Degree Thesis
Master's level
Teaching English via Fiction

A phenomenographic study of teachers’ perceptions about using fiction to teach English

Att undervisa engelska genom fiktion
En fenomenografisk studie om lärarens uppfattningar om att använda fiktion att undervisa engelska

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to examine and identify the different ways in which secondary and upper secondary school teachers perceive the use of fiction to teach English as well as their beliefs about the outcome or benefits of doing so. Five secondary and upper secondary school teachers in Sweden who teach English as a foreign language were interviewed about how they use fiction to teach English. A phenomenographic cross-case analysis was used to analyse the data. The teachers’ responses were categorized and labelled into two main themes, that is, teaching methods and benefits of using fiction to teach English. However, the teachers’ descriptions about the definition and medium of expressing fiction was first established. The data from the theme ‘teaching methods’ were later sorted, categorized, and labelled into six instructional strategies. The teaching strategies included: selecting authentic learning material for students; building knowledge about themes in the fictional works; using classroom discussions to support students’ learning; encouraging students to use their previous knowledge and learning experiences to understand the content of the fictional works; using audio-visual aids to enhance students’ understanding of themes in the fictional works; and designing tasks that reinforce learning. These strategies were common amongst all five teachers. However, there were some subtle differences in the teaching methods, caused by factors such as the students’ mastery of the English language, the English course(s) the teacher was teaching and the fictional material they were using to teach English.

Keywords:

Fiction, digital fiction, texts, multimodal texts, and contexts, teaching methods, EFL.
Abstract:
Syftet med denna studie är att undersöka och identifiera de olika sätt på vilka högstadielärare och gymnasielärare uppfattar användningen av fiktion för att undervisa engelska samt deras uppfattning om fördelarna med att göra det. För att få insikter om detta intervjuades fem lärare som undervisar engelska som främmande språk på högstadiet och gymnasiet i Sverige. En fenomenografisk tvärfallsanalys användes som metod för dataanalys och lärarnas beskrivningar av vad fiktion betyder samt på vilket sätt den kan uttryckas framställdes. Lärarnas svar kategoriserades i två huvudteman och märktes som: undervisningsmetoder och fördelarna att undervisa engelska genom fiktion. Data från temat 'undervisningsmetoder’ sorterades, kategoriserades och delades in i sex undervisningsstrategier. Undervisningsstrategierna innefattar: att välja autentiskt undervisningsmaterial; att bygga upp kunskap om teman i de fiktiva verken; att använda klassrumsdiskussioner för att stödja elevernas lärande; uppmuntra eleverna att använda sina tidigare kunskaper och erfarenheter av lärande; använda audiovisuella hjälpmedel för att förbättra elevernas förståelse av teman i de fiktiva verken; utforma uppgifter som förstärker lärande. Dessa strategier var gemensamma bland de fem lärarna. Det fanns dock några små skillnader i undervisningsmetoderna som orsakades av elevernas behärskning av det engelska språket, de engelskakurserna som lärarna undervisade i och de fiktiva materialen som de använde för att undervisa engelska.

Nyckelord:
Fiktion, digital fiktion, texter, multimodala texter och sammanhang, undervisningsmetoder, engelska som främmande språk.
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1. Introduction

Nowadays young learners are exposed to fictional works in and out of classroom settings which might help them learn the English language. A recent study by Khan and Alasmari (2018) show that using literary texts in English as a foreign language classroom settings can help students become creative, motivated, as well as understand themselves and others. It can also enhance reading skills, promote tolerance, increase vocabulary and grammar learning through language awareness, increase interpretive skills, stimulate critical thinking, increase communicative competence, and inspire writing (pp. 168-170). An earlier study by Gilmore (2011) also revealed that, to help students develop communicative language competence, teachers should use authentic materials such as print, and audio-visual materials because such materials provide authentic discourse of the target language which can help learners ‘notice’ how the language is used (p. 701). Authentic materials are materials that were designed for native speakers, not originally produced for language learning purposes, but used by language teachers as a way of exposing students to the language they are learning. They are infinite and can include any teaching resource from newspapers, magazines, movies to literary genres such as fiction, poetry, and drama (Aladini & Farahbod, 2020, pp. 83-84).

In Sweden, Lundström and Svensson (2017) have researched young people’s use of fictional texts and their study showed that students between the ages of 17-18 in Sweden, spend more time using fictional texts expressed in media forms such as computer games, tv-series, and film. Even though boys spend more time with computer games while girls spend time in reading literature, these practices depended on their individual preferences (pp. 30-49). However, this study was performed with students in secondary and upper secondary schools in general irrespective of the subject or program they were reading. Another study that focused on how The Hobbit was used to teach English in Sweden, considered first-year university students and teachers as participants (Sauro & Sundmark, 2016, p. 414). From my previous teaching practice experiences, it was realised that a lot of fictional material were used in English courses for secondary and upper secondary schools in Sweden even though there is minimal research on how teachers use such materials to teach English. That is why most of the research articles in this study are from foreign countries. There is therefore a need for more research to be performed within the field of English didactics especially that of using fiction to teach English. Such research can inform secondary and upper secondary school English teachers on effective teaching practices. This study therefore hopes to fill this gap by adopting a qualitative approach to present findings on how some exemplary English language teachers use fiction to teach English in secondary and upper secondary schools in Sweden. The hope is that other pre-service teachers like me, will understand how teachers already in service work.

1.1. Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to examine and identify the different ways in which secondary and upper secondary school teachers perceive the use of fiction to teach English as well as their beliefs about the outcome or benefits of doing so. To fulfil this aim, this study seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

- What teaching methods do teachers draw on when they use fiction to teach English in the EFL classroom?
- What are teachers’ perceptions about the benefits of using fiction to teach English?
2. Background

Key terms will be defined in the first part of this section. In the second section, a brief explanation will be given about the Swedish National Agency for Education’s stance on the use of fiction to teach English as a subject in secondary school.

2.1. Definition of key terms

2.1.1. Texts, multimodal texts, and contexts

Recently, the term ‘text’ has been given a new definition in our present-day digital society with multimodal school contexts. Reyes-Torres and Raga (2020) explained that “the term text does not solely apply to a narrative discourse, but rather to a wide range of media products and modes of meaning making such as images, films, music videos, advertisements etc.” (p. 98). Walsh (2009) defined multimodal texts as print-based texts or digital texts with more than one mode or form of expression such as print-image or print-image-sound-movement. Examples of such texts include printed books, picture-books, or graphic texts (p. 47). Multimodality refers to the use of different semiotic resources or modes such as print, image, movement, graphics, animation, sound, music, and gesture to communicate meaning (Walsh, 2009, p. 47) or a movement from one mode of writing prose such as text written on a white piece of paper to involve other digital modes such as “colour, image, sound, video, movement, music and gameplay”, with the intention to develop a multitude of communicative language skills (Skains, 2019, p. 3). This study adopts both definitions and considers multimodal texts to be any print-based text e.g., printed novels with images on the cover pages or digital texts with sounds, images, colour, etc such as films.

Multimodal literacy involves the meaning-making process that students engage in when they read, watch, understand, respond to, produce, and interact with multimodal texts in multimodal environments (Walsh, 2009, p 47). Multimodal learning environments “refer to classroom environments where teachers and students use and interact with different types of texts and tasks across a range of curriculum areas. Literacy and learning may occur as cohesive processes in the interchange between texts and learners” (p. 47). This study depicts the Swedish context where literacy practices in the classroom involves the use of multimodal texts and other modern teaching resources such as online videos, projectors, educational software, speakers etc. since students constantly use technology in studying as well as in language learning. The classroom in the Swedish context is therefore considered a multimodal learning environment where technology and other multimodal or digital resources are used to enhance learning.

2.1.2. Fiction

According to the Cambridge Online Dictionary (2022), fiction in the context of literature is “any type of book or story that is written about imaginary characters and events and does not describe real people or deal with facts, or false report or statement that you pretend is true” (Cambridge Online Dictionary).

Schillerqvist and Olin-Scheller (2011) defined fiction or “fiction comprehension” as a type of text or a reading strategy or a tool for engaging students in reading, employed by teachers during reading lessons. Fiction is also a genre as well as a tool to foster reading or simply a quality ascribed to a text so that when reading the text, the reader accepts that what is written in it does not necessarily depict reality as it is (pp. 53- 83). The essence of a fictional work is therefore its lack of truth since it is imaginative.
The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2021 henceforth) does not explicitly define fiction or literature but in its supplementary material for the curriculum for English in secondary school, the umbrella term literature, is used to refer to stories, songs, poems, novellas, novels, plays while fiction is used to refer to myths, animations, feature films (Skolverket’s Commentary material, 2021 p. 16).

Saarti (2019) defined fiction as a popular type of literature easily accessible on the internet and in public libraries. Traditional fictional works are classified depending on the genre, the year of publication, country of publication, writer, cultural regions, characters, events, settings, themes, or their multimodalities (p. 320-326).

This study adopts the above definitions of fiction. Thus, fiction is a kind of literary narrative that is imaginative or creative, lacks truth, and is expressed through different medias or forms such as printed novels, short e-stories, e-books, audio books, films, tv-series, animations, painting, drawings, photos, cartoons, poems, songs, drama etc and used by teachers as a way of engaging students in the learning process.

2.1.3. Digital fiction

Digital fiction is a form of electronic or e-literature which is narrative-focused, multimodal, and digital, “written for and read on a computer screen” (Skains, 2019, p. 2). This definition is also adopted in this study to give a broader meaning of fiction.

2.1.4. Teaching methods

According to Borich (2017), teaching methods are “instructional strategies [used by teachers] to encourage learners to develop deep understanding of content areas and their connections, and to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways” (p. 157). Teaching methods include teachers’ awareness of and use of different teaching strategies such as how to introduce a new material; making decisions about direct presentation of the material or group presentation or web-based instruction; how to organize and manage the class into groups, full class, or independent work. It also entails teachers’ awareness and use of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). PCK involves teachers’ awareness of and use of teaching approaches that best suits the subject matter being taught as well as knowledge of how certain teaching methods can enhance the teaching of different elements of the subject matter (Borich, 2017, pp. 159-160). In this study, the subject matter is fiction, and the aim is to examine and identify teaching methodologies.

According to Westwood (2008) there are two main teaching methods with several varieties. There is the direct teaching method and the student-centred method. Direct teaching means explicit instruction whereby new information is presented to learners in a form they can easily access, understand, and master. Varieties of direct teaching include lectures and interactive whole class teaching. Student-centred approaches on the other hand are teaching methods that allow greater student autonomy and student-student interaction so that knowledge is coconstructed and used in authentic situations. Varieties of student-centred approaches include activity-based learning, guided discovery, inquiry approach, problem-based learning, project-based learning, situated learning, resource-based learning, and computer-assisted learning. The underlying principle among the student-centred varieties is that students should be motivated to actively participate in the learning process; the topic, issues, or subject matters should be interesting and relevant to the students; and teachers should create opportunities for students to apply the knowledge they have learned in real-life situations (pp. 9-38).
2.1.5. English as a Foreign Language

EFL stands for ‘English as a Foreign Language’. Nordquist (2020) defines English as a Foreign Language as “the term used to describe the study of English by non-native speakers in countries where English is not the dominant language” (ThoughtCo, 2022). In Sweden, apart from Swedish, which is the national majority language, other native minority languages such as Finnish, Yiddish, Meänkieli, Romani, and Sami exist (Swedish Institute for Language and Folklore, 2022). This means that English is learned and used either as a foreign language or simply as a Lingua Franca. Seidlhofer (2021) explained that English as a Lingua Franca in the European context, especially among EU member states, means English is the de facto common language because most of the member states have their own national languages. English does not have any national role but is used mostly in the domains of social medias, tourism, popular youth culture, advertising, entertainment etc as people use it to listen to English pop lyrics, interact with foreign visitors to their countries, play online games, use social media, and watch their favourite series on their electronic devices, often with an original soundtrack in English. In educational contexts, English is predominantly used as a language for learning in secondary schools, sometimes through content-and-English-language-integrated-learning or simply as compulsory or elective subjects (Kirkpatrick, 2021, pp. 389-393). In this study, English is thus considered as English as a foreign language or simply as a lingua franca because it is not the national language of Sweden.

2.2. The position of fiction in the Swedish steering documents

The curricula for secondary and upper secondary schools are regulated by The Swedish National Agency for Education or Skolverket. It is stipulated in the curriculum for the compulsory school years, preschool class, and school-age educare (Skolverket, 2018) that students in grades 7-9 should be taught “spoken English and texts from various media; literature and other fiction in spoken, dramatized and filmed forms” (p. 37). The term “media” is the means of communication and can include audio-visual media or printed media (Skolverket’s Commentary material, 2021, p. 15). Also, Skolverket’s curriculum core content for English in upper secondary school (2021) states that students studying English 5 should be taught “content and form in different kinds of fiction, literature, and other fiction” (English Core Content for Upper Secondary School). Students studying English 6 should be taught “themes, ideas, form and content in film and literature as well as authors and literary periods, contemporary and older literature, poetry, drama, and songs” (Skolverket, 2021, English Core Content for Upper Secondary School). Students studying English 7 should be given the opportunity to learn “contemporary and older literature and other fiction in various genres such as drama” (Skolverket, 2021, English Core Content for Upper Secondary School). The word “form” in the courses English 5 and 6 implies that teachers have the freedom to choose the fictional content depending on its features such as narrative structure, genre, or linguistic features (Skolverket’s commentary material, 2021, p.14). In this study, the five teachers interviewed, who teach English for grades 7-9 or the courses English 5, 6 and 7, mentioned that they used fiction in their lessons as stipulated by the curriculum.

3. Previous research

In this chapter, results from previous research will be presented with a focus on some common approaches that EFL teachers draw on when using fiction to teach English. The benefits of using fiction to teach English are interwoven in the teaching methods as would be shown below.
3.1. Approaches used by EFL teachers to teach English through fiction.

3.1.1. The comprehensive approach to foreign language literature teaching

A comprehensive approach of teaching simply means adopting a holistic teaching approach whereby all aspects of the English language are taken into consideration when fiction is used. Bloemert et al. (2016) performed a quantitative research study to explore the way EFL literature is approached in Dutch secondary school. A questionnaire was designed to collect data from 108 EFL teachers that participated in the study. 70% of the teachers were female and 69% of them had formal teachers’ education with an average of 13 years of teaching experience. The participants were asked how frequently they teach any of the 20 elements of fiction and which of the four different approaches of teaching they used (see Table 1). Results from the study showed that on average, all the different elements of fiction and thereby English, were taught regularly but at different rates. More of the elements from the text approach and the reader approach were taught than those of the context approach and the language approach. Results also showed that there was no significant correlation between how teachers approached literature and their educational background, experience, or gender. However, there was a significant difference between how teachers approached literature and curricular factors such as the grades or classes they teach. The study concluded that literary features of the context approach frequently occurred, followed by the text approach, the reader approach, and language approach respectively (pp.170-188).

Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four approaches to FL literature education and the 20 underlying initial elements.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>(S.D.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text approach (Cronbach α = .87)</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>(1.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>storyline</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>(1.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>character development</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>(1.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who, what and where</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>(1.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recognising text types</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>(1.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distinguishing text types</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>(1.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literary terminology</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>(1.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>historical aspects of a literary work</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>(1.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural aspects of a literary work</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>(1.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overview of literary history</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>(1.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literary periods</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>(1.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information about the author</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>(1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biographical aspects of a literary work</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>(1.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader approach (Cronbach α = .81)</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>(1.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student’s personal reaction</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>(1.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical thinking skills</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>(1.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading pleasure</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>(1.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language approach (Cronbach α = .61)</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>(1.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making reading miles to improve language skills</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>(1.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English vocabulary in a literary text</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>(1.48)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bloemert et al. 2016, p. 179.

A quantitative study was also performed by Bloemert et al. (2019) in a Dutch secondary school, aimed to find out students’ perceptions on whether they benefited from how fiction is approached by secondary school teachers in the language classroom. The researchers also
wanted to find out whether ‘The Comprehensive Model’ or individual approaches within the model was effective to improve students’ attitude towards the literary text. A total of 635 upper secondary school students aged 15-17 were asked a single open question in a survey: what do you think are the benefits of using literature during EFL lessons? The question was handed out to students by their EFL teachers. Results (see Table 2) revealed that a majority of the students believed that the language approach is beneficial to them especially in learning vocabulary and idioms while over half of the students believed that the context approach is beneficial for learning historical, cultural, and societal issues. A third of the students believed that the reader approach is beneficial for learning critical thinking skills as well as for personal development, but none mentioned the element of personal reading experiences with the literary texts. A small number of students mentioned that the text approach is beneficial but none mentioned that discussing the setting and characters of the literary work could help them in any way. The study concluded that the most dominant teaching approach, from the perspective of the students, was the language approach (pp. 372-379).

Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>No. of students (n = 635)</th>
<th>Student example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language approach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language approach general</td>
<td>17 (28%)</td>
<td>You study the English language in a different way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English grammar and syntax</td>
<td>66 (10%)</td>
<td>You develop a ‘feeling’ for English syntax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English vocabulary and idioms</td>
<td>279 (44%)</td>
<td>I learn synonyms of words I already know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing)</td>
<td>163 (26%)</td>
<td>You improve your English language skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical development of the English language</td>
<td>117 (18%)</td>
<td>You learn where the language comes from, how it came into existence and how it developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context approach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context approach general</td>
<td>24 (4%)</td>
<td>Knowing about the mindset of writers from that era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biographical information</td>
<td>62 (10%)</td>
<td>You learn more about English authors and poets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical, cultural, and social context</td>
<td>296 (47%)</td>
<td>You learn about how people thought in different periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Literary periods and history</td>
<td>46 (7%)</td>
<td>You can place literary works in the right periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader approach general</td>
<td>5 (1%)</td>
<td>Understanding what a certain story means for your life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal reading experiences with literary texts</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing literary reading taste</td>
<td>41 (7%)</td>
<td>You read different kinds of texts, novels, literary periods, eras. This is how you can develop your own style and what you like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking skills and personal development</td>
<td>178 (28%)</td>
<td>It gives you time and space to think about topics that you would not look for on your own initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text approach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text approach general</td>
<td>45 (7%)</td>
<td>You get to know the classics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary terminology</td>
<td>12 (2%)</td>
<td>You understand metaphors better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary text types</td>
<td>5 (1%)</td>
<td>You learn different types of poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story, plot, and themes</td>
<td>14 (2%)</td>
<td>You discover the meaning behind stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting (role of time and place)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A qualitative study carried out by Sun (2021) aimed to investigate how teachers approached literature in the EFL classroom in different Chinese secondary schools, where four EFL teachers were observed. The teachers were teaching reading programs that used different young adult novels such as: The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, Flipped, The Alchemist and Harry Potter. Data was also collected through interviews as well as from the teachers’ journals and other related documents, then transcribed, coded, and analysed through a six steps thematic analysis. The teachers’ approaches were categorised and fitted into Bloemert et al.’s Comprehensive Approach to foreign literature teaching. Results showed that although the teachers focused on different aspects of the English language in their lessons, they all drew on insights from the
language approach when teaching. The study concluded that the language approach and its features was the dominant approach used by teachers teaching EFL in China (pp. 1-12).

Hoff (2019) adopted a qualitative approach to investigate teachers’ perspectives on how they use literary works to teach EFL to upper secondary school students in Norway. Four teachers were observed. Two of the teachers worked with short stories: “Harrison Bergeron” and “The Lottery”. Another teacher worked with a motion picture of “Romeo and Juliet” while the fourth teacher worked with a novel Animal Farm. The aim of the study was to examine how the fictional texts shaped classroom discussions between teachers and students. A total of five lessons were observed and video-recorded in each class. The Model of the Intercultural Reader (MIR) was used to analyse teaching materials and classroom discourse between teachers and students. Elements of the model such as ‘intertextual exploration’ and ‘emotional reader response’ were used to analyse and categorize the teaching materials or literary texts and tasks that teachers designed for students to work with. Findings from the study showed that some tasks promoted group discussions and interpretation of the literary texts while tasks that were designed to stimulate cognitive responses from the students did not evoke emotional response from them. The study also showed that only one of the four tasks designed to enhance students’ intercultural competence implicitly addressed the issue of intertextuality because students were asked to create Photostories in the form of news segments with scenes from the film. The study concluded that some fictional materials provided students with insights on different voices or perspectives while some tasks encouraged social interaction between students, but that the teaching approach chosen did not have the potential to help students develop as intercultural readers, that is, the ability to understand the perspectives of others without it being explicitly taught (pp. 444-454).

3.1.2. Multiliteracies pedagogy approach

The pedagogy of multiliteracies means that multimodal teaching resources such as images, films, music videos and advertisement are used by teachers to support students’ development of multi-literacy skills and strategies as well as direct their attention to the sociocultural/aesthetic, linguistic, and visual elements in multimodal artefacts or multimodal literary texts (Reyes-Torres & Raga, 2020, pp. 97-98).

Brinkmann (2015) conducted a study in an EFL secondary school classroom in Germany with 24 grade 8 students. The study focused on a sequential teaching of the graphic novel and a multimodal pedagogy approach was adopted by the teacher. Observation notes from four lessons which lasted 45 minutes per lesson were collected. From the four lessons, four pre, during and after learning tasks were analysed on how they support students’ development of multiliteracies skills. Findings from the study showed that most of the students developed a positive attitude to the literary text since images and other visuals could help them understand the story. Also, the different tasks made it easier for the teacher to include different aspects of the English language in the teaching unit and not just focus on training reading skills (pp. 61-77).

A qualitative study was carried out by Liu (2019) in a Chinese high school where two science fiction films, I am legend and Blade runner, were used to help 30 students develop critical and virtual literacy skills during a 60-minute EFL lesson. A multimodal pedagogy approach was adopted by the teacher researcher. Data was collected through classroom observation and recorded videos which were later transcribed for analysis. Data was also collected from students’ in-class oral assessment as well as their post-class written reports. Findings showed that using I am legend and Blade Runner to teach English motivated students to interact with
each other and share opinions and helped them understand how an interrelation of different modalities can be used in the meaning-making process. For instance, students could infer that the dark lighting in *I am legend* depicts a negative future for human life and all 30 students could understand the director’s intention of choosing specific visual and aural modalities as well as their effects on the meaning-making process. Using the multiliteracy approach also led many students to appreciate film-based questions since they tend to arouse their interest in societal issues, technology, human’s future, and globalisation (pp. 1-6).

Stefanova et al. (2017) carried out a case study to examine the effectiveness of teaching critical thinking skills through a literary text, *The lost child* in an EFL secondary school classroom in Spain. A series of activities for both teachers and their students, based on the multiliteracies pedagogy approach was designed by the researchers in the form of questionnaires. A series of pre-reading, during and after reading activities were created around the text for the students studying EFL at the B1 and B2 levels according to the Common European Framework of reference. The study showed that when teachers proceeded from the multiliteracies pedagogy approach to teach critical thinking skills through literature, a significant number of students realised an increase in critical awareness of the English language as well as an increase in reasoning and problem-solving skills (pp. 253-258).

3.2. Summary of previous research

Results from previous research presented in this section mostly show the different areas that teachers focus on when they use fiction to teach English. This means that teachers can either decide to focus on language, the literary text itself or the context of the literary text as described in the comprehensive approach or on the multimodal aspects of the fictional texts if they decide to proceed from a multiliteracies pedagogy approach. These different approaches only consider the focus areas that teachers may consider when using fiction to teach English. The approaches themselves do not lead into insights on how teachers actually use fiction to teach English. This therefore creates a gap as one cannot gain insights into teachers’ methods and teaching practices. This study thus hopes to fill this gap by asking teachers about their pedagogical practices or methods when they use fiction to teach English.

Also, results from previous research show that teaching approaches that focus on pre, during and after learning tasks or activities, have the potential to help students develop different language skills and not just basic literacy. Such teaching approaches encourage students to become engaged in the literary works as well as to develop critical thinking skills as they work with the different tasks.

Finally, results from previous research reveal that the teaching methods that teachers draw on vary depending on the teacher and the country. For instance, in China teachers tend to draw on the language-based approach while in the Netherlands teachers tend to adopt an integrated approach or the Comprehensive approach. The teacher-to-teacher variation creates a rich area for more research. This study therefore hopes to shed some light on such variations between teachers within a specific context, that is Sweden.

4. Theoretical perspective

This study adopts Vygotsky’s concepts of mediation (Scaffolding) and the Zone of proximal development (ZPD) in the context of sociocultural theory. According to Kazulin et al. (2003), mediation or scaffolding involves the ability of a child to develop depending on the presence of mediated agents in the learning environment. Mediated agents can consist of symbolic tools,
human agent as well as organized learning activities. The two main types of mediation include human mediation and symbolic mediation. Human mediation involves an understanding of how an adult’s involvement in the learning process can enhance students learning while symbolic mediation entails the use of external resources to assist students in the learning process. Adult mediation can occur in different ways, for instance, through the provision of safe learning environments, through encouragement, through challenging tasks, through feedback given to learners, by engaging learners in group activities to promote interaction and thereby create opportunities for the learner to complete tasks that they could not have done themselves. The technique of mediation involves providing strategies or using different tools that facilitate learning (pp. 17-21). Kazulin et al. (2003) explain further that symbolic mediation on the other hand involves the learners’ use of external symbolic tools or resources to enrich their learning experiences such as signs, symbols, writing, formulae, graphic organizers, maps etc. with the prerequisite that they are deliberately chosen by the teacher with their functionality explicitly given. Teachers who explicitly discuss the available symbolic mediators or scaffolds for learning and how they can be used, will help their students develop psychological tools and mental representations of that which is being learned. Also, the cultural aspects or context of the symbolic tool should be explained to help students make meaning of them else they will become handicapped in comprehending and expressing themselves in, for instance, a foreign language that they are learning (pp. 23-26).

According to Johnson (2019), instructional scaffolding/professional support/scaffolding strategies/teacher mediation/ is the use of resources, strategies, and verbal interaction to enhance students’ understanding of challenging school tasks and an effective practice for helping students studying English as a second or foreign language succeed in reading. Such strategies help students develop language proficiency and skills. The support that teachers give students are usually based on professional and practical knowledge intended to help students use the language during interactions as well as to understand reading materials (pp. 108-109).

In this study, the symbolic mediators include teaching resources such as films, video clips, songs, and other audio-visual resources that are used by the adult/human mediator/teacher/ to enhance students’ learning of English as a foreign language and not just texts, maps, or other traditional tools.

According to Chaiklin (2003), the Zone of proximal development is used to answer questions about the kind of instruction that is optimal for learners at a particular developmental stage in the learning process as well as the goals of an instruction and the resources available to achieve the goals (pp. 39-40). The zone is defined as:

The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers or what the child is able to do in collaboration today, he will be able to do independently tomorrow (Chaiklin, 2003, pp. 39-40).

Chaiklin (2003) explains further that the key assumptions or arguments for the ZPD is that of generality assumption, assistance, and potential assumption. Generality assumption implies that the learner can perform a certain number of tasks alone but with collaborative assistance will be able to perform an even greater number of tasks. The number and kinds of tasks that the learner can perform alone is taken as indicators of their level of development. Assistance implies that the learner should depend on a more competent person or adult or teacher to make meaning of the learning process. The principle of potential assumption is directed to properties of the learner such as their potential or readiness to learn or the existence of certain qualities
than can be further developed (pp. 41-43). Miller (2003) applied the principle of assistance to the teaching and learning of literature in the classroom with the argument that if teachers allow students to have open-discussions about literary works and form their own interpretations of them instead of giving them teacher-made interpretations, students will become excited and engage aesthetically in the social activity of text interpretation (pp. 289-290). This study therefore adopts the principle of assistance.

This study also adopts the concept of mediation (scaffolding) and ZPD because the aim of the study is to understand how teachers teach. As Johnson (2019) explains, scaffolding in education is a feature of Vygotsky’s sociocultural concept of ZPD because it works within the zone, that is, the area of assistance where teachers use resources to assist students to complete difficult tasks. Sometimes, the scaffolds can be planned such as teachers’ choice of materials, routines, and their organisation of students. The scaffolds can also be interactional whereby teachers support students by interacting with them or allow them to interact with each other during lessons (p. 110). Thus, both concepts of mediation and assistance are suitable to understand teachers’ pedagogical practices in the EFL classroom. The concepts will be used to as an analytical lens to understand in-service teachers’ responses on how they teach English through fiction. These concepts are also chosen because of their interrelatedness to one another as mentioned above. Thus, by using the second principle of the ZPD, that is assistance, teachers are also scaffolding the learning process. Finally, the concepts are chosen because as mentioned above, they have been used specifically to teach EFL through literature.

The sociocultural approach is chosen because using fiction to teach English entails gaining insights on the sociocultural practices of teachers in school contexts. According to Hofman et al. (2001), schools are social environments or social contexts where beliefs, norms, values, etc. are shared which shape students cognitive and affective development (pp. 171-172). Also, the framework is suitable for this study because it represents a combination of the social, linguistic, and multimodal practices that takes place in the classroom. Thus, asking in-service teachers about such practices might provide useful information and opportunities for pre-service teachers that is based on professional and practical knowledge. Although an inquiry into in-service teachers’ beliefs may not necessarily lead into insights about their practices, Buehl and Beck (2014) explain that teachers’ beliefs can influence their practice in the same way that their actions or practices can reshape their beliefs even though the relationship between beliefs and practices can be more complex than direct (pp. 68-70).

5. Methods

In this section, the method used for collecting data as well as the method for data analysis will be presented. Other aspects involved in the data collection process such as the interview guide and the selection of informants, will also be discussed. Aspects that involve both the data collection and analysis process such as reliability and validity as well as the ethical considerations taken to perform this study will also be presented.

5.1. Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview method was adopted to help collect data that will be used to answer the research questions. The semi-structured interview entailed the use of an interview guide with open-ended questions for data collection. It is used by the interviewer to get responses from the interviewee that will be used to answer the research questions. Prompts and probes are also used to get detail information or to encourage the interviewee to expatiate on their responses (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 511). The semi-structured interview was chosen for this study
because it is a small-scale study, and it was necessary to get teachers to participate in a digital interview within a short period of time. Thus, for the data collection process to be operational, I had to choose a semi-structured interview. Also, the semi-structured interview was chosen with the hope that teachers will speak freely and give their opinions about how they teach. This way, teachers can describe their teaching methods in detail. Hence, the kind of data (qualitative data) needed for this study also meant that using a semi-structured interview was the most suitable. Moreover, as Dahlgren and Johansson (2019) pointed out, phenomenographic interviews are semi-structured and thematical and although the interview guide should contain a small number of questions, they should be formed in accordance with the different aspects of the phenomenon in question (Fejes & Thornberg, 2019, p. 183. My translation).

5.1.1. Method discussion: Strengths and weaknesses

Although the semi-structured interview was the best method for data collection due to the scope and time frame of this project, there are some disadvantages of using interview data. According to Denscombe (2018), data from interviews are mostly based on what the informants say or believe rather than on their practices. Thus, what the informants say they do, believe, and think does not necessary reflect the truth about their practices. This can mean that the data collected lacks validity (p. 293). However, this study adopts a qualitative approach, which means that true knowledge, as derived from the informants, is subjective and attainable. Another disadvantage with the semi-structured interview is that the interviewee can be influenced by the identity and presence of the interviewer (Denscombe, 2018, p.93). However, because this study was performed through the internet and the interviewees had more experience in using fiction to teach English than the interviewer, that problem was canceled out. A third disadvantage as described by Denscombe (2018) is that the nature of the semi-structured interview means that there will be a likelihood of inconsistency in the collected data from the different informants as they each experience the interview process differently (p. 293). However, because an interview guide was prepared and the interviewees were asked the same questions, the rate of inconsistency was greatly reduced. With these disadvantages, it would have been preferable to do classroom observations as a supplement to the interviews to gain insights into teachers’ practices. However, that would have required more time for data collection because different teachers might want to be observed at different periods and from my experience, a teaching unit usually takes approximately 4-7 weeks to be completed.

5.2. Data collection instrument

The interview guide (Appendix 2) was designed by forming questions inspired by comprehensive and multimodal approaches in the previous research section, my knowledge and experience as a student-teacher during teaching practice and from previous students’ theses. The questions on the interview guide were also divided into three different categories or themes: what fiction is and how it is expressed, how teachers use fiction to teach English and teachers’ perceptions about the benefits of using fiction to teach English. The first category or theme was intended to get information on teachers’ understanding of the concept under study, that is fiction. The second category was intended to elicit information on how teachers use fiction to teach English and the third category had to do with teachers’ perceptions about the benefits of using fiction to teach English. The responses from the interviewees were used as raw data for this study.

5.3. Selection of informants

To get a suitable sample of informants that would participate in this study, letters were sent out via emails to principals of nine secondary schools in a city in Southeastern Sweden. In the
letters, I asked specifically for English teachers who would like to volunteer in my study. Teacher’s willing to volunteer were also required to fill in and sign a letter of consent (see Appendix 1), which was attached to the emails sent out to the principals, before they could participate in the study. For the first request, I only got one volunteer. After a reminder was sent out four more people decided to participate. Table 1 shows the different teachers who voluntarily participated in this study. They were all given pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity, so the names used in this study are not their real names. Anna teaches the courses English 6 and 7 for upper secondary school and has 39 years of teaching experience from different parts of Europe including Sweden. Peter teaches English 5, 6 and 7 and has taught for 15 years in Sweden. Elin teaches English 6 and 7 and has taught for 28 years in Sweden. Lena teaches grades 7-9 and has taught English for 15 years in Sweden while Susanne has taught English for 12 years in Sweden and teaches grades 7-9. All the teachers were given the option to answer in either Swedish or English. Only Lena and Susanne\(^1\) decided to answer in Swedish and their responses were later translated to English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Teacher certification</th>
<th>School form</th>
<th>Teaching experience</th>
<th>Teaching class/course described for this study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Licensed</td>
<td>Upper secondary school</td>
<td>39 years</td>
<td>English 6 and 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Licensed</td>
<td>Upper secondary school</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>English 5 and 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elin</td>
<td>Licensed</td>
<td>Upper secondary school</td>
<td>28 years</td>
<td>English 6 and 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena</td>
<td>Licensed</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Grade 7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susanne</td>
<td>Licensed</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although all the teachers who volunteered turned out to be licensed teachers, the main criterium was that they should be in-service teachers. Hence, the selection of informants was not random. According to Larsen (2019), in qualitative analysis, one can use non-probability sampling to decide who can participate in the study. With non-probability sampling, the participants are not randomly chosen and do not represent the population and hence could not be used to make statistical generalizations about the population, but the study should have a transfer-value in that its results could be transferred to different groups of the same population or be relevant to different groups of the same population (p. 124). In this light, the hope is that the results of this study will be relevant to pre-service teachers using fiction to teach English even though they might not be applicable to all the teachers in Sweden.

5.4. Pilot Study

After the letter of informed consent was sent out, one volunteer immediately decided to participate and signed the letter of consent. This participant was used to pilot the study. After carrying out the pilot study, the instrument for data collection was adjusted and the actual study was performed. A pilot study is used to determine how participants will react to the study as well as to determine possible problems and risks with the study (Cohen et al., 2018, p.136) as well as to test the interview guide (Larsen, 2018, p. 137). In the pilot study, the teacher was

\(^1\) All the names are pseudonyms.
asked how she used fiction to teach English and one question was asked about taking a stance for the use of fiction to teach English. That question was reformulated and broken down into several practical questions in the main study since the teacher thought it was a bit technical. This meant that the main study would require more time for the interviewees. The pilot study took approximately 30 minutes and was recorded via Zoom.

5.5. Implementation

After the pilot study, the instrument for data collection – the interview guide – was completed. Email remainders were sent out to the principals of the secondary schools. The letter of informed consent which was attached to each email detailed the purpose of the study and that the interviews would be conducted digitally and recorded. Once participants had given their consent, a date and time was set for the interview to take place. A ZOOM link was created with the date and time for the meeting and sent to the participants. Personal interviews were therefore conducted with all the five teachers via ZOOM. According to Denscombe (2018), a personal interview allows the researcher and the informant to decide on a suitable time to meet. Thus, it is easy to arrange and even much easier to control as the researcher is only focused on a single informant at a time and their ideas (p. 270). Each personal interview took approximately 40-45 minutes. The recorded interviews were later transcribed for analysis as explained below.

5.6. Method of analysis

This study adopts a phenomenographic approach to study data from the informants. Phenomenography is defined as a research approach designed to answer questions about how people perceive a particular phenomenon. The approach was originally developed at the department of Education, University of Gothenburg Sweden and is based on the theoretical framework of conceptions and outcome of the phenomenon (Marton, 1986, p. 28; Fejes & Thornberg, 2019, p. 179). This approach was chosen because using fiction to teach English is a common and natural process or phenomenon in the EFL classroom as stated in the curriculum. This study thus intends to examine teachers’ perceptions about the teaching methods they draw on when using fiction to teach English as well as their beliefs about the outcome or benefits of doing so. The aim of choosing this method of analysis is to understand variations in the teaching methodologies and not just similarities.

5.6.1. The phenomenographic research process

According to Marton (1986), the study of phenomenography involves understanding the different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various aspects of a phenomenon. By studying and giving account of the different ways people think about a phenomenon one will lay the foundation for a better way of perceiving the phenomenon. To do this, phenomenographers should only attempt to describe a phenomenon as it appears to people without giving their opinions about how they are or should be, that is, by using a ‘second-order’ perspective (pp. 31-33). Describing and categorizing a subject’s descriptions are the outcome or findings of the research because when a phenomenographic researcher reads and classifies descriptions of a phenomenon, they are not just sorting out data but looking for distinctive characteristics that appear in the data for instance, “structurally significant differences that clarify how people define some specific portion of the world” (Marton, 1986, p. 33 - 34). However, this study adopts Dahlgren and Johansson’s (2019) seven step analysis of the phenomenographic process whereby theory coexists with the analysis since the researcher considers his or her knowledge or preunderstanding of the phenomenon when designing the interview guide (Fejes & Thornberg, 2019, p. 188).
I began the process of analysis by familiarizing myself with the data. The audio versions of the interviews were transcribed and printed out then read several times. I also had to listen to the recordings several times to make sense of the transcripts. The different transcripts were labelled with pseudonyms of the teachers and their descriptions of fiction were read and marked with different color pens. According to Dahlgren and Johansson (2019), the researcher should start by studying or reading the transcribed interview material to be familiar with it and jot down important features or descriptions of the phenomenon in the process of reading (Fejes & Thornberg, 2019, p.184). After familiarizing myself with the data, the next step was to select responses from individual transcripts that were relevant to answer the research questions. Dahlgren and Johansson (2019) as well as Marton (1986) explain that several relevant passages or utterances from a single interview, that have some connection to the research question, can be cut out and labelled if the transcribed interview is printed out in paper form (Fejes & Thornberg, 2019, p. 185; Marton, 1986, p. 42). Next, I compared all the selected utterances to find similarities and differences between them. Marton (1986) describes this stage as the most crucial in the analysis process because the researcher’s attention is now shifted from the quotes or utterances to the meanings embedded in them. The researchers must interpret the meanings each quote carries and place the quotes in a “pool of meanings” context (p. 43). Then I grouped responses which were similar to each other – with regards to a specific question asked – together in one category and those that were different in another category. Dahlgren and Johansson (2019) explain that groupings of passages depend on their relationship to each other (Fejes & Thornberg, 2019, p. 186). After the categories were formed, they were labelled into different themes based on my theoretical framework, the sociocultural theory. Dahlgren and Johansson (2019) as well as Marton (1986) also explain that, at this stage, the researcher should articulate or decide clearly and distinctly the different categories and find out the essence or core meanings in the different categories, that is, what makes them similar (Fejes & Thornberg, 2019, p. 187; Marton, 1986, p. 43). After naming the categories, I made sure that all responses fitted into categories that had even the least similarities. According to Dahlgren and Johansson (2019), this is done in order to exhaust and fill each category with passages that have common features and meanings (Fejes & Thornberg, 2019, p. 187). Then I discovered that the different categories fitted well with the ideas or core meanings of the sociocultural theory. For instance, planned scaffolding and interactional scaffolding.

The above steps were followed during data analysis. However, the process of analysis could have implication for the replicability – and thereby reliability – of this study. As Marton (1986) explains, another researcher studying the same set of data may not arrive at the same set of categories because of the process of discovery. A researcher doing the same study may not necessarily find or discover the same categories, but he/she may recognize previously described categories. By recognizing previously described categories the study can be replicable (p. 35).

### 5.7. Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are important qualities of the entire research process and not just the results. Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) define reliability as the consistency and trustworthiness to which a research result can be reproduced by other researchers or better still whether the interviewees will change their answer or give another answer to the same questions when interviewed by another researcher. Reliability can be derived from the interviewer in relation to the type of questions asked and how they are asked which can also influence the type of responses given as well as the process of analysis. Leading questions as well as different formulations of questions that are not part of the interview guide can lead to different answers. Validity is defined in terms of truth, accuracy, and the strength of an opinion or in other words how valid conclusions can be drawn from premises or arguments that are well-founded and
convincing. A broader perspective of understanding validity entails “the extent to which a method investigates that which it intends to investigate” (pp. 295-296; *My translation*). More specifically, validity entails: how well the underlying theoretical framework or assumptions reveals a logical connection with the research questions; how well the interview guide and questions can adequately lead to newly produced knowledge of the phenomenon being researched; trustworthiness of the entire interview process; trustworthiness of the translation of interview answers from spoken to written language; trustworthiness in the questions asked and the interpretations made from the answers given (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, pp. 297-298). To increase validity and reliability, a qualitative study should have a transfer value, that is, it should be based on a well-founded theory and previous research, and its result should be transferable to other cases and not just those that have been in focus during the current research process (Larsen, 2018 p. 124). However, a pilot study was performed prior to the actual study as a way of increasing validity and reliability.

### 5.8. Ethical considerations

The Swedish Research Council’s (2017) publication on “Good research practice” informs researchers on how to make good decisions on research and research ethics. The publication emphasizes four important concepts: secrecy, professional secrecy, anonymity, and confidentiality (pp. 40). These ethical principles were taken into consideration when collecting data from the interviewees. A letter of informed consent was sent out to all volunteers informing them about the purpose of the study and how their information will be processed in case they chose to participate. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2014), a letter of informed consent is intended to: inform participants about the purpose of the study; that participating in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw whenever they want to; inform participants about how their personal data will be processed and who will have access to the collected data; and participant’s eventual access to the study (p.107). During the interview, participants were reminded about how their responses will be used and that the supervisor or examiners might have access to them. They were also informed that the recorded ZOOM meetings will be deleted after I get a pass on the thesis. Also, all the participants were given pseudonyms to maintain their right to privacy. According to the Swedish Research Council’s (2017) it is not just the names of participants that need to be coded but also other information that could be used to identify them (p. 42). Thus, information or responses that could be used to identify the participants were coded.

### 6. Presentation of results

In this section, the results from the data analysis will be presented. Using the sociocultural theory as a lens to understand and interpret the data, two major categories emerged: teaching methods and teachers’ perceptions about the benefits of using fiction to teach English. The definition of fiction and its different medium of expression will first be established as shown below.

#### 6.1. Definition and medium of expressing fiction

All five teachers mentioned that fiction can be expressed in different forms such as novels, films, music, poetry, art, games. However, their definitions of fiction were slightly different. Anna defined fiction as any story that is conveyed by any means. Peter defined fiction as any kind of creative expression which has no ambition of presenting facts. According to Elin, fiction is a broad concept and could include short stories, novels, poems, texts, films and even games that have a storyboard. Susanne described fiction as a space where one can escape reality even
though it can be based on real events. She also explained that fiction can be expressed as music, film, and books or simply be considered a way of expression for authors who want to fantasize about reality. Lena said that the curriculum did not give a clear definition of fiction so she does not understand what they mean by fiction, but that to her, fiction could be anything from poetry to films or books. Amongst the five teachers, only Lena and Elin refrained from defining fiction but stated clearly how it can be expressed.

6.2. Teaching methods

All five teachers’ descriptions of their teaching methods were classified into six prominent teaching strategies and labeled as scaffolding strategies. I made sure that all relevant responses fitted into categories that had even the least similarities to fill each category with passages that have common features and meanings. The identified teaching strategies included: choosing authentic fictional materials for learning, building up knowledge about themes in the fictional materials, having classroom discussions about the fictional works, allowing students to draw on prior knowledge, designing learning tasks and using visuals as aid. Results from the data on the teaching methods are presented in the subheadings below as the different scaffolding strategies.

6.2.1. Choosing authentic learning materials

All the teachers mentioned that they chose fictional materials with authentic and meaningful contexts of the English language. Apart from Susanne who said she chose an audio version of *The Hate You Give*, the other four teachers mentioned choosing literary texts in print form. Peter explained that he had worked with fictional songs, films, and poetry before and that he discussed and analyzed modern music and linked it to Shakespearean poetry. He also explained that he chose to work with *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro for English 7 because students could easily relate to its themes and that the language was relatively demanding. Susanne mentioned that she chose *The Hate You Give* by Angie Thomas. Lena explained that she chose *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney because it had picture illustrations which could help her students understand its contents. Anna said that she chose *Oliver Twist* because it was Victorian literature. Apart from choosing fictional works that were relevant to their students, all the teachers explained that they also chose the material depending on students’ level of understanding of the English language. However, only Susanne and Lena mentioned that choosing fictional materials could be influenced by the teacher’s interests.

6.2.2. Building up knowledge about themes in the fictional works

All five teachers explained that they introduced the fictional works by having discussions with students about the themes of the fictional works as a way of building up knowledge and preparing them to work with the fictional texts. However, they mentioned discussing different themes because they chose different fictional materials. Peter for instance, explained that he wanted students to learn about the opportunities and threats of science, friendship, genetic modification, organ donation etc. which were all current themes in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*. Peter also explained that he tried to “establish how much the students know about the theme during the first or second lesson” before having discussions with them about the themes they will encounter while reading the novel. Elin mentioned that she begins by talking about the theme of crime through a couple of lessons since it was a common theme in Agatha Christie’s novels. She also said that she allowed her students to listen to stories or podcasts about crimes. Anna mentioned that she used the fictional work as a springboard to talk about the theme of the death penalty and began by connecting the theme to present day issues so students will understand the content of the literary work. Susanne explained that because she
was working with themes such as social uprising and gang violence, she tried to connect the themes to current issues in Swedish society so that her students could easily understand the content of the literary work. Lena mentioned that she had discussions with her students on themes such as friendship and bullying before reading the book. Lena further explained that choosing some fictional works meant that she would talk about cultural and historical themes. She mentioned that while working with The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexia she discussed the history and culture of native Americans and compared their situation to that of Swedish minority group, the Sami. Like Lena, Peter also mentioned that he discussed cultural themes with his students depending on the novel he chooses to work with. He said that he used, for instance, Ruby Red by Kerstin Gier to discuss the theme of apartheid in south Africa. Susanne explained that because she was working with themes such as social uprising and gang violence, she tried to connect the themes to current issues in Swedish society so that her students could easily understand the content of the literary work. She explained that:

I found a film on YouTube with different clips of Black Lives Matter. We talked about Black Lives Matter and George Floyd and everything that happened and because we live in city X where we had two shootings in our area and we even had a student in the fall term that was shot, so they live and experience almost the same thing even though they think that it is happening there in the US and here is Sweden.

Amongst the five teachers, only Susanne and Lena mentioned linking the themes of the fictional works to current societal issues in Sweden. However, all the teachers said they connected the different themes to other fictional works or stories which students could easily relate to as a way of building up knowledge.

6.2.3. Using classroom discussions to support learning

All the teachers mentioned that they had teacher-led discussions and welcomed students’ perspectives and input of text interpretation through student-student discussions. They mentioned also that they had teacher-led discussions with the students and allowed them to work in groups before working individually with the final tasks. However, their descriptions slightly differed from each other with regards to the content of discussion. Elin reported that she had discussions about what students can do when they do not understand difficult words. According to her explanation, she tells students to look up difficult words and try to understand them in the context of crime fiction. She also mentioned that she allowed students to discuss in groups to help each other understand the novel better. She explained that she places most of the responsibility on her English 6 and 7 students because they are mature enough to choose the books they want to read as well as discuss the contents with each other. She talked about allowing her students to discuss the theme of crime fiction after two or more lessons with teacher-led discussions. She said that during group discussions, she allowed students to decide how many chapters they want to read per week but make decisions as to when they should meet and discuss the chapters. She also stated that her students “have different cultures and can explain to their friends in different ways”. Lena talked about having teacher-led discussions about the themes of friendship and bullying then giving students questions to discuss in groups. She mentioned that she first allowed her students to answer the questions individually before discussing them in groups. She further explained that she divides the class into groups and take out students in each group to have discussions with them about the book. She also said that most of her grade seven students do not feel confident in using the English language and are afraid of speaking if the subject of discussion is difficult for them that is why she chose to have discussions about friendship and bullying. She explained further that her grade eight students were more mature and willing to use the English language. She said that she had teacher-led discussions with her grade eight students when she introduced Robinson Crusoe and encouraged them to discuss questions relating to the novel in groups. She stated that:
[They] talked a little about a TV program and made a connection to Robinson. I talk to them about how to be an active reader and how to understand the context of the story so as not to get stuck while reading. I also tell them that sometimes they might need to stop and check the meaning of words. Then we can continue to have book discussions throughout the entire project.

Anna mentioned that she allowed her students to have a debate about the death penalty which is one of the central themes in Victorian literature. She explained that while working with Chimamanda Adichie’s Apollo, she had teacher-led discussions about gender which was a central theme in the book. She reported that she raised up issues such as equality, the class system and other societal issues that were mentioned in the novel, during her discussions. She also mentioned that during classroom discussions, she compared the gender perspective depicted in the novel to that of Sweden. She explained that her “students are very verbal and good in discussions, but they do not have a good mastery of academic English which is why I have to teach them that”. Moreover, she mentioned allowing students to share their opinions about the themes and take part in classroom discussions because she believes that every voice should be heard. Peter explained that while working with Never Let Me Go, he had teacher-led discussions about the themes, scenes, literary terms, characters and conflicts in the story and asked students to predict the events of the novel. He also mentioned that they always had classroom discussions after reading each chapter or watching a movie. He said that discussing the contents of the novel together is another way of making sure things are moving forward and because students are not always willing to share their ideas, it is a way of making sure that different voices are heard. He explained that:

I think the students can really benefit from also discussing it with each other, not just with me, it’s not about me presenting the one and only story. I try to encourage my students to just throw themselves out there and go for it and tell each other what they think, there is no right or wrong if you can support your ideas with examples from the story.

Susanne explained that she introduced the unit of The Hate You Give through teacher-led discussions and allowed her students to listen to video clips about Black Lives Matter on YouTube as well as the audio version of the book in BookBeat (an online reading program), read by the author herself. She explained that after allowing students to listen to each chapter, she had teacher-led discussions and asked students to share their experiences about events in the book with each other. She talked about having students discuss in groups and asking them to record themselves during group discussions so that she can give them feedback on their discussions. She also mentioned further that she was mostly using a contextual material (teacher guide) to teach her students and the material had articles about code switching and Tupac’s songs which she used as topics for classroom discussions. She also explained that she had teacher-led discussions about key words like ‘lynching’ so students will understand the meaning before they encounter them in the novel. She talked about using questions as a way of stimulating students to participate in classroom discussions. In short, all the teachers approached the fictional works by having teacher-led discussions with their students and encouraged them to share their opinions about the different themes through peer group discussions.

6.2.4. Encouraging students to draw on previous knowledge

All five teachers mentioned that they allowed students to draw on previous knowledge to understand the content of the fictional works. However, this was done differently. Susanne for instance explained that she asked students about their experiences after reading chapters of The Hate You Give or how they felt about reading certain events or themes in the novel. She further explained that The Hate You Give is an emotionally charged book and that she allowed her students to use previous knowledge and feelings to talk about its content. Peter also mentioned
that he encouraged his students to use previous knowledge and experiences when working with
*Never Let Me Go*. He stated that “when we discuss our reading experiences of the novel, I think
that’s a good way of learning and becoming more of a reflective reader”. He also explained that
he encourages his students to give their personal opinions and talk about how they feel. Elin
mentioned that she allowed her students to use reading strategies previously learned and to
share reading experiences because her students have different cultures and background which
meant they might interpret the fictional works differently. Anna mentioned linking the themes
of *Romeo and Juliet* to other themes from contemporary writers that students are familiar with
or have read before so has to enhance their understanding of them. Lena explained that when
working with the movie version of *The Hate You Give*, she took into consideration students’
level of mastery of the English language and encouraged them to compare events in the movie
to events in their own lives and the situation in Sweden. She explained further that when
working with *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, she compared the native
American situation to that of Swedish Sami minority to help students understand the content of
the book since students had previously learned about the history of the Sami in Sweden. Thus,
all five teachers encouraged students to use previous knowledge and experiences to understand
the content of the fictional works.

6.2.5. Using audio-visual resources

All five teachers mentioned using audio-visual resources as a way of helping students
understand the fictional works. However, this was done differently. Some teachers used digital
fiction while others used digital resources that were non-fictional, to enhance students learning
of themes in the fictional works. Anna mentioned that although she worked initially with the
*Oliver Twist* and *Romeo and Juliet* novels, she allowed her students to watch the movie versions
in class. She stated that she encouraged students to make their own interpretations of the movie
and use any media as a way of conveying their interpretations. She also explained that she used
other non-fictional digital resources such as online news articles, films, film clips, Ted Talks
etc. which had some connection to the death penalty theme. Susanne explained that she mostly
used digital fictions because they were easily accessible online and cheaper than buying printed
books. She mentioned that she used other non-fictional tools such as films and YouTube videos
about Black Lives Matter as a complement to the audiobook of *The Hate You Give*. Peter
mentioned that he had used modern songs as digital fiction. He stated that:

> When it comes to songs, I have used different songs in the past. What I often do is that we study a song
together in class and after that, I tell the students to pick a song, maybe their favourite song. And they
should analyse it according to the questions that we have used in our joint analysis.

Peter further described how he compared current songs to Shakespearean poetry. He also
explained that when working with *Never Let Me Go*, he asked students to look at the drawing
on the cover page of the novel and try to predict the story. He further explained that they listened
to the audio version of the novel and even watched the film in class and linked the story to other
fictional and non-fictional works such as online articles. Lena explained that apart from using
printed books, she also used films and audiobooks. She mentioned for instance, that when she
was working with *Robinson Crusoe*, she allowed her students to listen to the audiobook version
online. She explained further that when working with *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, she used digital
resources such as video clips from YouTube made by the author of the book on how to create
drawings like the ones in the novel. She talked about giving her students instructions on what
to draw after watching the videos. Elin mentioned that she had used a short film, *The Silent
Child*, with her students and that she used other digital resources which were non-fictional such
as Ted Talks and online news articles. She also talked about using digital fiction such as
podcasts. She explained that some of her students are not fond of reading long texts while others
have difficulty reading. So, she allowed those who have difficulty reading to listen to the audio version of the novel while reading at the same time.

6.2.6. Designing tasks that support learning

The five teachers mentioned that they designed final tasks for the students at the end of the unit, as a way of determining whether students have understood the content from the fictional works as well as their teaching content. All five teachers also mentioned that they worked in projects, that is, each unit is considered a project that takes approximately 4-7 weeks to complete, with different minor tasks in-between. The teachers however differed with regards to the final tasks they designed for students. Peter explained that he had designed an essay-type question at the end of the *Never Let Me Go* unit about the opportunities and threats of science. He also mentioned that he wanted students to incorporate information from other sources into their writing as stated in the curriculum. He explained also that his students regularly work with reading logs which is a minor task within the project. Anna explained that the final task for the Victorian fiction unit – with the death penalty as a central theme – was that students will have a debate for and against the death penalty. She also described another minor task that she wanted her students to perform before the final task. She said:

> Now we are working with *Oliver Twist* of Victorian literature, and I link all these works with current themes. So, they make sense to the students. For instance, *Oliver Twist*, we watched the film, we have read some extracts and we are working with a project where different groups of students had different themes and are educating the rest of the class about Victorian England, like death penalty, prostitution, industrialization.

Anna also talked about giving students minor tasks such as four-minute writing exercises where students write their reflections about death penalty. Susanne mentioned that she asked her students to write about characters in *The Hate you Give* as well as record themselves while having discussions about the book. She also explained that for the final task, she wants her students to write an argumentative essay at the end of the unit. Elin mentioned that she wanted her students to prepare a podcast where they report incidents of a crime scene or interview the police. Lena talked about having students fill in the missing words of a lyric in an online program when they worked with music. She also mentioned occasionally asking students to answer questions in a reading log about *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, mainly about character presentation, important events and the themes of friendship and bullying. She talked about giving her students tasks to do in groups as well as written and spoken tasks that students will do individually at the end of the unit or project. Thus, all the teachers mentioned that they worked in projects which took approximately 4-7 weeks to complete and that each project ended with a final task for students.

A summary of the six teaching strategies is shown on the diagram below:
Diagram 1: Prominent teaching strategies.

The different strategies seem to follow a sequential order from choosing authentic materials to designing final tasks for students. However, the five teachers did not describe their teaching in this order even though the questions were asked in a sequential order. Some teachers answered some questions in detail so that when the next question was asked, it became a repetition. Even though all categories were filled with descriptions from the teachers, the prominent categories identified still overlapped each other to some extent. For instance, there were some descriptions that seemed suitable for both ‘classroom discussion’ category and ‘building thematical knowledge’ category.

6.3. Teachers’ perceptions about the benefits of using fiction

The five teachers expressed different opinions about the advantages of using fiction to teach English even though they all mostly mentioned the linguistic benefits for students. According to Lena, using fiction to teach English meant she could include grammar teaching as well as help her students with explicit vocabulary learning. She also mentioned that using fiction helped her students cooperate more with each other. She said that her focus has always been on language and that she uses literature with the intention to help her students learn the English language. Elin mentioned that using fiction can help increase students’ vocabulary and grammar through language awareness even though they might not be conscious about it. She also mentioned that she does not discuss the culture of the country depicted in the fictional works but rather allow students to discuss such aspects with each other because they have different backgrounds and culture themselves and might understand the fictional works differently. She explained further that:

Students should read fiction to better understand themselves and other people. Reading fiction helps in developing your empathy, to understand how other people think. I think fiction is the perfect way to learn vocabulary and literary analysis tools. And, reading canonical literary works such as Agatha Christie, and Shakespeare’s Hamlet or Romeo and Juliet will make you literate as you have knowledge of the world through literature or art.
Elin used the Swedish word “bildning” as one of the benefits of using fiction to teach English. She said it does not have a direct English translation but that it means to help students become “literate” since they will know more about the world after completing school. Susanne mentioned that when working with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, she talked about the culture of the country depicted in the novel but that when working with *The Hate You Give*, she adopted a language development approach whereby she mainly focused on explaining the meaning of key words. She mentioned however, that she used to give students glossaries of difficult words and it helped them understand their meanings but when she worked with *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne, she did not give her students glossaries for each chapter and they found it challenging to read the novel. According to Anna, using fiction to teach English will:

> Enhance students’ ability to read, increase their English vocabulary, give them an insight into another world through the English language, give them a slight indication of how the text is produced, sentence structure and they don’t even think about these things, and it’s there.

Anna mentioned further that it provided a space for her students to learn academic English and that she also brings in the cultural aspects of the country depicted in the fictional works, during classroom discussions so that students will learn about different voices, perspectives, experiences, and ways of doing things. Peter said using fiction will help his students learn grammar and vocabulary and that they usually have discussions about the meanings and use of key words before students read each chapter. He also stated that “the chances of students using some of those words in their writing process increases”. He explained further that using fiction creates an opportunity for him to help students with sentence structures and spelling mistakes since he mostly focused on working with language. He said that he only talked about the culture of the country depicted in the fictional work, depending on the book he is working with. He said for instance, that when working with *Ruby Red*, his students learned about the culture in South Africa and about Apartheid. He also mentioned that using fictional works can enhance corporation between students. He explained that when using fiction, he teaches students on how to be a good listener; how to be supportive; how to ask questions to keep the conversation going and keep responses minimal and how to show that they are paying attention to what the other person is saying. Thus, all the teachers mentioned that using fiction will enhance students learning of the English language. None of the teachers mentioned any disadvantage of using fiction to teach English.

### 7. Discussion

In this section, the results from the collected data – as categorised and presented above – will be discussed in relation to explanations given in the background section, previous research results and the chosen theoretical framework for this study. The discussion in this section will also help answer the research questions. First, a discussion on the medium of expressing fiction in relation to Swedish steering documents will be established.

#### 7.1. Definition and medium of expressing fiction

This study did not find any significant difference as to the teachers’ definitions of fiction. Moreover, the teachers all agreed that fiction can be expressed through different mediums. According to Skolverket (2018), students in grade 7-9 should be taught literature and other fiction (p. 37). Likewise, students studying English 5,6 and 7 should also be taught different kinds and genres of literature and other fiction such as poetry, films, drama, songs (Skolverket, 2021, English Core Content for Upper Secondary School). In its commentary material, the texts used to teach these students could be from various media which include any audio-visual
or printed media (Skolverket’s commentary material, 2021, p. 15). The curriculum does not explicitly mention the types of fictional works that teachers should use. So, the teachers chose materials that had themes that were relevant for their students. However, because the curriculum says fictional works could be expressed through different media or forms, the teachers also used digital fiction as well as fiction expressed in print form. Susanne for instance worked with the audio version of The Hate You Give while Lena allowed her students to watch the movie version. What is important is that the teachers chose authentic material to work with. According to Gilmore (2011) using authentic materials expressed in print or through audio-visual forms can help students develop communicative language skills since such materials tend to provide authentic discourse of the target language (p. 701). Digital fiction can enhance students learning of digital, cultural and language skills (Skains, 2019, p. 2) and previous research on the multiliteracies pedagogy approach shows that multimodal teaching include the uses of resources such as images, films, music etc. during teaching which could help students learn language skills while learning how to use digital resources at the same time (Reyes-Torres & Raga, 2020, pp. 97-98). The teachers’ use of digital fiction is in line with with Liu’s (2019) study which showed that digital fiction could motivate students to interact with each other and share ideas (pp. 1-6).

7.2. Teaching methods

As mentioned earlier, teaching methods are the instructional strategies that teachers employ to teach a specific content area (Borich, 2017, p. 157). In this study, the methods that the teachers employed to teach English via fiction are the different instructional strategies that they used. Instructional scaffolding/scaffolding strategies/professional support/ teacher mediation/ verbal interactions or the use of external resources to enhance student’s understanding of challenging school tasks, are effective practices used by teachers to help students – studying English as a second or foreign language – succeed in reading and to develop proficient language skills (Johnson, 2019, pp. 108-109).

The teachers in this study used six instructional strategies to teach English via fiction. Apart from choosing authentic material and using digital resources which have already been discussed, the other four prominent strategies included: building up knowledge about the themes in the fictional work, using classroom discussions as support, allowing students to draw on previous knowledge, and designing tasks that reinforce learning.

After deciding on the fictional material to use, the teachers began by building up knowledge about the themes of the fictional works and having classroom discussions about them. They also discussed the different characters in the story, the role they play, as well as other literary terms and difficult words that students may encounter. For instance, Susanne mentioned discussing the characters of the literary works with her students and asked them to write about the characters in The Hate You Give. All this was done through teacher-led discussions. Teacher-led discussions are usually classified as direct teaching method which entails explicit teaching and may involve presenting new information to learners in a form they can easily access, understand, and master (Westwood, 2008, pp. 9-38). The use of teacher-led discussion and direct teaching to help students understand the themes and other aspects of the fictional works is in line with Bloemert et al.’s (2016) study of a comprehensive approach which showed that all aspects of the fictional work are discussed during English lessons when fiction is used. This include discussions about the themes of the story, the different characters and events in the story, recognizing and distinguishing text types, discussing literary terminology, the historical aspects of the literary works, the social and societal aspects of the literary work, cultural aspects of the literary work, overview of literary history, literary periods, information
about the author, discussing students’ personal reaction, critical report of reading experiences, focusing on improving language skills, learning English vocabulary and grammar etc. (p. 179). However, Bloemert et al.’s (2019) study showed that students do not find any benefits from discussing the characters of the fictional works (p. 378).

Moreover, the classroom discussions about the themes and other aspects of the literary work also included student-student interaction. By allowing student-student discussions, the teachers employed a student-centred method of teaching. Student-centred method of teaching entails creating tasks or activities for students or allowing them to work in groups with the aim of motivating them to actively take part in the learning process and apply knowledge that they have learned (Westwood, 2008, pp. 9-38). Teacher-led discussions, student-student interactions and the use of external resources is recommended as effective teaching practices according to Vygotsky’s ZPD theory. Also, welcoming students’ interpretations of the literary works through such practices will help engage them in the learning process (Miller, 2003, pp. 289-290).

As a way of enhancing students’ understanding of the content of the fictional works, the teachers encouraged them to use previous knowledge and learning experiences and created tasks that will reinforce their learning experiences. The teachers did so by comparing the contents, themes, events etc. of the fictional works to other works that they had previously used in class. For instance, Peter mentioned that his students had previously learned about the benefits of science. However, he created a task that will engage students to think about its disadvantages and not just its benefits. Likewise, Lena said her students had previously learned about the indigenous people of Sweden, that is the Sami. So, she compared the societal situation of the Sami people to those of the native Americans when working with The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian. This method of connecting the fictional works to other works or current societal issues as well as encouraging students to draw on insights from previous learning experiences is both a teacher-centered and student-centered method of teaching (Westwood, 2008, pp. 9-38) and is in line with Hoff’s (2019) study which showed that a focus on the experiences of the students as they read a fictional work means encouraging them to give personal responses to tasks about the fictional works. Although some students may become critically detached from the fictional work while others may easily relate to the characters at an emotional level, what is important is that this method will engage students in the learning process (pp. 444-454). However, previous research has shown that students do not appreciate a reader-centred approach as much as they do an approach that focuses on the English language or the literary text itself (Bloemert et al., 2019, pp. 372-379). Previous research about students’ perspectives on the way literary work is used to teach English also showed that a focus on students’ personal experiences and personal development is not considered by students to be as beneficial in learning the English language as compared to an approach that focuses on the literary text or the English language itself (Bloemert et al., 2019, p. 379). Despite this, tasks created to engage students in the learning process can shift students’ attention from their personal experiences to objective learning of the English language. The teachers created such tasks for their students. Minor tasks were created to engage students in the learning process and prepare them for the major tasks that will reinforce the knowledge that has been learned. Elin for instance tasked her students with making podcast where they take on the role of reporters and interview the police about an incident of a crime. Likewise, Susanne asked her students to record themselves during group discussions as a way of ensuring that all students participate and receive feedback for group discussions. This is in line with Stefanova et al. (2017) study which showed that a significant number of students learn critical awareness, reasoning, and problem-solving skills when their teachers create tasks that will direct their attention to the
multimodal aspects of the literary work (pp. 253-258). It is also in line with Hoff’s (2019) study which showed that how tasks are designed might have an impact on what students learn as some tasks may address certain language skills e.g., intercultural competence only implicitly while others may address other language aspects explicitly e.g., intertextuality (pp. 444-454). Finally, creating tasks that reinforces learning is in line with Brinkmann’s (2015) study which analysed four pre, during and after learning tasks to determine how they support students’ development of multiliteracy skills and showed that most students developed a positive attitude to the literary text when their attention is directed to the images and other visuals that could help them understand the story (pp. 61-77).

7.3. Teachers’ perceptions about the benefits of using fiction to teach English

As mentioned above, the benefits of using fiction to teach English are interwoven in teachers’ teaching approaches. For instance, the teaching approach “classroom discussions” where teachers mentioned explaining new words to their students, thereby helping them learn English vocabulary explicitly. The teachers mentioned that using fiction to teach English: enhances students’ reading ability, improves their English vocabulary, helps them develop new perspectives and ways of understanding the world, helps them become language conscious, improves their communicative skills, helps them learn correct grammatical structures and motivates them to learn the English language. These are the linguistic advantages of using fiction to teach English. These benefits are in line with Sun’s (2021) study which showed that a focus on language is usually dominant among teachers when fictional works are used to teach English as a foreign language (pp. 1-12). Likewise, Bloemert et al.’s (2019) study also showed that a focus on language – when fictional texts are used by teachers to teach English as a foreign language – meant teachers were teaching English grammar and syntax, English vocabulary among others (p. 379). The teachers focused on helping their students develop English language skills by using fiction. Apart from the linguistic benefits, the teachers mentioned that using fiction to teach English had other benefits. For instance, Lena said that using fiction will help her students cooperate more with each other while Elin believed that using fiction will not only help students become literate but will help them understand themselves better and learn more about empathy. To Susanne, Peter, Anna, and Lena using fiction could create a space to discuss the culture or history of the English-speaking country that is depicted in the fictional work depending on the work chosen. The four teachers also mentioned that using fiction to teach English will also open students to other perspectives and voices. However, previous research has shown that such benefits mean that students could implicitly develop as intercultural readers through intertextuality – as they gain insights on different voices and perspectives from the literary texts – but not as interculturally competent learners, unless the teaching approach is intentionally chosen to explicitly teach students intercultural competence, that is, the ability to use alternate narrative voices subject positions as a starting point when working with the tasks (Hoff, 2019, pp. 444-454).

The teachers mentioned that having teacher-led discussions about the contextual features of the fictional works will help students understand new perspectives and voices. This is in accordance with Bloemert et al.’s (2016) study which showed that teaching about contextual features such as the historical aspects of the literary work, the social and societal aspects of the literary work and the cultural aspects can help students develop as critical thinkers, but that this mostly depended on decisions made by the teacher, curriculum guidelines, and the students they are teaching. The study for instance showed that as students moved to higher grades, more of these contextual features of the literary works are taught. The reason for this is that students at upper
secondary school are more mature to understand these aspects and have the critical skill to link them to current societal issues (pp. 170-188). This could explain why all the teachers teaching upper secondary school mentioned that they linked themes of the fictional works to current societal issues.

Moreover, none of the teachers mentioned that using fiction will help students develop digital or multimodal skills even though they explicitly mentioned using audio-visual resources to enhance students’ learning. According to Liu’s (2019) study, multimodal or digital fiction such as films could help motivate students to interact with each other and share opinions, understand how different modalities are interrelated and used in making meaning of the literary texts, increase their interest in societal issues such as technology, human’s future, and globalisation (pp. 1-6). This means that tasks that were created with the potential to help students develop multimodal skills or multiliteracies and not just basic literacy, were not consciously designed for such purposes. Their benefits were therefore incidental. Kazulin et al. (2003) explained that teachers who enriched their students learning experiences by using external symbolic tools or resources and explicitly discuss how such resources can be used, will help their students develop mental representations of that which is being learned, which will further help them in learning a foreign or second language (pp. 23-26).

8. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine and identify the different ways in which secondary and upper secondary school teachers perceive the use of fiction to teach English as well as their beliefs about the outcome or benefits of doing so. This study has identified six different teaching approaches that the teachers used when teaching English via fiction. The teachers adopted a combination of direct or explicit teaching methods and student-centered methods. The six strategies include choosing authentic learning materials; building up knowledge about themes in the fictional materials; using classroom discussions to support students’ learning; encouraging students to draw on previous knowledge and learning experiences; using audio-visual aids to enhance students’ understanding of the themes in the fictional works and designing tasks that reinforces learning. This study therefore concludes that the six strategies are the commonly used approach that teachers draw on when using fiction to teach English. However, there were some slight differences in the descriptions from the five teachers on how they use fiction to teach English. These slight differences depended mainly on the individual teacher and the pedagogical choices they make such as the fictional work they chose to work with, their students’ mastery of the English language and the English course they were teaching. This is in line with results from Bloemert et al.’s (2016) study which showed no significant correlation between how teachers approached literature and their educational background, experience, or gender but rather a significant difference between how teachers approached literature and curricular factors such as the grades or classes they teach (pp. 170-188).

This study also concludes that some strategies were planned scaffolding strategies while others were interactional strategies. Strategies that could be considered as planned scaffolding strategies include teachers’ choice of the fictional works, designing tasks for the students, using audio-visual resources, building thematical knowledge about the fictional works and encouraging the use of previous knowledge to understand the content of the literary works. Interactional scaffolding strategies could include organisation of students into groups during classroom discussions. This does not mean that some scaffolds were planned, and others were not because interacting with students and encouraging group discussions were all planned strategies adopted by the five teachers. Moreover, the teachers mentioned their motive for every
decision they make, from choosing the fictional material to deciding that students should work in groups.

Although the teaching approaches had the potential to help students develop multiliteracies, the teachers did not mention that they explicitly teach students about the multimodality of the fictional texts. From a multimodal literacy perspective, students should be encouraged to understand how the interconnectedness between different modalities of a fictional work help in creating meaning. This will help students to become more creative. Even though Peter mentioned that he directed students’ attention to the image on the cover page and its implication for the story, he did not explicitly explain that this aspect of directing students’ attention to the different modes of the fictional work could help them develop multimodal skills. Also, Susanne who mentioned that she asked students to record themselves while discussing the themes of the fictional work did not explicitly mention that this will help students develop digital skills. Apart from such minor tasks, the five teachers also mentioned creating major tasks that reinforces learning as a way of determining if students have understood the content of their teaching. Such tasks could also be used to give formative feedback to students and thus boost learning.

Finally, this study concludes that there is no disadvantage in using fiction to teach English because the teachers mentioned that they could not see any disadvantage with using fiction to teach English. The prominent benefits of using fiction to teach English according to the teachers was that it helped students develop English vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. This means that using fiction to teach English will help students develop metalinguistic awareness as they notice the grammatical structures that their teachers direct their attention to. This will help students develop cognitive skills. The teachers also mentioned that using fiction will help students cooperate in class and exchange ideas. This will go a long way to improve students’ social skills. Peter, Anna, Susanne, and Lena mentioned that using fiction will help students learn about other cultures, perspectives, and voices while Elin said students will learn more about empathy. This indicates that using fiction to teach English will help students develop affective and behavioral skills.

The six different scaffolding strategies identified in this study have some pedagogical implications for student teachers who intend to use fiction to teach EFL in Sweden. This is because the strategies reaffirm knowledge from research on how second languages are learned from a sociocultural perspective.

8.1. Limitations of the study

This study is limited in that it does not consider the different components of the English language, for instance phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics, that teachers focus on when they use fiction to teach English. Another theory which could have been suitable to do this is Dell Hymes’ ethnography of communication. Hymes believed that to develop communicative competence, students should not only be taught grammatical skills but also the pragmatics of the language, that is, how it is used in specific contexts (Lindberg, 2005, p. 30). Researchers like Michael Canale who further developed Hymes’ ethnography of communication in 1983 into different communicative competences such as grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence believed in a communicative approach to second language learning and teaching (Street & Leung, 2010, pp. 291-293). However, the focus of this study has been on teaching methodology. Thus, how teachers teach the different components of the English language – when using fiction – should be researched further.
8.2. Further research

Although this study led to six prominent teaching strategies commonly used by the five teachers, there was no way to find out if these teaching strategies were effective in helping students develop the language skills that the teachers mentioned that students will learn when fiction is used to teach English. An observation study with a broader scope would have shed some light on this. A mixed method approach with both interviews and questionnaires would have also led to a broader picture of both teaching methods and students’ learning. Also, none of the teachers mentioned that using fiction expressed through different media can help students develop multiliteracies and not just basic literacy, even though the teaching strategies described had the potential of doing so. Further research therefore needs to be carried out on whether using digital fiction to teach English can help students develop multiliteracies and not just basic literacy skills.
References


Engelska (skolverket.se)


Swedish Institute for Language and Folklore: Retrieved from: National minorities and minority languages - Government.se


Appendixes

1. Letter of consent

Information om frågan att delta i en studie om litteraturundervisning inom engelskämnet
Du tillfrågas härmed om deltagande i denna undersökning.

Hej!
Jag heter Edith Anyim Fon och läser till engelskalärare vid Högskolan Dalarna. Under våren kommer jag att genomföra en undersökning med syftet att ta reda på engelskalärares uppfattningar om litteraturundervisning. Undersökningen syftar till att öka förståelse för hur lärare planerar och undervisar skönlitteratur och annan fiktion.


Ditt deltagande i undersökningen är helt frivilligt. Du kan när som helst avbryta ditt deltagande utan vidare motivering.

Ytterligare upplysningar lämnas av nedanstående ansvariga:

<table>
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<th>Student</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Namn</strong></td>
<td>Edith Anyim Fon</td>
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Samtyckesformulär
☐ Jag samtycker till att:
  - delta i studien: Teaching English via fiction: a phenomenographic study of teachers’ perceptions about using fiction to teach English.
  - intervjun får spelas in,
  - uppgifter om mig behandlas på det sätt som beskrivs i studiepersonsinformationen
  - följande personuppgifter samlas in: lärarlegitimation eller lärarexamen (svensk eller annan), yrkeserfarenhet, årskurserna eller elevgrupperna som läraren undervisar i,
  - personuppgifter kommer att användas till diskussion av studieresultat,
  - de insamlade uppgifter kommer att bevaras till dess att uppsatsen är examinerad och godkänd, dock högst tre år räknat från att datainsamlingen påbörjats.

Plats och datum

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Ansvarig för studien
Ort och datum: _____________________________
Namnteckning: _____________________________
2. Interview guide

Research questions:
- What teaching methods or approaches do teachers draw on when using fiction to teach English?
- What are teacher’s perceptions about the benefits of using fiction to teach English?

General questions
1) How many years have you taught English?
2) Do you currently teach English 5, 6 or 7?
3) Do you have a teacher’s licence?

Specific questions

Question 1: Defining fiction and naming the different forms of fiction.

In the curriculum for both secondary and upper secondary school it is stated that teaching should cover the following core content:
- Receptive language skills for grades 7-9 (listening and reading): students should be taught “Literature and other fiction in spoken, dramatized and filmed forms” (Skolverket 2018, p. 37)
- Receptive language skills for the course English 5 (listening and reading): students should be taught “Literature and other fiction”
- Receptive language skills for the course English 6 (listening and reading) where students should be taught “Themes, ideas, form and content in film and literature; authors and literary periods” as well as “Contemporary and older literature, poetry, drama and songs”
- Receptive language skills for English 7 (reading and listening) students should be taught “Contemporary and older literature and other fiction in various genres such as drama.”

From the curricula context, fictional or literary works seems to include material that students can listen to or read. In my perspective and in the context of my study, fiction is any creative writing that is expressed as printed texts or through other mediums e.g. films, dramas, poetry, songs, audiobooks, short stories, novels, TV series, paintings, photos, computer games etc used for learning purposes.

i. From the curricula context, how will you define fiction?
ii. Do you use fiction in your English lessons? If yes, what forms of fiction do you use? films, dramas, poetry, songs, audiobooks, short stories, novels, TV series, paintings, photos, computer games etc?
iii. Can you give examples of short stories, novels, plays or films that you have used successfully to teach English?
iv. Are there some teaching materials that you use but consider to be non-fictional? e.g., books, films, short stories, poetry etc If so, why do you consider them as such?

Question 2: How teachers use fiction to teach English

Based on your experience and knowledge of teaching English as well as information from the core contents of the curriculum mentioned above. If you were to work with a fictional material in the upcoming weeks e.g., films, dramas, poetry, songs, audiobooks, short stories, novels, TV series, paintings, photos, computer games etc.

i) What fictional material will you chose to work with? Why did you choose that specific material?
ii) How will you introduce the material to your students? What activities, questions or instructions will you give them as a way of preparing them for working with the material?

iii) Will you teach them strategies or give them tips that can help them in understanding the material? If so, what kind of strategies or tips?

iv) How long will it take for you to work with the material (give an estimate)?

v) What societal themes will you take up during whole class discussions?

vi) How will you help students interpret the message that the literary work or material is trying to convey? Will you have open discussions with them, or will you prefer that they answer questions that you have prepared for them?

vii) What will be the intentions of your questions? Will it be to direct students towards the aesthetic aspects of the material e.g., characters and their roles, important events or a problem/an issue that the material is emphasizing on? Or will your questions be intended to direct students on current societal issues that are relevant to them which are in some ways connected to key issues taken up in the material? Or will your questions focus on both aspects?

viii) Apart from questions, what other kind of tasks or instructions will you ask students to do when working with the material?

ix) Do you think students should use their background knowledge, feelings, experiences to answer questions asked about the material? If yes, why?

x) Will you sometimes relate the material to other works? If yes, why?

xi) Will you discuss the context or culture for which the literary work is written? If yes, why?

xii) What strategies will you use to support students understanding of the culture of the literary work?

xiii) What will be the overall goal of working with the chosen material? What do you expect students to accomplish after working with the material? What final task or activity will you have them do to show that they have understood your teaching?

xiv) For the final task, will you allow students to work individually, in pairs or in groups? Why?

xv) If you were to name your teaching method or approach, how will you call it?

xvi) If the chosen material is a printed text or digital text form e.g., novels, short stories, poetry. What pre, during and after reading activities or tasks will you plan for the students? How then will you work with an audio-visual material like films?

xvii) If the chosen material is in audio-visual form e.g., movies, TV series, audiobooks, computer games, paintings, photos etc. What pre, during and post understanding activities or tasks will you plan for the students? How then will you work with a printed text or digital text material like novels?

Question 3: Benefits of using fiction to teach English

1) According to you, what are the benefits of working with the chosen material? Do you see any disadvantage or challenges?

2) Would you say using fiction in the classroom can help improve student’s ability to read and understand as well as improve other language skills such as speaking, listening, and writing if
it is used continuously? How? How can using fiction help improve student’s ability to read and understand or their ability to listen and understand etc?

3) What language skills will students develop or learn by working with the chosen material? e.g. speech sounds, grammar, vocabulary, the meaning, and use of new words?

4) What intercultural skills will students develop or learn by working with the chosen material? e.g., learning of new cultures where English is spoken, lifestyle, famous authors, literary works, or canons, how holidays are celebrated, folklore, idiomatic expressions, different perspectives, traditions (customs or beliefs) of the English-speaking country as well as an awareness of the traditions of the current country.

5) Do you think using the chosen material will help improve student’s social skills (for instance, interaction and communication skills in English)? If yes how?

Closing questions

1) Will you say literature or fiction should be studied for the sake of studying literature e.g., by studying literary devices for interpretation of literary works, reading canonical literary works, learning literary terms and literary theories or that literature and fiction should be used as a tool for teaching English e.g., learning new words, phrases, idiomatic expressions etc?

2) Is there anything you would like to add that you feel you want to touch further or that has not been mentioned in the interview?