Reading Literature

A Study of the Significance of Literature in Language Education

Läsa litteratur
En studie om betydelsen av litteratur i språkundervisningen

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Abstract

The aim with this study is to find out the role of literature in language education. More specifically, this essay focuses on discovering how literature can be used to learn and acquire the English language. The study will show how reading literature can benefit students’ proficiency. The paper is based on two parts. The first part is an interview section where four English teachers have been interviewed in order to learn what teachers’ thoughts are on the role of literature in the courses in English. The teachers that have taken part in the study work at the same school in a smaller municipality. The second part of the study examines the availability of literary material in three current ELT coursebooks that the interviewees use in their teaching. This was done by a page-by-page analysis of the coursebooks. The results of the interviews suggest that through reading literature students can acquire skills such as expanded vocabulary and proficiency. Moreover, the study shows that the coursebooks available to the teachers fail to provide enough reading material, nonfictional or fictional, to develop the proficiency the authors of the coursebooks claim students will acquire by using their coursebooks.

Keywords: Literature, reading, language education, ELT coursebooks, language acquisition.

Sammanfattning på svenska:


Nyckelord: Läsning, engelskundervisning, språkinlärning, litteratur
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1. Introduction

Reading can be said to be an abundant source for discovering oneself and developing the ability to understand other people’s perspectives. Literature can take us on a journey to places where we cannot ever go and it gives us the opportunity to step into another world where we can forget all our troubles for a little while. This is at least how I feel about reading literature, that it should be an enjoyable experience which takes one’s mind to another place where new things can be discovered. But, in a world where people’s lives are becoming more and more centered around social media, reading books seems like something from the past. We seem to spend less time reading books and more time with different technological gadgets. Moreover, students tend to fail to see the reasons behind why reading is a significant part in their learning process. Nevertheless, several researchers point to the many benefits of reading and point out that reading does not only help develop students’ proficiency and increase their vocabulary, it can also be said to develop social skills. This inspired me to start thinking about the role literature, more specifically literary fiction, has in language education in Swedish upper secondary schools today. As it is stated in the national syllabus for English, students must read some form of literature in order to pass the course (Skolverket). However, the lack of detail about reading in the national syllabus can be considered quite worrying, since the integration of literature in the curriculum is so dependent on the teacher’s own interest and initiative.

Consequently, this study aims to examine the attitudes towards reading literature amongst four teachers at a vocational upper secondary school in Sweden. The teachers that have taken part in the interviews are all experienced and have taught English several years which means they have had plenty of experience when it comes to teaching literature. In addition, to further analyze the role of literature at this specific school, three current ELT coursebooks, used by the interviewees, will also be included in the study. Coursebooks are often considered a source of material that teachers and students alike can depend on. All over the world teachers and students use coursebooks on a daily basis. Authors of ELT coursebooks often claim their material to be innovative and designed to be in line with the current curriculum. This study will examine the extent to which these three ELT coursebooks provide the interviewees with literary material.
1.2 Aim

The aim with this study is to find out how literature can be used when teaching English in a Swedish upper secondary school. The present study aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the teachers’ attitudes, ideas and beliefs about reading literature?
- To what extent do current Swedish ELT coursebooks include literary material?

In order to answer these research questions I will interview teachers about their experiences of teaching literature and their reasoning behind literary selection and pedagogical approaches. Secondly, a study of three current ELT coursebooks that are used by the interviewees will be included to examine how much reading material the coursebooks provide the teachers with.
2. Background

This chapter focuses on discussing previous research on what gains students can make by reading literature. The chapter will take a closer look at what scholars’ thoughts are on reading in general and reading literature. Furthermore, there will be a discussion about why we should teach literature and what the reader can gain from it.

2.1 Thoughts on reading literature in general

In a time where our world has become more and more focused on technology there is a fear for the downfall of literature. As Richard Beach et al write in *Teaching Literature to Adolescents*, in our modern society our students have grown up in a world very different from previous generations and in which social media is considered to be very important. Prejudice against children of our modern society might be that they do not read very much or at least very little in comparison to previous generations and that this will lead to the end of reading books and thus the end of literature. A survey done in 2008 by the Scholastic Publishing Company shows that students still read and do it for their own pleasure, but that at the same time there is a decreasing number of young people who read for pleasure over the age of eight (Beach et al 22). This is especially noticeable when it comes to teenage boys who find that there are more important things that they rather do. So does this mean that the act of reading literature is destined to slowly but surely disappear? Magnus Persson writes on the subject of reading in the anthology *Why Study Literature?* by Jan Alber et al. He begins by stating that our time can be described as a time in which we transition from a text culture to a media culture: “Literature’s position as a privileged educational tool has been undermined and its competition from newer forms of media is enormous” (Persson 177). Yet, even if this is the reality of today’s society, literature is not dead. As Persson points out, the market for books is growing and there are more and more books being published, often thanks to modern technology rather than despite it, as many people would perhaps think (177). Events such as World Book Day and guides on how to read literature are just a few examples of campaigns that focus on inspiring people to read more. According to Persson, this shows that reading literature is still part of people’s everyday life but it also shows that if we need guides on how to read, we no longer understand why and how to read (177). This general lack of understanding of why it is significant to read can be connected to what is happening with the younger generations. They have grown up in a world where there is instant gratification - if they want something they get it - but if something does
not immediately grasp their attention, they tend to lose interest (Beach et al 23-24). As we live in the age of social media, our students are constantly surrounded by things they consider more interesting, which, as stated before, results in them not having the time or the interest to sit down and read for their own pleasure.

2.2 Views on why we should teach literature

Taking a closer look at reading and how we read literature today brings me to another subject which is vital in discussing literature in school, namely why we should teach literature at all. This chapter will focus on discussing two areas which are examples of what an English student can learn from reading: improving vocabulary and learning about themselves and other people’s perspectives.

Throughout the years we have had different reasons for teaching literature. As Elaine Showalter writes in *Teaching Literature*, when literature was first introduced as a course at University College London in the 1820s, the goal was to “moralize, civilize and humanize” (22). The aim of teaching literature has in the past been just this aspiration to create better human beings and citizens. Consequently, teachers should aspire to help students achieve their full potential and become good members of society. Today this might not be the teacher’s primary focus when planning for teaching a novel. As Showalter points out, it is difficult to agree on the goals or reasons for why it is important that students read (22). But, as can be seen in the following section, learning vocabulary can be a reason for using literature when teaching English as a second language.

2.2.1 Learning vocabulary

Spela Mezek discusses how students acquire a second language through reading in *Advanced Second-Language Reading and Vocabulary Learning in the Parallel-Language University*. Even though she mainly focuses on the reading university students do, some of her points that she makes in the introductory sections of her study are applicable to teenage students learning a second language. Mezek points out that reading is different in a second language as compared to in the first language (hereafter referred to as L1). When reading in one’s second language (hereafter referred to as L2), both the L2 and L1 are active, meaning that the students connect what they have read in their L2 to what it means in their L1 (Mezek 24). This becomes very apparent when discussing vocabulary since an L2 student learning a new word has to make all
the connections an L1 student makes when learning a new word such as sound, form and meaning. But the L2 student also has to make the connection between the L2 and its equivalent in the L1 (26-27). Moreover, Mezek points out that researchers have found that our L1 affects the L2 in more ways when it comes to reading. The developmental interdependence hypothesis states that the L2 learner’s reading ability is based on their L1 reading ability (24). Thus, in a Swedish context, the student’s ability to read in Swedish will affect their ability to read the novel their teacher gives them in the English class.

Geoff Hall also writes about the benefits of teaching literature in L2 education in *Literature in Language Education*, one being vocabulary gain. It is often claimed that reading literature will give students an expanded vocabulary. For instance Hall states that extensive reading of literature may be a source for vocabulary gain (121). While Hall concurs that literature can be a way of acquiring vocabulary, he nevertheless claims that the potential benefits such as improved vocabulary may “have too often been taken on trust” (Hall 48). Consequently, he argues that claims such as vocabulary gain through reading must be “framed more empirically and precisely for any useful investigation to be possible, to be researched, in short” (Hall 48).

However, Tricia Hedge points out in *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* that vocabulary increase is something that has long been neglected by scholars in literature on English language teaching (110). The statement that vocabulary gain has been neglected refers to what scholars in the field had found in the early 1970s and 1980s. Hedge refers to D.A Wilkins who stated in the early 1970s that linguists have very little to say about vocabulary, that there have been very few studies on the subject that would be of interest for teachers. Rod Ellis claimed in 1995 that nothing much had changed (Hedge 110). Hedge finds that “this neglect sits uncomfortably with the significance placed on vocabulary by learners themselves” (110). Furthermore, errors of vocabulary can be more misleading and confusing for the listener than grammatical errors. Such errors are likely to occur for instance in the case of false friends. Hedge uses the Swedish word *affär* as an example: a student could say “my father has an *affair* in that village” confusing the Swedish *affär* (meaning shop) with the English word *affair*, which has a similar pronunciation but different meaning (111).

But how do students actually learn new vocabulary from books or any other kind of text that they read? Irina Elgort and Paul Warren discuss how a student may learn new vocabulary in their article “L2 Vocabulary Learning from Reading: Explicit and Tacit Lexical Knowledge and the Role of Learner and Item Variables”. The theories on vocabulary learning most often suggest that the learning of a new word takes place when reading the same word numerous
times in a text. When an L2 student is first introduced to a new word there are few signs of any vocabulary gain; however, when coming across the word several times when reading there is an increasing chance that the student will acquire the new word (Elgort and Warren 366). Moreover, the context in which the student will come across this new word is also of help in the acquisition process. “When L2 vocabulary is learned from sentence contexts, the presence of more contextual clues that make it easier to guess the meanings of unknown words results in significantly higher scores in tests of recognition and recall of meaning” (Elgort and Warren 367).

The majority of recent researchers seem to find that students do learn new vocabulary through reading. But the necessity of reading a word several times in order for there to be any vocabulary gain also presents some issues, as researchers such as Sandy Urquhart and Cyril Weir point out in *Reading in a Second Language: Process, Product and Practice*. They write that it takes a considerable amount of reading texts to ensure that there is enough repetition of new words for the student to actually acquire these new words (195). Thus, reading can indeed help in the acquisition of vocabulary, but it also means that the books the students read must repeat the words in a context which gives them clues as to the meaning of the words. This presents somewhat of a problem for teachers if they find they want to use reading as a way of acquiring new vocabulary, since finding books where new words are repeated enough for word acquisition to occur might be difficult. It is almost an impossible task because it also means that the teacher must know which words the students are familiar with and which words they have never encountered before. Nevertheless, there must be some way of learning new vocabulary even if there is little intentional effort from the reader. It has been stated by for instance Stephen Krashen that reading for pleasure is a source, and perhaps the best source, for vocabulary growth (Lightbown and Spada 100). Thus, the importance of reading for pleasure becomes apparent yet again as a means to motivate students to take the time to read since it can have an impact on their language skills. As they are reading for their own enjoyment, they are internally motivated, meaning that they are driven by their own desire to learn and not because of external rewards or punishment as Robert A. Sullo points out in *Activating the Desire to Learn* (7).

2.2.2 Learning about other people and ourselves

There is an idea among scholars that through reading literature we gain an understanding of ourselves as well as other people’s perspectives. Reading can give us knowledge about why we and other people think and act the way we do. In *Reading for Learning: Cognitive Approaches to Children’s Literature*, Maria Nikolajeva takes a closer look at how we might learn from
reading fiction. To have an understanding of how other people think and feel, essentially getting an idea about what goes on in other people’s minds, is a significant social skill that can be seen as necessary when interacting with other members of the community (Nikolajeva 77). Yet, why would reading about fictional characters who do not exist and who struggle with non-existing problems be of any use in developing our knowledge about how real people act? Nikolajeva states that the answer to this question is brought forward by cognitive literary scholars such as Lisa Zunshine and Patrick Hogan:

We care about literary characters because we are naturally (evolutionarily, if preferred) inquisitive about ourselves and other human beings; because we want to understand (or are, for survival, compelled to understand) our own and other people’s ways of feeling and thinking, views, beliefs, intentions, desires, motivations and decisions; “We need to know what other people are like”. (77)

By reading literature we can do all of this without being directly involved in a real situation, which saves us from making mistakes that could lead to embarrassment. Our empathy or lack of empathy for the characters will not be judged, which might have been the case in the real world. This is a vital part in developing an understanding of other people: we get to practice on imaginary characters and use these skills that we have acquired in real life situations with real people. Our emotions for characters in a novel, from a cognitive perspective, show how our minds work. Through our experiences in life we develop knowledge of the minds of other people by studying their body language, reactions and facial expressions. This is the basis on which we depend for our ability to interact with other people, a skill we use without even noticing (77). As Nikolajeva points out, we are not born with these skills but develop them over time and it can be argued that reading literature is a source for further developing these skills (77). According to Nikolajeva, empathy is sometimes considered one of the most important social skills that distinguish us from any other living entity (78). It is what makes us human. Empathy is, as Nikolajeva puts it, the ability to understand how other people feel (78). Howard Sklar goes further in his definition of what empathy means when it comes to reading literature in The Art of Sympathy in Fiction: Forms of Ethical and Emotional Persuasion. According to Sklar, empathy is not just the ability to understand how people feel but to take on another person’s emotions as our own although we do not tend to lose our own identity when doing so (24). Far from it, we can empathize with a character that we do not share any similarities or any experiences with. Moreover, as readers we can empathize with characters that we are not supposed to feel empathy for from the author’s perspective (Nikolajeva 79). Reading literature
gives the reader the opportunity to develop skills such as empathy by connecting to the characters.

But how can reading literature help develop the reader’s knowledge about themselves? Nikolajeva writes that one can claim that “the most important knowledge readers acquire from fiction is the knowledge and understanding of themselves, including thoughts, emotions, beliefs, assumptions, intentions, and behavior” (141). Having a sense of identity and knowledge about ourselves are arguably two of the most important aspects in our life. Apart from during childhood, adolescence is when we develop our identities the most. If reading literature can be used to help students understand why they think and act the way they do, it can be very beneficial in their education and development of social skills (Nikolajeva 141). From a cognitive psychological standpoint, young people have more difficulties understanding their own and others’ thoughts and emotions than adults (Nikolajeva 141). Thus, it would seem that if the adolescent mind is full of conflicting and confusing thoughts, literature written for this particular group must also be confusing for them to understand when they read. Yet, as Nikolajeva points out, authors still write about the emotions and issues that a young adult may face in their life (141). The use of various literary devices, for instance using first-person narrative to make the reader feel more connected to the character, may be beneficial in the student’s process of acquiring self-knowledge. Still Nikolajeva writes that using this particular style of narration does not necessarily mean that the reader will acquire self-knowledge (142). Nevertheless, by using a personal narrative the reader can feel connected to the character, feeling “she is just like me”, which could make the reader more interested in the book. When placing a book in our students’ hands, we hope that they will in some way take an interest in the book and the characters, to essentially find themselves in the characters. Through reading literature the students can get a sense of their own self and not the stereotypical labels that place people in groups, especially during adolescence. By reading, we can get a clearer picture of our thoughts, beliefs and values, and it can bring forth questions such as whether we would make the same decision as the protagonist and if it is the right choice to make. Moreover, through literature students will acquire knowledge of the world, learn about social issues such as racism, class and gender, and come to terms with what they believe. Although literature can be a great source for learning about ourselves we cannot forget what it means to be a teenager. As Beach et al point out, adolescence is a time when we are conflicted, when we can have multiple identities and are unsure of who we are (29). As adults we tend to have a better understanding of ourselves, what we believe in and what is important to us. When students read about
characters that in some ways resemble themselves, that have to face different issues whether racism or gender related, they are able to, with help from the teacher, reflect on how they would act themselves if they were in this specific situation. Thus, they would also potentially begin developing their own self. Even though we develop from experiences, both good and bad as well as mistakes, through reading literature we do not need to worry about making any mistakes since we are not being judged and we do not need to take into account what consequences might follow our actions.

2.3 Previous research

With an idea of what scholars in the field have to say about the meaning of reading in the classroom, it is also significant to find out what previous researchers have found when it comes to teachers’ attitudes about reading in the classroom. Moreover, previous research on the reading material and the uses of ELT coursebooks will also follow.

2.3.1 Teachers’ views and attitudes about reading in the classroom

In 2011, Beatriz Ilibio Moro and Adriana Argelim Rossa conducted a small-scale study in Brazil of English as an additional language (EAL) teachers’ attitudes about reading, in general, in the language classroom. The name of the article is “Reading in the Classroom: How English as an Additional Language Teachers See It”. The focus of their study is, simply put, to gather results from questionnaires which were given to thirty EAL teachers, since they believe that teachers’ views and beliefs of the importance of reading affect their choices and attitudes when it comes to choosing reading material for the classroom. Moro and Argelim Rossa believe that teachers’ attitudes would also affect their students’ success when it comes to reading comprehension (5). The teachers were divided into two groups; a free course group and a school group. The aim was to find out if the perspectives on reading differ between teachers in schools and teachers who teach free courses. Firstly, the teachers’ experience of teaching was determined as well as their level of education (7). 80% of the teachers had been working for more than three years and the majority also had a degree in languages (8). By compiling the questionnaires it was clear that the majority of the teachers linked the act of reading “to linguistic aspects, such as vocabulary, comprehension, the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), grammar points etc.” (Moro and Rossa 9). All of the teachers found that reading is a significant process that is a source for learning and improvement of vocabulary and proficiency (10). The main difference between the two groups was that the school group
seemed to have more freedom in the choice of what texts to use in the classroom, i.e. not only use what texts are available in the student’s course books (10). Moreover, in order to find non-fictional texts such as blogs and newspapers, the internet was a popular choice. It was mainly the more inexperienced teachers who brought blogs into the classroom as reading material (11). Otherwise there were no tangible differences between the two groups in terms of selecting material. Moro and Rossa discuss that despite the teachers finding reading an important process they do not at all, according to the results, see reading as a means to learn about other people’s perspectives as some scholars in the field do (11). Reading is seen by most of the participants as being a means to acquire the language. But it is also seen as just a “part of the curriculum” which could point to the teachers disinterest and unawareness of how important reading is (Moro and Rossa 11). One issue that all of the teachers have met is finding material that is suitable for the students’ level of proficiency and that would interest them. Another concern is the lack of reading habits that the teachers seem to find in their students, since they can see great improvements in those who take the time to read on a daily basis (10). All in all, the teachers see why reading should be included mostly because it benefits language acquisition. In addition to that, some of them state that the reason reading is included is simply because it is a part of the curriculum.

Another study on the subject of teachers’ attitudes about reading was done by Peggy Daisey in the United States, in which 82 preservice teachers\(^1\) taking a literary course participated. The participants had different ethnic backgrounds and majored in a variety of subjects such as English and History. In her article “Secondary Teachers Remember Their Favorite Reading Experience” she discusses the study further. The aim was to gather data on teachers’ reading experiences. There had been previous studies on the topic and Daisey mentions one of those in her article (679). That study by DuChein et al., based on 124 preservice teachers showed that high school teachers were the main source of “negative influence on them as readers” (Daisey 679). This meant that the participants’ high school teachers had a negative effect on their desire to read. In her own study, Daisey began with having the preservice teachers answer a questionnaire about reading in secondary school. A week later they were asked about their favorite reading experience and to draw themselves reading in that moment, which psychologists tend to believe is a means to understand a person’s thinking (Daisey 679-80). At the end of the literary course they were once again asked to answer a questionnaire about reading when teaching themselves. The study showed that half of the participants remembered

\(^1\) Preservice teacher is a term for a teacher student studying to become a teacher.
reading in secondary school as homework and not as something they did in the classroom. Only about 5% of the participants mentioned school as the place where they had their most memorable reading experience (Daisey 681). The other responses showed that summertime and at home in bed or outside on porches were places where they had their favorite reading experience. When asked about the possibilities of reading in secondary school, 64.6% of the participants felt that as teachers they would strive for presenting a variety of reading material to their own students (Daisey 683). A fifth of the preservice teachers realized the significance of teachers’ attitudes about reading on the reading in the classroom. Teachers must make the effort and be motivated to understand the kinds of reading that interest students in order to influence them to keep reading (Daisey 683-84). The study showed that the majority thought reading should be a relaxing process serving to escape the real world. Freedom of choice when it comes to picking books is a great motivator for students to actually keep reading and has been suggested by scholars to promote further reading as adults (Daisey 684). In the drawings Daisey found that only about 2% of the participants drew pictures of them reading in school and that none of them included a teacher (685). This can indicate that the reading the participants have done in the classroom might not have been especially enjoyable. The reason for this could be that as teachers we are expected to follow the curriculum which means that the kind of reading the participants found enjoyable did not occur in the classroom. Consequently, none of them drew a picture that included a teacher. But as Daisey points out, there is no reason at all that teachers are “to be remembered as the most negative influence when there is a world of wonderful reading material” (Daisey 685).

2.3.2 ELT Coursebooks

In the article “Topics of Reading Passages in ELT Coursebooks”, Arda Arkian aims to find out what kinds of reading that students do in coursebooks. The study is based on her own quantitative and qualitative studies of four intermediate ELT coursebooks. As Arkian herself states, the coursebooks used in language classrooms all over the world are still considered to be the most important resource (2). In fact, coursebooks are in many cases the only material used by teachers in some classrooms, which clearly shows how significant ELT coursebooks can be. Arkian refers to an online poll made by the BBC in 2008 about how often ELT teachers use coursebooks (2). Out of 310 participants the majority use coursebooks very frequently while only 6% state that they never use coursebooks (2). Her own study shows that the more frequent topics of reading passages were about family, food & sports and free time activities (11). Topics that seemed to be overlooked were topics concerning social issues such as “issues of gays,
lesbians, transgenders etc.” (Arkian 11). She later states that this is of interest since the same

coursebooks consist of an ample amount of reading topics about crime and violence (Arkian
12). This is particularly problematic from a humanitarian perspective as “it can be said that

students should be exposed to such concepts or realities like love and values rather than violence

and crime for the good of society and to eradicate crime and violence in the world around us

through social awareness” (Arkian 12). Moreover, Arkian found that in the material used in her

study, the reading topics were almost solely non-fictional despite the fact that research has

shown that younger students seem to prefer fiction but should “gradually be introduced to

nonfiction in forms of the topics and reading materials” (Arkian 12). Furthermore, Arkian found

that her study clearly showed that coursebooks are very different in terms of reading topics.

Some focus more on technology while other focus more on environmental issues. Consequently,
the teacher must have an idea of what their students find interesting in order for

the coursebook to suit the class (12).

In the article “The Role and Use of Course Books in EFL”, Angeliki Constantinou
Charalambous writes about the advantages and disadvantages of coursebooks. One positive side
to using coursebooks is that it can be considered to be a useful aid where teachers can find
material and support (3). From a learner’s perspective it also supports their acquisition of the
language as the coursebook serves as a guide through the learning process. Another advantage
of using coursebooks is that it “gives teachers a relief as it reduces the heavy load of preparation,
saves time and makes teaching and learning easier” (Constantinou Charalambous 4). However,
while there are advantages to using coursebooks there are also disadvantages. One of these
disadvantages is that coursebooks usually follow a specific format, each unit looking exactly
like the one before, which may become tedious for both students and teachers (5). Furthermore,
there is no such thing as a perfect coursebook, as Constantinou Charalambous points out, since
they are meant to suit as many students as possible which means that there is no course material
that suits every individual in the classroom (5). Constantionou Charalambous recommends that
instead of using coursebooks religiously, the teacher should complement the coursebook with
other material that is better suited for the target group (7). As Constantionou Charalambous
points out, coursebooks are simply one source for material that can be used to meet the
knowledge requirements.
3. Material and methods

The present study focuses on reading in English at a Swedish upper secondary school, with a primary focus on reading literature. By selecting a school which offers unique vocational programs, such as the dog sport and the game preserve programs, the idea is to acquire knowledge about the teachers’ viewpoints about what we gain from reading and especially when reading literature. The reason behind opting for a school with vocational programs was that I found it of interest to research how reading is viewed by teachers whose students might be less interested in reading than students enrolled in a theoretical program. It is not to say that students studying at a vocational school do not enjoy reading at all, but generally, there is a preconception that students who choose a vocational program do so because they, to some degree, are not fond of schoolwork. The study of the teachers’ views was done by the means of interviews. Moreover, a content analysis of the reading material in current coursebooks used by the teachers at the school in question was also carried out in order to examine the access to literary material. The reading material in the coursebooks will be divided into two categories: literary texts and nonfictional texts. The literary text category will consist of four subcategories: literary excerpts, poems, plays and short stories.

3.1 The interviews

The procedure to choose which teachers that were going to be interviewed went fairly easy. As the aim with the essay was to find out the role of literature when teaching English as an L2, the teachers that were of interest had to be language teachers, more specifically English teachers. Moreover, another criterion that I had for selecting which teachers that were going to take part was that they had to be teachers in upper secondary school. Even though reading literature is a significant part of English at any level, it is not until upper secondary school that students begin to deal, in greater depth, with subjects such as gender and environmental issues. In the national syllabus for secondary school grades 7-9, the focus is to broaden the student’s repertoire (Skolverket). As they progress and become students of upper secondary school, they begin to look at literature as more than a means to acquire the language. Nevertheless, the syllabus lacks detail. It does state that students must read literary material but does not specify what kind, how much they should read etcetera. What to read is something that all teachers must decide on their own. The participating teachers in my study all work at the same school. I decided to limit myself to one school because I wanted to discover what the views were about reading literature at a vocational school. It was mainly the school, with its unique vocational programs that made me interested in speaking with the English teachers there. Since most of my experience of upper
secondary schools has been connected to theoretical programs, I wanted my study to focus on a vocational school instead. Because the school is quite unique, students all over Sweden and from abroad come there to study. I therefore decided I did not want to expand my study and include another school. In retrospect, it would also have been interesting to include another school but as time also was an issue, one school was enough. Five teachers were approached to take part in my study, but due to illness and a heavy workload one declined taking part. Since I interviewed only four English teachers there is a possibility of the results being biased. Another set of participants might have resulted in different viewpoints. Furthermore, there is also the risk of the results being biased since the participants all work at the same school. This could mean that by working together they might have developed similar views and ideas, views that teachers at another school might not share.

When it comes to interviews, there are two recognized ways of executing them: through a structured or a semi-structured approach. I have constructed my questions following the semi-structured approach and therefore decided to opt for qualitative research when it comes to the interviews. As Johansson and Svedner point out in *Examensarbete i lärarutbildningen*, the purpose with the qualitative interview is to try to get the interviewee to give as much detail as possible about their thoughts and ideas (35). Thus, the interviewer has to adapt to the person they are interviewing and adapt the questions to them. Therefore, the semi-structured approach suited my study best as I wanted to ask the participants the same questions but for them to be constructed in such a way that I could get as much material about the participants’ views on reading as possible. A full account of the questions used in the four interviews can be found in Appendix 1. It is common knowledge that teachers are often very busy, so I considered it important to be flexible. I let them decide the time and place for the interviews. As it turned out, they all were quite eager to help so I finished all four interviews in less than a week. I conducted the interviews in Swedish, as it felt most natural for the participants to do so. The interviews were also conducted individually in order to make the participants feel comfortable to freely share their thoughts. The interviews were all recorded, since none of the interviewees objected to this procedure when being asked.

As half of my study is based on my interviewees’ opinions and thoughts, it is important that the interviewees know the purpose of the study as well as the purpose of their participation. As Steinar Kvale writes in *Doing Interviews*, every interview should begin with the interviewer informing the interviewee about the purpose of the interview (25). Thus, I began my interviews by informing the interviewees the reason for their participation and what their answers where
going to be used for. The participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could opt out at any point. Moreover, in order to make them feel comfortable I also made it clear to the participants that neither their names nor the name of the school were to be mentioned in my study (Kvale 25). To protect their anonymity I chose to give each teacher a fictitious name so that their answers could not be connected to them or the school in any way. This reassured the participants that they could speak freely about their thoughts and ideas. All of the teachers that participated in this study are educated teachers. The participants that have taken part in the study are presented below:

**Rose** – has taught English for 15 years.

**Mary** – has taught English for 20 years.

**Anne** – has taught English for 12,5 years.

**John** – has taught English for 15 years.

### 3.2 The coursebooks

The selection of material for the second part of my study was done by asking the interviewees what coursebooks they use when teaching. From the list of coursebooks the interviewees mentioned, I selected the three that were most frequently used. The three coursebooks represent examples of material for English 5 and English 6. They are *Read & Catch Up – Interactive* (2013), *Read & React – Interactive* (2013) and *Pick & Mix 2* (2015). *Read & Catch Up* and *Read & React* are targeted towards English 5. *Read & Catch Up*, a book of 118 pages, is intended for students not yet proficient enough for the English 5 course. But by methodically working with exercises, the coursebook aims to help these students meet the knowledge requirements for English 5. The other coursebook for English 5, *Read & React*, around 110 pages long, is intended to be used by learners taking the English 5 course. The third book included in the second part of the study is the 256 pages long *Pick & Mix 2*, a coursebook aimed towards English 6 students. As previously stated, the second part of this study will aim to examine the availability of literary material in these three coursebooks. This was done by a page-by-page content analysis in order to find out the extent to which the coursebooks focus on reading.
4. Analysis and results

This chapter focuses on the answers that were given by the four teachers who took part in the study as well as the three coursebooks used by the interviewees. The first part of the analysis focuses on the results of the interviews. As mentioned previously in the materials and methods section, the participants have all been given a fictitious name to protect their anonymity. The second part of the analysis focuses on the availability of literary reading material in three current coursebooks used by the interviewees.

4.1 Teacher views on the use of literature in EFL education

In order to find out what literature means to the interviewees personally, all four participants were asked about their personal views on literature and whether it was something they found interesting. Moreover, I wanted to find out if they thought it was important or even necessary to have an interest in literature as an English teacher. It immediately became apparent that literature is something that the interviewees are passionate about both when it comes to reading themselves and using in their teaching. Reading is something they all enjoy doing in their spare time. Furthermore, all four interviewees agree that it is indeed very important to have an interest in literature as an English teacher and thought that it is probably unusual not to have an interest in reading. One of the teachers suggests that a discernable lack of interest can convey a negative feeling that the students will most likely notice. Mary speaks a bit about her views on the subject:

Yes, I read a lot of literature, almost only Swedish literature, mostly crime novels. To me it is a way to relax to become someone else to identify oneself with a character in some way. I also think that it is like some form of therapy, as a teacher you meet so many people every day so it is a time for me to breathe as recreation actually. To have a book that you really enjoy and long for is a good thing and important to me. I think it is hard to be passionate about your subject at all if there are parts of it that you do not enjoy. Then you are forced to do it and you convey a negative attitude which the students will notice if you do not like your subject. Of course you can like some parts more than others, that is a possibility, but I think you must like a language as a whole for it to completely work. (Mary – my translation)

All the other three interviewees concur with Mary’s statement about the significance of liking reading as a teacher. However, only Mary states that if a teacher finds reading insignificant the
students will most likely pick up on this. Nevertheless, Anne does say that it is important to enjoy reading as an English teacher since teachers can be a source of inspiration when it is time for students to read. Despite the participants being English teachers, the majority of them seem to prefer reading in Swedish. As Mary states, she almost only reads Swedish literature, which can be considered quite interesting as reading in English would also help her maintain her English.

To have an idea of their standpoint when it comes to the importance of literature when teaching English I asked the four teachers about their thoughts on how reading literature is defined in the syllabus (see 3.1). Two out of the four teachers find that the syllabus could be improved and become clearer and more detailed. Yet, at least according to Rose, there does not seem to be any reason to add anything to the syllabus about literature. There are probably those who would wish the syllabus to be clearer but, as Rose points out, the lack of detail provides teachers with a degree of freedom of choice. Rose, for example says:

Yes, they say we should read but they are not that specific. But then again they are not very specific at all so you have great opportunities to choose. It can make things easier for you as a teacher if you have options to choose from. I have never felt that there is something missing in the syllabus about literature. It is a part of the syllabus.

(Rose – my translation)

Mary also finds the syllabus quite unclear and unlike Rose she believes it should be more detailed.

It really just says that we are supposed to read and interpret texts from different time periods in the knowledge requirements. But when you look at the core content of the course it also says that they should be knowledgeable about literary periods, which is not stated later on in the knowledge requirements. If students see this they might put less focus on it. That it will not be as important as focusing on the text, time and the society that the book is based on can be overshadowed. On the other hand, it is rare that students question anything in the syllabus but it feels like it lacks detail, that there should be more emphasis on understanding the novels and the literary periods. To clarify what society was like during the time in which the novel was written.

(Mary – my translation)
Rose and Mary tend to agree with each other that the syllabus could be more detailed but Rose also states that she has never really felt that anything needs to be added about literature in the syllabus. Anne also gives her views about literature as a knowledge requirement as she says:

Sure, it is important but I do not think that it is the most important knowledge requirement. But I think that you should read at least one novel just so you can say that you have done it (Anne – my translation)

Moreover, it was also of interest to find out if the teachers thought that enough time is spent reading in school. As scholars in the field have pointed out, reading is something that we can always do more of. This is also something that the participants have discussed, as two out of the four participants say that despite there being plans to read more they have thus far not been put into action. They both refer to the reading projects they have done in the courses in Swedish and that it would be great to do something similar in English 5 and English 6. The main reason that it has not been realized, as gathered by Mary’s answer, is a lack of time. To find room to have everyone read even for an hour each week could be problematic, as both teachers’ and students’ schedules are already quite cramped. Mary discusses the matter further:

We have reading projects in Swedish 1 where students read for half an hour each week, which is not really a lot of time. Especially at our school where students do not take any English courses year two. We ought to make room in the schedule so that students can get the opportunity to read one hour each week. Because they lose some of their proficiency between year one and three. (Mary – my translation).

To clarify the quote above, as mentioned in the material and methods section, the school that the interviewees work at provides vocational programs and the English 6 course is optional and takes place in year three. Having said that, evidently, there has been a discussion at the school to implement reading projects as they have done in Swedish 1.

In order to analyze further the importance of reading literature in English, the teachers were asked if they thought language acquisition is the main purpose of reading. All four interviewees agreed that by reading literature students can acquire the language. Yet, all four point out that language acquisition is just a part of the reading process. Moreover, both Anne and Mary point out that reading can also be a way to acquire knowledge about other cultures as well. As can be seen below, Anne finds value in acquiring grammar and vocabulary as well as learning about other cultures through reading:
Absolutely, you could actually only work with literature and look at grammar and vocabulary. There are many parts of a book that you can choose to work with, it depends on how much time you want to put in. You can learn a lot of new words and see how they are connected, how to form sentences and so on. But I can also see the value in the culture aspect. You can connect it to past and present, adolescents and adults, so there are many advantages to reading. (Anne – my translation)

Furthermore, John states that reading is necessary for language acquisition:

Yes, I think so absolutely. And absolutely necessary for proficiency, reading comprehension and so on. It is possible that you build a foundation for a new habit. It is an important part if one is to read in English, so proficiency is important. Above all you learn to be fairly independent and you are fed with a language that is idiomatic, you find an abundance of expressions that you never would have heard of without reading. (John – my translation)

But what do the teachers find to be the major benefits of reading in terms of language acquisition and can they see any positive effects of reading? They all seem to agree that one of the more significant things students can acquire by reading is a better knowledge of the language. For instance Rose answered the question as shown below:

Their proficiency and vocabulary. By reading someone else’s text you can develop your knowledge about sentence structure and so on. But in order to acquire the culture parts as well, you read about other English speaking countries in books which take place there. If you have worked with words then you can see concrete evidence of what they have learnt. You can also see through discussions or written assignments what they have learnt. (Rose – my translation)

Mary sums up her views on the matter in a sentence:

I think that everyone who does what they are supposed to do, who actually read and learn from it get an expanded vocabulary and better fluency. (Mary – my translation)

This coincides, to some degree, with what has been brought up in the background section. Like the scholars Hall, Elgort and Warren, the interviewees found that vocabulary can be improved through reading. However, Hall stated that the idea that students improve their vocabulary by reading needs to be researched further for such a claim to be made. Moreover, as Elgort and Warren write, vocabulary gain often occurs by coming across the same word more than once,
which the interviewees did not mention when speaking about vocabulary (see 2.2.1). Only one out of the four teachers emphasizes how literature can be a means to understanding oneself as the scholars have done. Mary touches upon the matter as she states that one other reason for reading is that students can acquire a greater knowledge about themselves as well as other people’s perspectives. The reason as to why the other teachers did not discuss it in any greater extent could be that the matter of students acquiring knowledge about themselves through reading literature is not brought up in the national syllabus. Moreover, it is quite difficult to find out whether students have developed a greater understanding of themselves through reading or not. Therefore, it perhaps is easier to focus on matters that are more tangible. Thus, the results of the answers could suggest that, unlike scholars in the field, teachers might not find learning about ourselves a primary reason for student reading at least not for students learning English as a second language.

There are a number of books to choose for student reading, which led me to ask the teachers how they selected books for the course. Some thought about the selection more than others. Mary answered that a few of the English teachers usually sit down and look at what new books are available and whether someone feels they have time to read some of them. Yet, John for instance mentions that he does not give the selection of literature that much thought.

I usually do not give it that much thought. Either I pick something I have read and like, or I choose books that have sometimes been too easy. But I think that the books should be easy to understand with a compelling story. (John – my translation)

It can be considered quite remarkable that John does not give the matter that much thought seeing that he previously stated that reading is necessary in order to acquire proficiency (see question about language acquisition). Thus, he seemingly contradicts himself by finding reading important while at the same time not giving the selection of reading material much thought. The other teachers did think more about the selection by for instance discussing new material, as Mary pointed out, or by putting together a number of books in different genres that students then can choose from, like Anne claimed to do.

Whether students should have the opportunity to choose freely what kind of book they want to read or whether they should read the same book was also something that the interviewees were asked about. As they all point out, there are arguments to be made for and against both alternatives. All four teachers agree that one of the benefits of reading the same book is that it becomes much easier to have discussions and written assignments than it would be if everyone
were to read different books. Rose says that reading the same book also gives the students the opportunity to discuss the book, when not in a classroom setting, in a different way than if they were reading different books. They can discuss and find out if their classmates have interpreted things that happen in the book the same way as they have. The difficulty lies in finding a book that everyone is able to read and understand when it comes to the language level. According to Mary, one of the downfalls of reading the same book is that students can cheat and not actually read the book. Instead they have a nice friend who has read the book and tells them in a detailed way what it is about. When it comes to reading different books, the major benefit is that the students get to choose something that they are interested in themselves. But, as Anne points out, they often choose a book that is too difficult which results in a number of students changing books, which in turn means that they might not have time to finish. As Rose points out, it is important that they finish reading a book cover to cover because it gives a feeling of accomplishment. For John the major benefit of reading the same book is that he knows exactly what his students have read. He goes on by saying that, if every student reads different books, having any in-depth discussions about the novels is almost out of the question. Seeing that every student has picked a different book they cannot discuss their perspectives on the book they read with anyone.

The scholars Beach et al have claimed that adolescents nowadays read less literature than before (see 2.1). Thus, the interviewees were asked if they find that students read less today than when they first began teaching English. There is some disagreement on the subject: three of the teachers find that there has not been a significant change during their 12.5 to 15 years as teachers.

Not in the years that I have been teaching. If there has been any difference it is only a few individuals that struggle more with reading. (John – my translation)

Anne agrees with John, to some degree, as she has not noticed any major differences but that students nowadays are not used to reading:

Maybe not more difficulties but they do not have any perseverance and really they are not used to reading (Anne – my translation).

Anne’s answer can be considered quite contradictory as she says she has not seen any major changes in the amount of reading students do but then she goes on and says that students do not have any perseverance and are not used to reading. This answer suggests that there was a time
when students were used to reading but now they are not any more. Out of the four teachers at
the school only Mary, with 20 years of experience, can clearly see that something has changed.

Yes, I think that a lot has changed since I became a teacher; back then there was not
as much resistance. Girls tend to read more and longer books than boys, there are
students that say that they have never read a book in secondary school which is
strange since it is required that they read. But I guess that we have gotten lazy and
get scared when a book is placed in our hands. We are used to reading short texts
like two pages on the internet about something you are interested in and then it ends
there. It could be because their parents do not find it important, people in my
generation that have not seen why it is important to read. Maybe it is about what
education or upbringing they have had and that is why they do not find it important.
Sadly, parents in my generation have also gotten more involved with social media.
It is more fun to check what has happened on Facebook or whatever than care for
your children. They can be somewhat forgotten. You do not really spend time
together. I do think that parents read bedtime stories to their children when they are
younger but it ends when the child grows older and can fall asleep on their own. Then
it is not as important like, “now we are finished” or something. They do not motivate
their children. (Mary – my translation)

With two out of four teachers finding that there has been a change in the years that they have
been active, the results of the study to some extent agrees with what scholars as Beach et al
have found. Mary is the one who remarks on the changes the most. A reason for this could be
that she has worked as a teacher longer than the others. Possibly she began working when the
decline in reading proficiency was more noticeable. This would imply that when John, Anne
and Rose began working the downward trend in reading proficiency was at its end.
Nevertheless, the participants find that students could work on their perseverance, which
suggests that students might have gotten a bit lazy if compared to previous generations.

Finally, the last question that the interviewees were asked was about their views on the
coursebooks for English 5 and English 6. Since half of my study is based on examining the
availability of literary material in the coursebooks that the interviewees have access to, I found
it significant to find out what the teachers thought about the coursebooks. To begin with, only
John and Mary mention using coursebooks on a more regular basis. John does, now and again,
use the coursebook Read & React – Interactive when teaching English 5. Although Mary uses
coursebooks it is mostly when she teaches a small group of students not yet proficient enough
for the English 5 course. This group of students almost solely work with the coursebook *Read & Catch Up – Interactive*. When teaching other students in English 5 and English 6, she prefers not to use coursebooks and instead picks literary material she knows and likes. To investigate the matter further I asked why they do not use coursebooks more frequently. While they all agree that coursebooks can be a great source of material, Mary explains why it is difficult to use them:

There is nothing wrong with the coursebooks at all. No, most of them are actually really good. But as our school provides such specific vocational programs it is hard to find material that deals with subjects that can be connected to the programs. That is why we usually opt for choosing our own literary material (Mary – my translation)

4.2 The coursebooks

The answers from the interviewees suggest that current coursebooks can be very useful. But as it is stated in the syllabus, teachers should provide material that is in some way connected to the students’ education (Skolverket). Thus, the interviewees find that the coursebooks available to them do not provide them with material to do so. This inspired me to analyze the availability of literary material in three coursebooks used by the interviewees. The results of the second part of the study can be found in the following sections.

4.2.1 Read & Catch Up – Interactive

*Read & Catch Up* (2013) is a coursebook for English 5 intended for helping students who have yet to become proficient enough to meet the knowledge requirements for English 5. By using *Read & Catch Up*, students will get the opportunity to work on their reception, interaction and communication fully in line with the current curriculum for English at upper secondary school (Gy11). The coursebook consists of nine chapters with texts from different genres and exercises that aim to help students practice their reading comprehension, vocabulary and acquisition of idioms (Augutis et al 2). There are also several exercises based on practicing communication and production.

As previously stated, *Read & Catch Up* consists of nine chapters all of which are comprised of different themes. Each chapter also includes a reading section of both fictional and nonfictional pieces.
Table 1 shows that each chapter consists of one reading unit which then focuses on either a nonfictional or a fictional text. The number of nonfictional and fictional texts is divided evenly, with four fictional and five nonfictional texts. The fictional texts included in Read & Catch Up are literary excerpts and short stories. There are no examples of poems and plays. Even though there are fictional texts in the coursebook, there is no great number of fictional texts for a teacher to choose from. In fact, out of 118 pages only 16 include reading material, fictional and nonfictional material included. Out of those 16 pages, eight pages contain literary material. The nonfictional and fictional texts that can be found in Read & Catch Up are usually one or two pages long. Having said that, the two literary excerpts are from the novels Braveheart by Randall Wallace and Cinderella Man by Marc Cerasini. Interestingly these novels both draw facts and inspiration from actual events. Furthermore, these two novels have also been adapted to the big screen and have become very successful movies. Choosing excerpts from novels that have been adapted to movies opens up an opportunity for further discussion and comparisons between the novels and the movies. Moreover, connecting a text to a movie adaptation might be a way to get students more interested in reading the source material. By analyzing the literary material in Read & Catch Up we can also find out their level of difficulty. The reading units in Read & Catch Up can be considered quite easy. An example of this is found in chapter two, where the reading unit is comprised of young people’s writing to a teen magazine with different issues in hope of receiving some good advice. Reading topics that aim to interest young people is clearly something that the authors of this coursebooks focus on. But there are no reading topics that can be said to be in any way connected to the vocational programs at the school, which confirms what Mary stated in the interview section (see page 27). In Read & Catch Up there are exercises connected to each reading unit. Before each chapter, a vocabulary exercise introduces the reading unit by highlighting difficult words that the students will come across in
the text. The glossary list is only half finished, meaning that each word that is likely to present an issue is written in English, the students then need to finish it by picking the Swedish equivalent from a box of Swedish words connected to the task. After the text there are further exercises but none explicitly focusing on vocabulary. Rather, grammar or prepositions and other comprehension exercises are the primary focus.

4.2.2 Read & React - Interactive

*Read & React – Interactive* (2013) is the counterpart of the coursebook *Read & Catch Up* for English 5 intended for students at the level of English 5. The authors describe *Read & React* as a textbook that fits perfectly for upper secondary schools of today (Augutis et al). The coursebook is designed for English 5 and follows the current knowledge requirements for English 5 in the national syllabus. Just as *Read & Catch Up*, *Read & React* also consists of nine chapters. In general, the coursebook is structurally very similar to its equivalent for students not yet proficient enough for the English 5 course. Each chapter consists of a reading passage which is either nonfictional such as a letter from a soldier fighting in World War II in chapter 5, or fictional like the short story in chapter 2 about a man and his umbrella.

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<th>Number of reading units</th>
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*Table 2: Reading units in Read & React – Interactive*

Table 2 shows that the reading material of *Read & React – Interactive* is evenly made up of nonfiction and fiction. The number of texts is exactly the same as in *Read & Catch Up* but here there are four nonfictional texts and five fictional texts. While there are fewer pages in *Read & React* than in *Read & Catch Up*, 19 pages out of the 110 include reading material. Out of those 19 pages, eleven consist of literary reading material which is three pages more than in *Read & Catch Up*. Again there are no poems or plays included in the reading material, instead there are three short stories and two literary excerpts. Like *Read & Catch Up*, the reading units in *Read & React* are one or two pages long. There are also other similarities between the two
coursebooks in terms of the kind of literary excerpts that have been included, in that they are both from novels that have been adapted to movies. These excerpts, *Bend it Like Beckham* and *Rainman*, also give the teacher the opportunity to bring in both the movie and the book into the classroom and have students discuss and compare. The choices of excerpts from novels like *Rainman* and *Braveheart* can be thought to be a way to introduce students to the world of literature. These titles are probably, for both adolescents and adults, most associated with the movies and not the novels that they are based on. Thus, the choice of excerpts can be seen as a means to introduce students to literature via film adaptations and inspire them to seek out other novels in the future. Despite this potentially being a good way to introduce literature, there is no significant amount of fictional reading material in *Read & React*. Moreover, the book does not provide any reading material, nonfictional nor fictional, that could be claimed to deal with subject areas that are connected to the students’ programs. Just as *Read & Catch Up, Read & React* also introduces each reading unit with a vocabulary exercise. After each reading unit we also find other types of exercises focusing on language proficiency. Even though *Read & Catch Up* nor *Read & React* are especially long books, both being around 110 pages, the lack of reading material can be considered alarming. There is simply not a great number of choices for the teacher to make in terms of fictional texts.

4.2.3 *Pick & Mix 2*

*Pick & Mix 2* is a coursebook that is aimed towards students in the English 6 course. According to the authors, Simon and Tove Philips, the 256 pages long book is innovative and unique and contains “user-friendly course material, written for gymnasieskolan’s course English 6 and developed in line with Gy 2011 requirements” (Philips and Philips 3). Each of the chapters in *Pick & Mix 2* offers opportunities to practice the four language skills – writing, speaking, reading and listening (3). The authors suggest that the coursebook is best utilized by selecting one of the two approaches they recommend. These approaches are to use a traditional thematic approach and work through the book from cover to cover, or a selective approach and do as the title suggest and pick and mix the skills that the user feels the need to practice. In terms of reading material there is one reading unit in each chapter and in some cases even two. Each chapter begins with what Simon and Tove Philips call warm-ups which also include shorter texts, both nonfictional and fictional. Moreover, in two of the listening exercises in chapters 6 and 9, students can listen to excerpts from George Orwell’s *1984* and Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. 
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<th>Reading units in each chapter</th>
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</table>

Table 3: Reading units in Pick & Mix 2

The two coursebooks from the Read-series, although significantly shorter than Pick & Mix 2, had an even distribution between nonfictional and fictional texts. However, as can be seen in Table 3, in Pick & Mix 2 the majority of the texts are nonfictional. Out of the 256 pages 69 consist of reading passages. The number of reading units in Pick & Mix 2 is considerably larger as the book consists of 25 reading units as compared to the Read-series where each of the of the books only contains nine reading units. 22 pages out of 69, include fictional texts and the rest is comprised of nonfictional texts. In Pick & Mix 2, most of the texts are two pages or longer. The topics of the nonfictional texts range from space to philosophy. Despite there being a considerable imbalance in favor of nonfictional text, Pick & Mix 2 does make use of different kinds of fictional text. For instance, chapter 2 utilizes an excerpt from Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Grey, a novel in which the consequences of eternal youth is a central theme. This chapter also happens to be one of the chapters that contain two reading units, apart from the warm-ups that are included in every chapter. In chapter 2, students also get a nonfictional text about the life of Oscar Wilde. Short stories are only found in the warm-ups, unlike in the Read-series where short stories on occasion make up one reading unit of an entire chapter. Other examples of literary excerpts are Virginia Wolf’s To the Lighthouse and Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. Moreover, Pick & Mix 2 makes use of something that the Read-series do not include, namely a passage from a play. This passage is from the play A Streetcar Named Desire written by Tennessee Williams in 1947 (Phillips and Phillips 69). It is apparent that Pick & Mix 2 not only makes use of more literary texts but also more demanding literary texts. As the texts are so demanding, in fact very complex, they require that the teacher explains and opens up for long discussions in order for them to be meaningful, which could be difficult when only working with excerpts of the texts. It is natural that the texts are more demanding as the coursebook is aimed for students of English 6 while the Read-series is to be used in English 5.
Yet, the assumption can be made that the total number of reading units should perhaps not depend upon the course students are currently taking. Instead the level of the literary texts should progress and become more advanced in English 6. Moreover, the length of the texts is more extensive in *Pick & Mix 2* compared to the two books in the *Read*-series. In *Pick & Mix 2*, all reading units are at least two pages, whereas in both *Read & Catch Up* and *Read & React* no reading unit is longer than two pages. However, *Pick & Mix 2* does also present teachers at this particular school with some problems when it comes to the reading material. Like the two books from the *Read*-series, *Pick & Mix 2* does not provide any reading material that can be associated with the programs available at the school. Despite the coursebook being significantly more varied when it comes to the reading topics than the *Read*-series, it does not include any material that the participants could connect to the students’ programs. *Pick & Mix 2* also includes vocabulary, but instead of specific vocabulary exercises before the reading units, difficult words and a Swedish translation is found beside the text. Moreover, following the text there is some form of vocabulary check, as well as other exercises such as reading between the lines. Reading between the lines is an exercise where students get the opportunity to practice reading comprehension by discussing a number of questions about the text they just read. Exercises such as reading between the lines can be found throughout *Pick & Mix 2* and seem to be included in order to further students understanding of the literary excerpts they have read.
5. Discussion

The following section discusses the results of the present limited study of the views of four experienced teachers and three current ELT coursebooks used by these teachers at a vocational upper secondary school in Sweden. The results of my study were gathered through semi-structured interviews and a page-by-page analysis of the three coursebooks. This was done in order to find out what the teachers attitudes, ideas and beliefs where about reading and to what extent current Swedish ELT coursebooks include literary material. Since the study only focuses on teacher views and coursebooks at one school, there cannot be any claims that this study is generalizable in any way. Nevertheless, the results show that this study both confirms and refutes claims made by scholars in the field.

Scholars in the field, such as Beach et al, claim that students nowadays read less than previous generations (see 2.1). My own study is too small to prove or disprove any such claims. However, the results of my study suggests that if students indeed do read less, it could be because they are influenced by their parents. If they do not find reading to be of any importance, then the child might not find it significant either.

Reading is seen as a means to acquire the language. Both researchers and teachers alike find it significant to read in order for language acquisition to occur (see Hall, Elgort and Warren 2.2.1). But if what scholars say is true, that to acquire vocabulary through reading requires texts that repeat words enough times, as Urquhart and Weir have pointed out, any major vocabulary gain seems to be next to impossible (see 2.2.1). The results of my own study suggest that the teachers were of the opinion that students would acquire vocabulary by reading novels. However, the claim that students need to read the same word several times for vocabulary acquisition to take place is not something that the interviewees mentioned paying any particular attention to. I would also argue that if there is a need for repetition, assignments and exercises seem to be required to actually acquire vocabulary. These exercises should focus on vocabulary and make students think about what they are reading.

A discrepancy between researchers’ views and the results from my own study can be found when it comes to the effect of reading on our understanding of ourselves and other people. Reading is considered a major contributor for acquiring social skills that we are not born with but rather develop over time (see Nikolajeva 2.2.2). One of the skills that are mentioned in 2.2.2 is empathy; we can learn to empathize with someone else through reading literature even though that person is a fictional character. The idea that we learn about ourselves through reading
fiction is completely overlooked by the interviewees. A reason for this could be that it is difficult to attain what the reader actually learns about themselves when reading fiction. Moreover, the acquisition of social skills is not something that is mentioned in the syllabus, which could indicate that it is something that teachers do not think about.

The present study also suggests that there is insufficient reading material in the coursebooks that were studied. In order for them to be an adequate source of reading material, both as regards quantity and quality, they would need to be revised. As regards to quantity, the coursebooks do not challenge the students enough as the reading material tends to be only one or two pages long. The largest quantity of reading material is found in *Pick & Mix 2* for English 6, where 27% of the coursebook is comprised of reading units. But only 8% of it is comprised of fiction. *Read & Catch Up – Interactive* only allots eight out of its 118 pages to fictional texts. Although slightly shorter (110 pages), *Read & React – Interactive* is only marginally better than *Read & Catch Up* as there are eleven pages of fictional text. The lack of fictional texts is worrying seeing that coursebooks are often the only material used by teachers in classrooms (Arkian; see 2.3.2). When it comes to quality, previous research has pointed to the importance fictional text has on the development of social skills (see 2.2.2). Thus, it is alarming to see that the coursebooks do not provide but a small amount of fictional texts that challenge the students enough in order to acquire vocabulary and social skills. The implication is that teachers need to be ready to go beyond the coursebooks in order to find sufficient reading material.

Furthermore, Daisey suggests that teachers’ attitudes about reading could be essential in order for students to enjoy reading. She found that teachers need to be motivated and understand what kinds of reading students are interested in. In order to do so, I find that there is a need for exercises and other tips and tricks that teachers can use to make reading more fun and exciting for the students. Persson points out that our world has shifted from a text culture to a media culture, and that we now need guides to help us understand why we should read (see 2.1). The reality is that both younger and older generations are at the mercy of their mobile phones, tablets or any other gadget that keeps them up to date with what is going on in the world. Thus, it seems that the work teachers do in school might be more important than ever before. Therefore, the reading projects that the interviewees mentioned could be a way to introduce students to the literary world. If students read more in school it could possibly spark a lifelong interest in reading.

This study consisted of two parts: interviews and a page-by-page content analysis of three current ELT coursebooks used by the interviewees. I found that using a semi-structured
approach when constructing the questions for the interviews worked well. The participants who took part in this study all worked at the same school, which could affect the validity and reliability of this study. Moreover, to increase the validity and reliability, the study would have benefitted from more participants and a larger number of coursebooks to analyze. In retrospect, four participants and three coursebooks is not enough to prove or disprove any claims. But hopefully this study can be an indication of teachers’ views when it comes to reading and the extent to which ELT coursebooks include literary material.
6. Conclusion

Reading is said to improve students’ knowledge of the language and aid them in their language acquisition. Reading literature is considered among both researchers and interviewees to be essential in order for students to acquire the English language. Reading provides students with the opportunity to develop their proficiency and is a source for vocabulary gain. The interviews suggest that teachers do find reading literature to be a significant part of their teaching, as well as a way for students to develop their proficiency. The interviewees have a positive attitude towards reading and half of them think that more time should be devoted to reading by implementing reading projects. There is reason to believe that if reading can indeed be beneficial when it comes to acquiring the language, then the selection of literary material ought to be considered just as significant. Nevertheless, one of the interviewees claimed to give the selection of material very little thought, which contradicts what he has previously stated about the importance of reading literature. Even though this study is limited, the results indicate that students today read less than previous generations. As shown in 4.1, two out of four interviewees have noticed a change in the years that they have been teaching English.

The results of the study of the three ELT coursebooks show that they include a very limited amount of reading material. Furthermore, the availability of fictional texts in the coursebooks is even more limited. Although Pick & Mix 2 contains more texts than the two books from the Read-series, the coursebooks display an almost shocking lack of any kind of reading material, be it nonfictional or fictional. This does not leave the teacher with many options to choose from when finding literary material for their students. As these coursebooks are meant to help students master the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) it would be beneficial if the coursebooks were longer so reading could be more highlighted than it currently is. The interviewees found that there is nothing in particular that is problematic about the coursebooks. But as coursebooks are designed to suit as many students as possible, finding reading material that spark an interest in these coursebooks is not easy. Nevertheless, the lack of reading material, especially fiction, in the coursebooks included in this study points to their inability to serve as a source for literary material in the classroom. Instead of being a source that teachers can depend on, the limited amount of fiction in the coursebooks forces the interviewees to search for literary material beyond the coursebooks.

As for suggestions for further research, it would be interesting to gather a larger amount of material to analyze, to see if the same conclusions can be made with a greater quantity of
material or if there could be any discrepancies. It could also be of interest to include a study of students’ perspectives on the subject in order to examine whether students find that they learn from reading literature or not.
Works Cited

Primary sources:
Read & React – Interactive. Studentlitteratur, 2013. Print

Secondary sources:


Appendix

1. Hur länge har du varit lärare?

2. Vad innebär litteratur för dig? Är det något du brinner för att använda i din undervisning? Är det viktigt att vara intresserad av litteratur som engelskalärare?

3. Hur ser du på målen angående litteratur i engelska? – Är det viktigare än andra mål i kursplanen? Borde man göra mer tid för litteratur i engelska undervisningen?

4. Anser du att läsandet av litteratur kan användas som ett verktyg att nå kunskapsmålen? Är språkinlärningen den största anledningen till att läsa böcker eller ser du fler anledningar?

5. Vad tror du eleverna får ut av att läsa? Hur gynnas de? Kan du se några positiva effekter hos eleverna efter dem har läst?


7. Vilka fördelar/nackdelar ser du med att eleverna läser samma bok? Samma fråga när de inte gör det?


9. Vilken typ av böcker har fungerat bäst för dig i din undervisning? Vad har inte fungerat? Vad berodde det på?

10. Vad är din åsikt angående kurslitteraturen för kurserna i Engelska? Brukar du använda dig av kursböcker i din undervisning?