricula are documents that are subject to undergoing updates and revisions over time, since they contain official requirements, educational expectations and learning goals for new generations of students who will later become active contributing members of society.

Brown (1995) states that a syllabus is a document that establishes the focus of the instruction and provides the reasoning behind the selection and organization of the core content. Likewise, Richards (2005) holds the view that a syllabus is created with the aim of specifying the contents of the programme and delivers an inventory of the items that should be taught and assessed. The scholar explains that syllabus design requires a decision-making process that begins with formulating a course rationale, selecting and sequencing content, planning and preparing items and developing necessary materials. According to Candlin (1984), a syllabus contains the planned objectives to be achieved at the end of the instruction and carries a certain sense of authority both for the teachers, as well as for the learners. Similarly, Nunan (1988) explains that a syllabus is primarily focused on the outcome of the instruction (in contrast to the methodology, which is concerned with the process).

2.6 Types of language learning syllabi

There is a variety of different types of syllabi used in the context of teaching EFL, depending on the educational culture of the country, the pedagogical ideas and theories of language that are viewed as reputable at the time, the purpose of the instruction, the learners' needs and goals, the teachers' preparation and background etc.

Based on the objectives of the instruction, a syllabus can be tailored to include a wide range of content types and activities. Syllabus design is therefore the plan resulting from the interaction between the currently accepted theories of language learning and the communicative objectives established for the individuals undergoing instruction. Nunan (2015) defines syllabus design as:

> The selection, sequencing, integrating, and justifying of content for a syllabus: content can include some or all of the following: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, topics, themes, situations, functions, and text types. (p. 192)

According to Brown (1995), there are seven basic syllabus types: "structural, situational, topical, functional, notional, skills-based and task-based and these can be linked to specific teaching approaches and methods" (p.7).

For this paper, due to space constraints, only the syllabus types that are considered relevant will be presented and used in the syllabus analysis. In the table below, I have provided a short description of the three syllabus types that my paper focuses on and I

have mentioned which sub-component of communicative competence they are most closely associated with.

After reading diverging opinions from different scholars regarding strategic competence and noting that there is debate on the topic (Bohlke, 2014; Tarone, 1988), I have chosen to link strategic competence with a skill-based syllabus because I consider strategic competence to be a skill, and not just a language function. Strategic competence as defined by Canale and Swain (1980) involves knowledge about addressing misunderstandings in communication and adequately compensating for one's communicative shortcomings. Strategic competence is described in the literature as a broad term encompassing a wide range of micro-skills and actions (rephrasing, asking for clarification, seeking help, making deductions based on the context, etc.); it also involves verbal and non-verbal aspects (Tarone, 1984; Nakatani, 2005).

Table 2. Types of language learning syllabi

Structural syllabus
Main focus: grammatical competence
This type of syllabus is organized around grammatical competence, putting the emphasis on the learners' need to assimilate the rules of the language system, with all its facets such as pronunciation, morphology, syntax, semantics, orthography and vocabulary. Wilkins (1976) explains that a grammatical syllabus lists all the linguistic structures that a learner needs to acquire often ordered by complexity or around a semantic theme. Nunan (1988) states that a structural view of language presumes that language learning happens in a linear fashion, therefore, each new section should build upon the previous items learned.
Notional-functional syllabus
Main focus: sociolinguistic competence
Based on Wilkins' (1976) criticism of structural syllabi and his understanding of language as consisting of functions and notions, the notional-functional syllabus was developed and it became one of the most influential types of CLT syllabi (which the author describes in detail in the book named *Notional Syllabuses*). Wilkins states that communicative ability is used as the starting point of the instruction and content is chosen and organized according to the learners' future communicative needs. In addition, language learning is viewed by Wilkins as a cyclical process: students are constantly faced with new complexities and intricacies of the target language that they need to integrate with their previous knowledge. Students are expected to master the many communicative functions of language (agreeing, requesting, apologizing, promising etc.) and learn to talk about notions (time, location, frequency etc.)
Skill-based syllabus
Main focus: discourse competence and strategic competence
This type of syllabus is focused around developing the four major skills in a foreign language: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Each of the skills can be further broken down into many microskills that nuance the expectations in regard to the

learning outcome. For example, speaking can be further segmented into: carrying a phone conversation, making an oral presentation, persuading, doing a speech, etc. The four skills are integrated together with encouragement given to learners to do their own research on specific themes of interest (Richards & Rodgers, 2015).

Moving forward, the Methods and Results sections will be using key terms which were outlined in the literature review: the framework of communicative competence and its subcomponents, the characteristics of the CLT approach and the three types of language learning syllabi: structural, notional-functional and skills-based.

3. Methods

3.1 Syllabus analysis

For the purpose of addressing my first research question ("How do the EFL syllabi in Sweden and Japan compare in regard to what they suggest about communicative competence? What commonalities and differences can be found?") I used qualitative content analysis and compared the two syllabi, viewing the documents as qualitative textual data (Dörnyei, 2007). The qualitative categories used for the content analysis were predetermined, namely the four sub-competences defined by Canale and Swain (1980). I have first looked at the syllabi individually from the perspective of communicative competence, trying to accurately identify evidence of the four sub-components and then contrasted the findings side by side.

Based on Canale and Swain's framework of communicative competence (1980), I conducted the analysis through an interpretative process where I have taken the explicitly stated syllabus objectives one by one, for each one of the steering documents and I have linked each individual aim with the sub-component of communicative competence that, in my view, most closely matches it. According to Richards and Rodgers (2015), "objectives will normally see to operationalize the notion of communicative competence into more specific descriptions of learning outcomes" (p. 91). The authors also note that the outcomes are a reflection of the nature of the syllabus framework. Therefore, most of the analysis is based on the categorization of the learning objectives and associating them with different sub-competences.

The same steps were then repeated for the core content of each syllabus. I have presented and summarized the findings in Table 5 and Table 6, given that organizing information visually is a data display tool that can help the researcher highlight relevant findings, draw conclusions, and make the data more accessible to the reader (Dörnyei, 2007). During this entire repetitive process, I have strived to maintain accuracy and consistency in the way I categorize the aims and core content, constantly referring back to the definitions of the sub-competences and considering the phrases within the context and theme of the syllabus document.

In many cases it was readily apparent to me which sub-component of communicative competence a certain phrase would be most accurately categorized as. For example, the passage below taken from the Swedish syllabus clearly corresponds to grammatical competence, given that it explicitly mentions linguistic features of English such as morphology, the grammar system and syntax:

> Language phenomena to clarify, vary and enrich communication such as pronunciation, intonation and fixed language expressions, grammatical structures and sentence structures. (Skolverket, 2011, p. 37)

However, other times the wording in the syllabus' text was not as transparent and more open to different interpretations. In situations where the phrasing was vague or broad, it was not as easy to quickly glean the underlying meaning intended by the authors. In those cases, I considered the phrase within the broader overview of the document's theme and decided which sub-competence to categorize it as based on my interpretation of what the phrase means within the context. Such an example is the following underlined phrase:

> Teaching of English should aim at helping the pupils to develop knowledge of the English language. (Skolverket, 2011, p. 37)

While this at first sight seems like a broad statement, I made the decision to categorize it as grammatical competence because, having read through the whole page where the phrase is found, all the other paragraphs refer specifically and precisely to other sub-competences of communicative competence. Therefore, in the context, I believe that the underlying meaning of this phrase is to suggest grammatical knowledge and imply that students are supposed to acquire knowledge about the linguistic system of English.

Finally, based on the overall theme and structure of the documents and having categorized the aims and core content into the four sub-competences, I have identified in each of the syllabi some characteristics of the three types of language learning syllabi that I described in Section 2.7 (Table 2). The underlying idea is that any school syllabus is based on a combination of at least two types of syllabi; it would be exceedingly rare to find a steering document that fits purely a single type. Furthermore, CLT syllabi are known for being eclectic and frequently combine a variety of different elements (Richards & Rodgers, 2015).

3.2 Qualitative study: semi-structured interviews

For this research paper, I deemed it important to supplement the theoretical syllabus analysis with a qualitative study that gathers field data from actual teachers. The objective of the interview study is to shed light on the differences between each official syllabus, in other words the formal document issued by the Ministry of Education in both countries, and the operational syllabus, defined as its practical implementation through actual teaching practices and classroom activities (Posner, 2004).

Interviews are a suitable research method for when the researcher already has an overview of the topic at hand and is therefore able to formulate a set of broad questions about the subject (Dörnyei, 2007). Studying an issue from several perspectives will create a better understanding of the topic being investigated (Dörnyei, 2007; Schilling, 2013). In other

words, the interviews add another vantage point to the research, one that is derived from practical experience. The benefit provided by the interviews is that pedagogues are reliable, first-hand sources that can reveal a lot about how the syllabus takes life in the physical classroom. As a result of their training, English teachers are ultimately the ones that carry the responsibility of interpreting the information in the syllabus, following the guidelines, and implementing the national directives in the real world, so that the language education objectives can be reached. In the absence of helpful input from English teachers, this study risks being a mere theoretical exercise in analysing two formal steering documents, without considering their consequences and effects in the classroom.

The interviews were taken through an individual online meeting with each teacher. Interviewing via long-distance methods has the advantage of being comfortable and less intimidating for the respondents, as it conveys a more informal setting that may allow them to open up and feel at ease (Schilling, 2013). The respondents in the sample were randomly selected by reaching out online through professional networks of teachers and by contacting schools via email according to a few main criteria for selection. The first criterion was that the respondents needed to be non-native speakers of English and native speakers of the respective local language; this was done to define a sample of comparable linguistic and cultural background and avoid introducing differences that can be explained by other factors (like being a native speaker of English or non-native speaker of Swedish, respectively Japanese). The second criterion was related to the respondents' professional background: the study included teachers that are licensed in their respective country (and have therefore received the required training for certification), and who had at least a few years' experience teaching English in public school at the secondary school level (and have been therefore professionally active teaching the age group that is relevant for the study). Some other considerations were including teachers of different ages (thus different generations), with varying lengths of experience and from different schools and geographical areas.

After interviewing two Swedish teachers whose data are not included into the main data set, I proceeded with the data collection. Piloting the interview study allowed me to refine my list of questions and strategize how to best move forward. By trying out how questions were received I could anticipate possible answers and eliminate or re-order questions in order to be able to elicit the most useful data. For example, I moved the question "What is the content of your lessons? What kind of activities and materials do you use?" near the very end of the interview in order to prevent the conversation from going off-topic and lingering on this issue, since I was only seeking a brief answer on the matter.

The semi-structured interviews each lasted thirty minutes and involved asking a standard list of questions that I prepared in advance concerning their interpretation of the syllabus, their classroom practices, and views on communicative language teaching (see: Appendix 1), while leaving room for additional questions and requests for clarifications that could arise spontaneously. While conducting the interviews, it was important to appear neutral and ask the questions without showing personal bias (Dörnyei, 2007). Semi-structured interviews have the advantage of relatively good replicability of the methodology by other researchers interested in confirming the study's findings, while also allowing for some nuance and depth to be expressed by the respondents. Though a survey would have been

an effective way to gather data from a much larger sample of respondents, the decision against using a questionnaire was motivated by the absence of opportunities to instantly ask follow-up questions and bring forward interesting viewpoints and unexpected pieces of information that could be relevant to the research (Dörnyei, 2007; Mosley, 2013).

3.3 Interview participants

Three teachers from each country participated in this study. All participants were native speakers of the local language and qualified English teachers with experience teaching EFL in secondary school in their country.

Table 3. Swedish interview participants

Code	*Year teaching license was obtained*	*Years experience teaching EFL in secondary school*	*Total years experience as an EFL teacher*
S1	1993	27	27
S2	1997	8	11
S3	2016	5	5

Table 4. Japanese interview participants

Code	*Year teaching license was obtained*	*Years experience teaching EFL in secondary school*	*Total years experience as an EFL teacher*
J1	1991	12	30
J2	2001	6	20
J3	2014	6	6

4. Results

4.1 Syllabus analysis

4.1.1 The English syllabus in Sweden

At the time of writing this paper, the national curriculum in use in Sweden is called *Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the recreation centre*, 2011 (commonly abbreviated as Lgr11) and has been approved by Skolverket (The Swedish National Agency for Education) in 2011 as a result of the educational reform that took place during the same year.

Lgr11 contains a detailed description and formulation of the values, principles and educational objectives to achieve through the instruction in Swedish schools. Furthermore, it contains the syllabi for every school subject available in Sweden, one of them corresponding to English as a subject (EFL). As mentioned in this paper's

introduction, English is one of the core subjects (Swedish: *kärnämnen*) in the curriculum, holding the same level of importance as Swedish literacy and Mathematics. Not being able to obtain a passing grade in English at the end of ninth grade means that the student is later on not eligible for university studies.

The syllabus for English that will be analysed in this paper is the third CLT syllabus in use for teaching EFL in Sweden so far. The Swedish syllabus for EFL complies closely with the directives of The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The aims of the reform were to better align syllabuses in European countries and create the potential for increased workforce and educational mobility in the EU, but also to provide clearer, better defined and more standardized grading criteria for schools in Sweden (Mader & Zeynep, 2010).

4.1.2 Communicative competence and the Swedish syllabus for EFL in secondary school

The Swedish syllabus for EFL consists of the following parts: aim, core content for different stages in compulsory school (in year 1-3, year 4-6 and year 7-9) and a thorough list of knowledge requirements for every grade at the end of year 6 and year 9 (Skolverket, 2011). Given that this research paper focuses on secondary school, only the parts referring to year 7-9 will be analysed.

The excerpt below (emphasis mine) is taken from the part of the Swedish syllabus for EFL describing the overall aim of the English instruction. The underlined parts clearly suggest a strong focus on communicative competence, the need for interaction skills and emphasize the importance of helping pupils develop the ability to communicate appropriately in English:

> "Teaching of English should aim at helping the pupils to develop knowledge of the English language and of the areas and contexts where English is used, and also pupils' confidence in their ability to use the language in different situations and for different purposes.
>
> Through teaching, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop all-round communicative skills. These skills involve understanding spoken and written English, being able to formulate one's thinking and interact with others in the spoken and written language, and the ability to adapt use of language to different situations, purposes and recipients. Communication skills also cover confidence in using the language and the ability to use different strategies to support communication and solve problems when language skills by themselves are not sufficient.
>
> (…) They should also be equipped to be able to use different tools for learning, understanding, being creative and communicating. Teaching should encourage pupils to develop an interest in languages and culture, and convey the benefits of language skills and knowledge." (Skolverket, 2011, p. 34).

Skolverket explicitly notes that pupils are expected to not only communicate and get their message across, but also achieve this while feeling secure in their abilities: "communication skills also cover confidence in using the language" (p. 34). Moreover, the EFL syllabus in Sweden encourages the development of a high level of autonomy for

the learners by fostering their research aptitudes and stimulating creative skills, as exhibited in the following passage:

> "Teachers should help pupils to develop their skills in searching for, evaluating, choosing and assimilating the content of spoken language and texts from different sources. They should also be equipped to be able to use different tools for learning, understanding, being creative and communicating." (Skolverket, 2011, p. 34).

As shown in the passages above, developing all-round communicative skills is painted in the Swedish syllabus for EFL as achieving a combination of self-confidence when using the language, understanding what one hears or reads, expressing thoughts correctly, adapting one's language to different recipients and contexts, as well as being able to repair breakdowns in communication or address misunderstandings. Communication skills in English are considered important because "knowledge of English thus increases the individual's opportunities to participate in different social and cultural contexts, as well as in international studies and working life" (Skolverket, 2011, p. 34).

It is notable that Skolverket does not provide any specific guidelines on how these ideas should be implemented in the daily classroom activities, nor does it describe any particular pathways that are deemed effective for achieving these goals through the educational process. The syllabus can thus be interpreted with a great degree of freedom, which can be perceived both as a strength and as a weakness. On an implicit level, this signifies that there is a large amount of trust placed in the teachers' professional competence and training, by relying on their capacity to individualize and tailor their lessons. The natural consequence of this is that EFL teachers in Sweden have a significant amount of freedom regarding their choice of material, instructional content, procedures for evaluating the learners, routines for giving feedback etc. It is likely that English teachers may interpret and use the criteria mentioned in the syllabus in somewhat different ways, based on the resources available, their own views on EFL instruction and the school's educational profile.

There are phrases explicitly referring to sociolinguistic competence, as can be seen in the statement of the main aims of the instruction which are "helping the pupils to develop (…) knowledge of the areas and contexts where English is used" and developing the "ability to use the language in different situations and for different purposes" (Skolverket, 2011, p. 34). Skolverket states that pupils should also become able to "adapt language for different purposes, recipients and contexts" and "reflect over living conditions, social and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used" (p. 35). In addition, the importance of acquiring sociolinguistic competence is reinforced through this passage:

> "Teaching should also provide pupils with opportunities to develop knowledge about and an understanding of different living conditions, as well as social and cultural phenomena in areas and contexts where English is used." (Skolverket, 2011, p. 34).

On the topic of strategic competence, there are precise descriptions (Skolverket, 2011, p. 34) of what it means ("the ability to use different strategies to support communication") and its utility ("solve problems when language skills by themselves are not sufficient").

One of the aims of the instruction is that learners are able to "use language strategies to understand and make themselves understood". There is even more evidence of attention being given to strategic competence in the core content, which even contains specific examples of what strategies pupils should be able to employ:

> "Strategies for understanding details and context in spoken language and texts, such as adapting listening and reading to the type of communication, contents and purpose.
> (…)
> Language strategies to understand and be understood when language skills are lacking, such as reformulations, questions and explanations.
> Language strategies to contribute to and actively participate in conversations by taking the initiative in interaction, giving confirmation, putting follow-up questions, taking the initiative to raise new issues and also concluding conversations." (Skolverket, 2011, p. 37).

Discourse competence is the sub-competence that is given most ample space, with a number of 12 mentions throughout the syllabus document. Pupils are required by Skolverket (2011) to become able to "understand and interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts" and "express themselves and communicate in speech and writing" (p.34) by working with a wide range of types of discourse, as specified in the core content:

> "Spoken English and texts from various media.
> (…)
> Oral and written instructions and descriptions.
> Different types of conversations, dialogues, interviews and oral communications.
> Literature and other fiction in spoken, dramatized and filmed forms.
> Songs and poems.
> Oral and written information, as well as discussions and argumentation for different purposes, such as news, reports and newspaper articles.
> (…)
> Different ways of searching for, choosing and assessing texts and spoken language in English from the Internet and other media.
> (…)
> Different ways of working on one's own production and interaction to vary, clarify, specify and adapt them for different purposes.
> Oral and written narratives, descriptions and instructions.
> Conversations, discussions and argumentation." (Skolverket, 2011, p. 37).

Least represented in the Swedish EFL syllabus is the issue of grammatical competence, with only a sweeping mention in the overall aims as "knowledge of the English language" and two specific, explicit appearances in the core content for the course:

> "How connecting words and other expressions are used to create structure and linguistically coherent entities.
> (…)
> Language phenomena to clarify, vary and enrich communication such as pronunciation, intonation and fixed language expressions, grammatical structures and sentence structures". (Skolverket, 2011, p. 37)

The role of the teacher is openly stated as being one that "should essentially give pupils the opportunities to develop their ability (…)" (Skolverket, 2011, p. 34) to use English for communicative purposes, which implicitly carries the connotation of the teacher being seen as a guide, a creator of varied and ample opportunities for learning. In addition, Skolverket (2011) explains that teachers need to "encourage pupils to develop an interest in language and culture" and "convey the benefits of language skills and knowledge" (p. 34). This paints an image of the teacher's role as an inspiring guide, tasked with stimulating the pupils' desire to assimilate linguistic skills while also becoming aware of the advantages of speaking other languages.

Overall, the Swedish EFL syllabus incorporates a fair balance of the four sub-components of communicative competence with a marked inclination towards sociolinguistic and discourse competence (which are given most attention), incorporating thorough coverage of strategic competence and showing very little emphasis placed on grammatical competence. Therefore, the steering document exhibits characteristics of a skills-based syllabus, with a strong notional-functional component. The structural aspect of language is only mentioned, but the organizing principle here are the functions of language and the language skills.

4.1.3 The English syllabus in Japan

The EFL syllabus in Japan is titled *The Course of Study: Foreign Languages* and is primarily designed with English in mind as the first-hand choice of a foreign language, albeit it is specified that it shall be also used for the study of foreign languages other than English, when this is applicable.

In 1989, the CLT approach was first implemented in secondary schools in Japan by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), then further reinforced through a subsequent syllabus revision in 1998, all with the aim of improving the listening and speaking skills of Japanese students (Tanaka, 2009).

In an article authored by Yoshida, Aliponga, Koshiyama, Gamble, Wilkins and Ando (2012) it is pointed out that there were three major studies conducted in Japan after the syllabus revision (Gorsuch, 2000, Taguchi, 2005, Nishino, 2008, as cited in Yoshida et al., 2012) and each one of them found that Japanese EFL teachers were not satisfied with the revised CLT syllabus for English. The data regarding teachers' beliefs was collected through surveys and revealed that the teachers perceived the syllabus to be incompatible with the educational system in Japan and difficult to use for the classroom assessment of students' communicative skills.

4.1.4 Communicative competence and the Japanese syllabus for EFL in secondary school

The overall objective of the EFL syllabus in Japan is stated on its first page as being communication (emphasis mine):

> to develop students' basic communication abilities such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, deepening their understanding of language and culture and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages. (MEXT, 2008, p. 1)

This clearly establishes the development of communicative competence as the main goal, which is subsequently reinforced through the four objectives declared in section II.1.:

> (1) To enable students to understand the speaker's intentions when listening to English.
> (2) To enable students to talk about their own thoughts using English.
> (3) To accustom and familiarize students with reading English and to enable them to understand the writer's intentions when reading English.
> (4) To accustom and familiarize students with writing in English and to enable them to write about their own thoughts using English. (MEXT, 2008, p. 1)

On an implicit level, it can be deduced that the communication level expected at the end of instruction is not exceedingly high or complex, since the conversations topics revolve only around expressing own thoughts and feelings (therefore only on topics relating to the self and not so much on the outside world); in addition, the students are only required to be familiar with the language and grasp the overall meaning of what the speaker expects from them in an interaction.

The aims stated in the syllabus include a list of 5 to 6 language activities required for practising each one of the four macro-skills. The purpose of these activities is to allow students to "develop a practical command of English" and "understand English and express themselves in English" (MEXT, 2008, p.1). This is further evidence of a declared communicative focus, although the standard of proficiency to reach seems to be a reasonably modest one. More evidence of communicative competence is apparent in the recommendation given to teachers to focus on "actual language-use situations and functions of language" and help students "cultivate communication abilities such as listening, speaking, reading and writing" (MEXT, 2008, p. 7).

Grammatical competence is extensively covered in the Japanese syllabus, this is most obvious through the fact that it contains a section titled "Language elements" (starting on p. 4) consisting of a two-page long list of speech sounds, letters and symbols, words and collocations and grammatical items (verbs, pronouns, passive and active voice etc.). Therefore, by providing such a comprehensive list of linguistic elements to be taught, there is a clear emphasis on accurately mastering the linguistic code of the English language and thus, on pure grammatical knowledge.
However, the next part of the syllabus, which offers recommendations to the teachers regarding how to treat the content of the lessons, includes the following advice (emphasis mine):

> "B. Language activities should be conducted in such a way as grammar is effectively utilized for communication, based on the idea that grammar underpins communication.
> C. Consideration should be given so that the instruction does not center on issues like explaining grammatical terms or differentiating between usage, but on actual use of grammatical items. At the same time, instruction should be provided in the awareness of the differences between English and Japanese in terms of word order, modification relation and other aspects.
> D. Effective instruction should be devised in order to have students understand the unique features of English, such as organizing mutually related grammatical items in a cohesive manner." (MEXT, 2008, p. 6)

This section of the steering document most clearly highlights the underlying dichotomy that characterises the Japanese EFL syllabus. There is namely a need to reconcile and adhere to two distinct, opposing views on language learning. On one hand, it is said that grammar should not be central to the EFL instruction and should only be mentioned as a way to illustrate actual usage. However, on the other hand, there is a lengthy list of grammatical terms to cover and an emphasis on contrasting the students' native language with the target language in order to help them understand the linguistic system of English.

Sociolinguistic competence is readily apparent in the statement of the overall objective of the EFL instruction, as the syllabus requires:

> "deepening their understanding of language and culture and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages" (MEXT, 2008, p. 1)

In addition, the requirement for a basic level of sociolinguistic competence is apparent in two of the goals ("listen to questions and requests and respond appropriately", p.1 and "understand the writer's intentions in texts such as messages and letters and respond appropriately", p. 2). Teachers are also told to plan activities that teach pupils "how to express themselves in a way appropriate to a specific situation and condition" (p. 3).
Additional attention is given to sociolinguistic competence in the following recommendations given to teachers for selecting the content of their lessons (emphasis mine):

> "B. Materials should be useful in deepening the understanding of the ways of life and cultures of foreign countries and Japan, raising interest in language and culture and developing respectful attitudes towards these.
> C. Materials should be useful in deepening the international understanding from a broad perspective, heightening students' awareness of being Japanese citizens living in a global community and cultivating a spirit of international cooperation." (MEXT, 2008, p. 8).

Aside from the goal of fostering understanding towards the English-speaking world, it is remarkable that the phrase underlined above shows that MEXT expects students to be able to express their "Japaneseness" when communicating in English and thus be able to contribute to Japan's image in the international community.

Moreover, the Japanese EFL syllabus provides a list of functions of language to be taught that includes a mix of communicative categories (emphasis mine):

> "a. Facilitating communication:
> Addressing, asking for repetition, giving nods, repeating
>
> b. Expressing emotions:
> Expressing gratitude, praising, complaining, apologizing
>
> *c. Transmitting information:*
> *Explaining, reporting, presenting, describing*
>
> d. Expressing opinions and intentions:
> Offering, promising, giving opinions, agreeing, disagreeing, accepting, refusing
>
> e. Stimulating a communication partner into action:
> Asking questions, requesting, inviting" (MEXT, 2008, pp. 3-4)

Amongst the functions listed above, “addressing” and every item listed under point b., d. and e. can be categorized as belonging to sociolinguistic competence, while point c. relates to discourse competence. In addition, the underlined phrases are evidence of attention given to strategic competence. Aside from the underlined parts above, a brief mention of using dictionaries and a single line in the goals section referring to asking for repetition, strategic competence is notably scarce in the Japanese EFL syllabus.

On the topic of discourse competence, this sub-component is given ample attention through 9 instances where different aspects of this competence are goals related to individual macro-skills:

> “(c) To carry on a dialogue or exchange views regarding what students have listened to or read.
> (d) To speak continuously using various techniques such as linking words.
> (e) To give a simple speech on a provided theme.
> (…)
> (b) To read silently while thinking about the written content, and read aloud so that the meaning of the content is expressed.
> (c) To accurately understand the general outline of stories or the important parts of descriptive texts.
> (…)
> (c) To take notes or write one’s impressions or statements of agreement/disagreement and reasons for it with regard to what students have listened to or read.
> (d) To write about one’s thoughts and feelings with regard to issues like what has happened or what one has experienced in everyday situations.
> (e) To write a composition with due attention to the connections between sentences so as to accurately convey one’s thoughts and feelings to the reader(s).” (MEXT, 2008, p. 2).

Given the overwhelming amount of attention offered to grammatical competence and the focus on accumulating knowledge about the English language system during the instruction, the Japanese EFL syllabus shows overt characteristics of being in essence a structural syllabus. This is further supported by the advice for teachers to order the contents to be learned according to the degree of complexity, so that each school year builds upon the one before it (MEXT, 2008, p. 4). In my interpretation, this shows a structural view of language learning as described by Wilkins (1976) because the process of EFL acquisition is seen as gradual and systematic, rather than cyclical. Therefore, despite the communicative focus being repeatedly declared and references to macro-skills being made throughout the syllabus, the document exhibits at its core a structural or grammatical focus. In addition, there are parts that are compatible with a functional-notional syllabus, given that sociolinguistic competence is adequately addressed. Finally, discourse competence occupies a significant amount of space in the document, which is evidence of MEXT incorporating some of the characteristics of a skill-based syllabus.

4.1.5 Side by side comparison of the two syllabi

In this section, the findings resulting from the individual analyses of the two syllabi will be visually presented side by side, categorized and contrasted according to the four sub-competences of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980):

Table 5. Categorization of the main objectives in the Swedish and the Japanese EFL syllabi

	Swedish EFL syllabus	Japanese EFL syllabus
Grammatical competence	*Develop knowledge of the English language (p.34)*	*To enable students to understand the speaker's intentions when listening to English (p.1)* *To enable students to talk about their own thoughts using English (p.1)*
Sociolinguistic competence	*Develop knowledge (…) of the areas and contexts where English is used (p.34)* *Ability to use the language in different situations (p.34)* *Adapt language for different purposes, recipients and contexts (p.35)* *Reflect over living conditions, social and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used. (p.35)*	*To enable students to understand the speaker's intentions when listening to English (p.1)** *To enable students to talk about their own thoughts using English (p.1)**
Discourse competence	*Understand and interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts (p.34)* *Express themselves and communicate in speech and writing (p.34)*	*To accustom and familiarize students with reading English and to enable them to understand the writer's intentions when reading English. (p.1)* *To accustom and familiarize students with writing in English and to enable them to write about their own thoughts in English. (p.1)*
Strategic competence	*Use language strategies to understand and make themselves understood* *(p. 34)* *Ability to use different strategies to support communication and solve problems when language skills by themselves are not sufficient (p.34)*	-

*Note: There were two phrases in the Japanese EFL syllabus (MEXT, 2008) that were broad enough in meaning that I have decided to classify them as referring to both grammatical and sociolinguistic competence: "to enable students to understand the speaker's intentions when listening to English" (p.1) and "to enable students to talk about their own thoughts using English" (p.1). I have associated the phrases with grammatical competence because grasping intentions and expressing thoughts require a basic level of grammatical understanding. However, sociolinguistic competence also enables learners to get the meaning of an utterance they have heard (for example, whether it is intended as an order, as a statement or as a question), and sociolinguistic knowledge is needed to appropriately voice one's thoughts in a variety of situations.

On the topic of grammatical competence, the Swedish EFL syllabus briefly formulates one single, broad objective, that of developing knowledge of English. Meanwhile, the Japanese EFL syllabus states two outcomes that can be loosely connected to grammatical competence: understanding what a speaker intends and expressing one's thoughts.

In regard to sociolinguistic competence, there are a number of aims described in the Swedish EFL syllabus. Skolverket formulates four different objectives that can be linked to this sub-component of communicative competence. The Swedish syllabus requires that learners acquire social and cultural knowledge about the countries and situations where English is spoken, develop the capacity to use English in a variety of situations and adapt the way they speak English depending on many different factors. Thus, all the main aspects making up sociolinguistic competence are included. On the other hand, only two of the objectives outlined in the Japanese EFL syllabus could be linked to sociolinguistic competence and they refer to merely understanding someone's intentions.

Discourse competence is addressed in two objectives stated in the Swedish syllabus, which explicitly refers to the production as well as the reception of various types of written and spoken forms of communication. The Japanese EFL syllabus also states two objectives that can be linked to discourse competence by requiring learners to become familiar with reading (reception of language input) and writing in English (production of language output). It is notable that only these two macro-skills are mentioned by MEXT, there is no reference to being required to develop production and reception skills for spoken English or make use of listening comprehension skills. In addition, there is no indication that students are expected to employ discourse competence on a variety of materials.

Finally, attention is given to strategic competence in the Swedish syllabus, which clearly states in its goals that students need to be aware of language strategies that facilitate mutual understanding and thus, be able to solve problems or repair breakdowns in communication. The compensatory aspect of this sub-competence is explicitly highlighted here, in agreement with the way it has been defined by Canale and Swain (1980). On the other hand, the Japanese EFL syllabus does not include any mention of aims that can be evidently linked to strategic competence.

In the following table, I have visually presented the way in which the core content in the two syllabi can be classified according to each sub-component of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980):

Table 6. Categorization of core content related to the 4 macro-skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking) for the Swedish and Japanese EFL syllabi

	Swedish EFL syllabus (p. 37)	Japanese EFL syllabus (pp. 1-2)
Grammatical competence	*Language phenomena such as pronunciation, intonation, grammatical structures, sentence structure, (…), as well as fixed language expressions pupils will encounter in the language.* *Language phenomena to clarify, vary and enrich communication such as pronunciation, intonation and fixed language expressions, grammatical structures and sentence structures.*	*To follow the basic characteristics of English sounds such as stress, intonation and pauses and listen to English sounds correctly.* *To listen to English, spoken or read in a natural tone, and accurately understand the information.* *To become familiar with the basic characteristics of English sounds such as stress, intonation and pauses and pronounce English sounds correctly.* *To speak accurately to the listener(s) about one's thoughts and feelings, or facts.* *To distinguish letters or symbols and read English correctly.* *To distinguish letters or symbols and write correctly with due attention to the spaces between words.* *To correctly write a sentence with due attention to the connections between words.*
Sociolinguistic competence	*Spoken English with slight regional and social accents.* *Words with different registers.*	*To listen to questions and requests and respond appropriately.* *To understand the writer's intentions in texts such as messages and letters and <u>respond appropriately</u>* (emphasis mine)
Discourse competence	*Spoken English and texts from various media.*	*To listen to coherent English and properly understand its outline or important points.*

	Oral and written instructions and descriptions. *Different types of conversations, dialogues, interviews and oral communications.* *How connecting words and other expressions are used to create structure and linguistically coherent entities.* *Literature and other fiction in spoken, dramatized and filmed forms.* *Songs and poems.* *Oral and written information, as well as discussions and argumentation for different purposes, such as news, reports and newspaper articles.* *Different ways of searching for, choosing and assessing texts and spoken language in English from the Internet and other media.* *Different ways of working on one's own production and interaction to vary, clarify, specify and adapt them for different purposes.* *Oral and written narratives, descriptions and instructions.* *Conversations, discussions and argumentation.*	*<u>To understand the writer's intentions in texts such as messages and letters</u> and respond appropriately* (emphasis mine) *To carry on a dialogue or exchange views regarding what students have listened to or read.* *To speak continuously using various techniques such as linking words* *To give a simple speech on a provided theme* *To read silently while thinking about the written content, and read aloud so that the meaning of the content is expressed.* *To accurately understand the general outline of stories or the important parts of descriptive texts.* *To grasp the written content or the writer's viewpoints so as to be able to express one's impressions or state agreement/disagreement and reasons for it with regard to the content or viewpoints.* *To take notes or write in one's impressions or statements of agreement/disagreement and reasons for it with regard to what students have listened to or read.* *To write about one's thoughts and feelings with regard to issues like what has happened or what one has experienced in everyday situations.* *To write a composition with due attention to the connections between sentences so as to accurately convey*

		one's thoughts and feelings to the reader(s).
Strategic competence	*Language strategies to understand and be understood when language skills are lacking, such as reformulations, questions and explanations.* *Language strategies to contribute to and actively participate in conversations by taking the initiative in interaction, giving confirmation, putting follow-up questions, taking the initiative to raise new issues and also concluding conversations.*	*To understand the content, confirming what has been said by, for example, asking the speaker to repeat it*

Grammatical competence appears in the Swedish syllabus in two passages describing the core content of the instruction, making reference to several different language strata such as morphology, syntax, semantic content etc. In the Japanese syllabus, there are 7 instances in the core content that I have categorized as describing grammatical competence. Each of the phrases either includes the word "accurately" or the term "correctly" and they all describe basic features of the English language or a type of minimal skill (such as placing spaces where they should be or distinguishing between different letters).

In terms of sociolinguistic competence, the Swedish syllabus suggests that the core content of the EFL instruction should include sociolects and regional varieties of English from different regions of the world. It also requires learners to acquire knowledge about words that belong to different language registers. In the Japanese syllabus, there are two passages that can be categorized as belonging to sociolinguistic competence, but only in regard to the element of appropriateness: learners are expected to have the ability to respond in a suitable manner in spoken and written communication. However, there is no mention of needing to introduce any regional accents or have discussions about different linguistic registers.

Discourse competence is dedicated ample space in both syllabi, with at least 10 phrases referring to this part of communicative competence in each of the steering documents. The Swedish syllabus states that learners must be exposed to many different types of discourse (music, poetry, news, reports, debates, etc.) during their EFL instruction and in addition, become able to sift through information in English from many sources, research independently and select relevant material for their EFL assignments. Therefore, there is a certain degree of autonomy given to Swedish pupils during their learning process. On the Japanese side, the variety of types of discourse to be included in the core content is limited to stories, descriptive texts, speeches, compositions, and dialogues. There is no

mention of being required to work with relative independence or any expectation that the students should be encouraged to explore different types of media. There is however an emphasis on understanding "accurately" and reacting or responding with one's personal opinions and views by writing a text or giving a simple speech.

Strategic competence is addressed in the Swedish syllabus' requirements regarding core content in two passages that enumerate various avenues a speaker can use for the purpose of helping communication move along. Learners are also encouraged to practice how to start or end a conversation and how to bring up new subjects, both strategies for enriching spoken interaction. In contrast, the Japanese syllabus mentions only one language strategy, namely asking a person to repeat themselves, with no further emphasis on interaction skills or communicative strategies.

4.2 Qualitative study

4.2.1 Summary of the findings

After analysing the manner in which the two syllabi address communicative competence first individually and then side by side, the next step in the research for this paper was to gather information on how EFL teachers interpret the syllabi and how they implement their directives in practice. Because the views presented in the following table are reported directly by qualified teachers that are professionally active within the two respective cultural and social contexts in which EFL is taught, this part of the study serves to provide additional perspective on how each syllabus should be interpreted and paint a clearer picture of how the syllabi are effectively used. Furthermore, the data collected in this part of the study is a useful counterpoint that helps shed light on whether my interpretative analysis of the documents was reasonable and balanced. If the data derived from the interviews were contradictory to the findings of the analysis, there would be reason to investigate why this occurred and even reconsider the validity of the analysis. Nevertheless, as shown below, the findings from the interviews generally agree with findings in the previous section and provide further clarity on the differences and similarities between the two documents in regard to their main stated objective, that of developing learners' communicative competence:

Table 7. Summary of the main findings from the interview study

	Swedish EFL teachers	Japanese EFL teachers
View on EFL syllabus	Unanimously appreciated for the freedom offered; "the only restriction is my imagination" (S1) Simultaneously criticized by all for the same freedom; "A list of required reading and grammar would be appreciated" (S3)	All participants expressed worries over covering all the topics on time, the syllabus includes a long list of items to be taught during a limited time frame Too restrictive Very limited room for doing fun activities, usually performed by assistant language teachers (J2, J3)
Opinion on communication skills in EFL	Viewed by all as the main objective of the instruction	Communication skills considered by all participants the main aim of instruction

	Communication increasingly more emphasized with each version of the syllabus	More focus on communication with each subsequent syllabus
Usage of English during lessons	By teachers: 90-100% of the time (S2), 70-80% of the time (S1, S3) More Swedish spoken to struggling students or managing behaviour. Swedish is sometimes used when explaining grammar. By students: Sometimes, mostly when doing conversation practice or answering in class.	By teachers: 50% of the time, would speak more but students aren't comfortable (J2) 30% of the time (J1, J3) Consists of basic classroom phrases and questions. ALT always speak English, the teacher translates to Japanese for the students. Japanese normally used when explaining grammar. By students: Very little, only when responding to questions. Somewhat more when doing special lessons with an assistant language teacher (ALT)
Teacher role assumed	Providing and selecting tasks, supervisor of independent learners, guide, "walk around and help" (S1)	"an advisor, guide, manager, and director; encourager for struggling students" (J1) coordinator of activities, responsible for keeping schedule, in charge (J2, J3)
Focus on accuracy vs. fluency	All participants expressed a focus on fluency, "I don't correct mistakes as long as it is possible to understand" (S2)	2 out 3 gave priority to accuracy, 1 participant prioritizes fluency (J2): "it is okay to make mistakes"
Familiar with the concept of CLT	3 out of 3 participants were keenly familiar and on board with the ideas underpinning CLT	None, but 1 out of 3 described wanting to teach in a way that is communication-focused
Explicit grammar instruction	Grammatical points are sometimes depicted briefly, not seen as central to lessons. The grammar is presented as support for carrying out assignments	Very frequent, understanding how English works is deemed very important, the characteristics of the language are often compared to the Japanese language system

4.2.2 Analysis of the findings

One of the main commonalities that were observed while comparing the respondents' answers was that the EFL syllabus in both countries was reported to become more focused

on real-life communication skills with every new version issued by the Ministry of Education (this was namely pointed out by S1 and J1, the participants who had decades of experience in teaching EFL and had worked first-hand with up to three consecutive EFL syllabi in their country). This suggests that teachers are aware of the ongoing educational reforms made by Skolverket and MEXT respectively and are adapting to the new directives supporting the goal of increasingly focusing on the students' communication skills in English.

The teachers' perception of the syllabi is markedly different in regard to the degree of freedom to choose, create and organize their own content for lessons. While all three Swedish teachers interviewed stated that the EFL syllabus in Sweden allows them to select between an immense variety of activities and topics almost at their discretion, the Japanese teachers considered the EFL syllabus to be rather restrictive and heavily loaded with obligatory topics, thus not permitting them to experiment more with routine-breaking activities for fear of not having time for the compulsory core content. According to the Japanese respondents, the only opportunity to do something more appealing than following the textbook occurs when, if there is time left over, there would be special lessons planned in collaboration with a native speaker ALT.

One major difference between the teachers' responses relates to the amount of time they themselves and their students speak the target language during lessons. All three Swedish teachers interviewed reported that they speak English almost exclusively (with exceptions made for explaining more difficult concepts, managing student behaviour and assisting students that struggle with comprehension). Swedish students are expected to address questions and actively participate using English, which they generally do. However, the Japanese teachers used English, at best, only half of the time, reportedly due to worries about their students not feeling comfortable because they would not be able to understand every word and idea that is being communicated. One of the Japanese respondents (J2) expressed the wish to speak a lot more English during lessons but has not accomplished this aim yet for fear of students feeling confused. All three Japanese respondents recounted that in general, the students who are most passionate about English are the ones who usually dare to speak during lessons and even do extra work out of their own initiative. Other reasons for Japanese students not speaking during lessons is a lack of confidence in the correctness of their answer, but also a desire to demonstrate humility in cases where their knowledge is solid.

Teachers' views on the four macro-skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) differed in several crucial ways. Swedish respondents supported the idea of developing all four macro-skills simultaneously and noted that assessment criteria require that students show adequate knowledge in every macroskill. Respondent S1 described five skills due to making a distinction between speaking as interactional skills in conversation and the ability to produce a coherent spoken discourse without there being a "back and forth". On the other hand, on the Japanese side there is respondent J1 who stated that while all four skills are important, writing is the most valuable one for students because they will need to write emails, admission essays for university, resumes etc. J1 expressed that speaking and listening are good for the students' future international experience but nevertheless considers these skills as less important because they are not concrete and tangible in the

same writing is ("speaking is transient and vanishing"). J2 emphasized the importance of being able to speak and communicate in English in real-life interactions with others.

Regarding explicit grammatical competence, all Swedish teachers included some grammar reviews to varying extents. In Japan, this type of content is reported to be a lot more frequent. J2 for example informed that as a result of being given a lot of explicit instruction around grammatical competence, Japanese students have in depth knowledge about the English language but still cannot speak fluently because they have limited opportunities to practice oral skills in the classroom and this is even more applicable outside the classroom. Therefore, there is more time spent studying the language, as opposed to using the target language. All Japanese teachers stated that they need to dedicate significant time to explaining English rules, most often in Japanese so that students can follow without the risk of confusion. Japanese teachers also mention that in their experience, it is a challenge for the learners to master the rules and express themselves correctly. In contrast, S2 from Sweden stated that focusing on grammar is not desirable because students lose interest and suggested that neither learners nor teachers have the right vocabulary required to do "speaking about language" in a successful manner.

On the subject of accuracy versus fluency, the difference is stark. The Swedish teachers I interviewed expressed little concern about grammatical correctness and unanimously mentioned that fluent communication is what matters, given that it is the end goal of the instruction. As a result, they all expressed a high degree of tolerance and leniency towards students making mistakes during the learning process. On the other hand, two of the Japanese teachers I interviewed firmly believed in the importance of achieving accuracy, apart from J2 who exhibited an encouraging attitude towards daring to make mistakes and a reassuring, easy-going outlook on linguistic mishaps that was reminiscent of the views described by Swedish teachers. J1 mentioned that accuracy is the base for all four language skills and even stated: "I'd like to have students learn by heart all the conversation sentences in a textbook page."

Regarding their perceived role in the EFL classroom, the three Swedish pedagogues saw themselves primarily as guides, supportive coordinators, and leading participants in the classroom activities. The consensus was that students should be working independently as much as possible, according to their level of knowledge, while teachers go around offering assistance and feedback. On the Japanese side, the interviewed teachers described an authoritative position centred around coordinating every activity and directing students more closely. Among the teacher's many duties, there is also the necessity to coordinate lessons with the ALT and translate what the ALT is saying to the class. The teachers from Japan reported being frequently engaged in speaking in front of the class and instructing the course content, while students listen attentively and take notes. Sometimes there are group activities such as speaking tasks or special lessons were the ALT takes over more, but generally teachers reported shouldering the brunt of the lessons.

5. Discussion

5.1 How do the EFL syllabi in Sweden and Japan compare in regard to what they suggest about communicative competence? What commonalities and differences can be found?

Regarding the first research question ("How do the EFL syllabi in Sweden and Japan compare in regard to what they suggest about communicative competence? What commonalities and differences can be found?"), the results show that the Swedish EFL syllabus gives a balanced amount of attention to each of the four sub-competences that make up communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) and is therefore overall a skill-based syllabus with a notional-functional component. On the other hand, the Japanese EFL syllabus mostly emphasizes grammatical competence, making it essentially a structural syllabus with, secondarily, a skills-based component and a notional-functional part.

The main similarity between the two steering documents is the overall objective that is explicitly declared: learners need to acquire communicative abilities through the EFL instruction. However, this commonality is present mostly on the surface level because while examining the documents in detail, the overall impression is that the Swedish syllabus is thorough, nuanced and ambitious in its requirements for communicative skills, while the Japanese syllabus sets more modest standards to reach, puts a lot of emphasis on learning grammar systematically and is less precise in the description of the desired communication skills.

The differences are significant ranging from the level of proficiency expected of learners to the way each sub-competence is addressed and integrated into the framework of the syllabus. Furthermore, the organizing principle behind each syllabus is evidently different: the Japanese syllabus has a structural core, while the Swedish document is skill-based. These findings showcase the flexibility and adaptability of the CLT syllabus and the many shapes it can take in countries around the world (Richards & Rodgers, 2015).

It is also remarkable that amongst the principal declared objectives of the Japanese syllabus there are very few items relating to sociolinguistic competence and none linked to strategic competence. Admittedly, these are mentioned amongst the outcomes based on microskills and on other pages of the syllabus, but the near-absence of the sociolinguistic component and the notable omission of communicative strategies from the main outcomes section is telling: the EFL Japanese syllabus is form-focused, both on the sentence level and at the discourse level. In contrast, the Swedish EFL syllabus appears more balanced regarding the amount of attention given to each sub-component of communicative competence. The outcome related to grammatical competence is formulated in a vague manner, but in my interpretation, this is intentional: the idea conveyed on an implicit level appears to be that the learners' knowledge should be general and encompassing a wide range of structural aspects (the syllabus does not go into the specifics instead the selection of grammatical content is entrusted to the teachers based on their professional training).

5.2 To what extent do teacher views and reported practices correspond with the EFL syllabus in each country?

The second research question was: "To what extent do teacher views and reported practices correspond with the EFL syllabus in each country?"

Teacher views and their reported practices closely reflected the directives of the EFL syllabus in Sweden and respectively, Japan. The interviews confirmed that teachers are professionals who follow the guidelines of the syllabus carefully. Every teacher I interviewed reported having classroom activities and views that were in agreement with the requirements of the steering document they used. For example, Swedish teachers reported working with grammatical competence in an implicit manner and using the target language extensively during lessons, while Japanese teachers on the other hand, dedicated an overwhelming amount of time to explicit grammar training and had less time to spend on designing communicative lessons centred on practising the target language. In addition, while Swedish teachers gave little attention to grammar training, the Japanese ones showed a lot more interest for teaching grammatical knowledge.

Swedish teachers also described having a lot of freedom in planning the content of their lessons, while Japanese teachers disclosed that because the syllabus was restrictive it put a hamper on creativity. This was reported to have implications for assessment: while Swedish teachers described the need to be cautious in choosing content that will permit them to evaluate the students' levels accordingly (the grading criteria are perceived as rigid and precise), Japanese teachers reported having to exercise good time-management skills in order to ensure that all required items in the syllabus are adequately covered. In addition, even if Japanese teachers wanted to work with more communicative activities this was not appealing because the exams and tests are formed around standardized testing and grammatical exercises, which creates difficulties in assessing students' abilities.

While Swedish teachers reported speaking in English almost exclusively, Japanese teachers answered that they do not use more English during lessons because of the students' reluctance. This result is mirrored in a paper written by Aspinall (2006), who found that school culture is a significant influencing factor on EFL performance. The author of the study noted that Japanese students exhibit unwillingness to speak in front of a large group out of fear of making mistakes, not getting the right answer or standing out too much.

5.3 The importance of communicative competence

Addressing all sub-components of communicative competence and integrating them into the foreign language instruction is essential for learners' success in acquiring communication skills (Canale & Swain, 1980; Nunan, 1988). For this reason, I think it is a cause for concern that the Japanese syllabus only contains traces of strategic competence, given that this component is crucial for repairing and facilitating communication. This may be a reason underlying Japanese speakers' reluctance to speak, since they might be intuitively aware that if anything unexpected happens, they are not

properly prepared to manage the situation. On the other hand, the Swedish syllabus gives little attention to grammatical competence, which carries the risk of learners' not internalizing the target language's rules and exhibiting the phenomenon fossilization of their grammatical errors. Ideally, in my opinion, all four components should be equally addressed, so that the learners can make progress in all areas of communicative competence.

5.4 The syllabus and its implications for EFL fluency

The literature describes a series of sociolinguistic reasons for lower EFL fluency in Japan such as the perception of English as merely an academic subject, the large linguistic distance between Japanese and English, the prevalence of shame-based culture and a lack of utility of English skills in a homogenous culture (Kitamura, 2019; Kubota, 2019). While these are all forceful and legitimate reasons why EFL skills are not as high as desired in Japan, the findings of this paper suggest that the syllabus itself would need reform because as it stands at the moment of writing, its communicative focus appears to be a declarative, symbolic statement but not yet fully implemented to the extent necessary. Nunan (1988) warns that a structural syllabus risks not being effective at preparing learners for communicating in real-life situations, while a notional-functional syllabus is better because it aims to mimic genuine interactions in the classroom. In my opinion, this is applicable for the Japanese EFL syllabus and was confirmed by the Japanese teachers, who expressed interest in focusing more on their students' communicative skills but noted that, at the moment of being interviewed, the assessment criteria and the steering documents don't allow for that.

On the other hand, the fact that Sweden has such outstanding EFL fluency can be also primarily attributed to sociolinguistic factors, given that British and American culture hold high status in Sweden (Parkvall, 2009). This was corroborated by the Swedish teachers who were interviewed, as they mentioned that the students' outstanding performance in English class is often due to their hobbies and activities outside of school. Nevertheless, I believe that the syllabus carries certain merit because it clearly emphasizes communication as being paramount and allows teachers the freedom to create an authentic communicative environment as they deem suitable for their group of students.

5.5 Limitations and avenues for future research

This research paper is partly based on qualitative data collected from a very small sample of respondents. Though attention was given to including participants with varied experiences and backgrounds, such a small sample is not representative enough and the conclusions cannot be generalized. This can be addressed in future research by interviewing a larger number of respondents and having more precisely defined selection criteria.

Furthermore, the syllabus analysis that was conducted is limited to grades 7 to 9. More insight can be obtained by putting these findings into the larger context of the entire compulsory school period by connecting this study to the elementary school syllabus and the senior high school syllabus. It would also be useful to consider the textbooks or

learning materials that are being used and even supplement the data with classroom observations. Last but not least, learners' attitudes and experiences should be taken into account because this would add another layer and dimension to the significance of the findings.

6. Conclusion

This research paper has focused on comparing the EFL syllabi for secondary school (grade 7 to 9) in Sweden and in Japan, with a focus on communicative competence as it was defined by Canale and Swain (1980). Through a combination of qualitative content analysis of the textual data of the syllabi documents and a qualitative interview study with three active teachers from each of the two countries, the paper has aimed to address the following research questions:

1) How do the EFL syllabi in Sweden and Japan compare in regard to what they suggest about communicative competence? What commonalities and differences can be found?
2) To what extent do teacher views and reported practices correspond with the EFL syllabus in each country?

The key findings of the study showed a few notable differences in the way the two syllabi address communicative competence. Teachers' reports of their implementation of the EFL syllabus were found to correspond with the steering documents' guidelines. Though both syllabi have set developing communication skills as the main focus, the analysis highlighted some important distinctions between the documents' treatment of communicative competence, which carries implications for EFL fluency, educational policy and students' scholastic outcomes.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Please tell me a bit about your experience/background as a teacher. How many years have you taught English in secondary school? What year did you obtain your teacher's license?
2) What is the main learning objective stated in the English syllabus in your opinion?
3) Is the syllabus for English clear, effective and relevant? Are there any aspects that should be strengthened or removed?
4) How does an English teacher in your country know what contents to include in their teaching?
5) Do you feel like the English language syllabus offers you enough freedom? Or is it too restrictive?
6) Are you familiar with the concept of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)?
7) How often do you speak English during your lessons, as opposed to your mother tongue? What is the ratio?
8) During an average lesson, how much do students themselves speak English?
9) What is the content of your lessons? What kind of activities and materials do you use?
10) What is your role in the classroom? (Are you an advisor, guide, manager, director etc.)
11) Do you care more about accuracy or fluency?
12) What is your view of the use of the students' mother tongue in the English classroom? Something which should be avoided, a useful resource, etc.?

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