

# Teachers' Perspectives on the Use of Short Stories in the English Classroom

A qualitative study of English teachers' work with short stories  
in the multicultural classroom in Sweden

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study aims to examine teachers' perspectives on the use of short stories in the English classroom at the upper secondary level in one municipality in Stockholm, Sweden. The study is a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with 6 English teachers. The theoretical framework underscores different implications and advantages of teaching literature in the classroom. These implications regard the use of authentic literary texts and their advantages. The theoretical framework also gives a definition of the terms multiculturalism and interculturality. The results suggest that teachers use short stories in order to motivate students to read more because they are shorter than longer texts. Teachers reported advantages in student motivation, a sense of accomplishment, and enhancement of language skills when teaching short stories. Moreover, short stories are seen by teachers as versatile tools that cater to different students' learning abilities. The short stories that the teachers select to work with come from their own interests. When selecting short stories, the teachers always have in mind to be sensitive in order not to offend anyone or for it to be culturally sensitive. Some teachers vary their literature by choosing works from around the world to present different perspectives. The short stories that the teachers select contain authentic language that presents different views that the students can discuss in order to understand. The results indicate that teachers find that cultural aspects are embedded within the stories and could be discussed from different perspectives in the multicultural classroom.

**Title:** Teachers' Perspectives on the Use of Short Stories in the English Classroom. A qualitative study of English teachers' work with short stories in the multicultural classroom in Sweden

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## 1. Introduction

Reading and reading literary texts is a topical subject in Sweden today. A recent and well-publicized study, “The Decrease of School Related Reading in Swedish Compulsory School – Trends Between 2007 and 2017”, shows that Swedish schools have had a drastic drop in students reading non-fiction and fiction. While students in middle school still read more non-fictional texts than secondary school students, the amount of reading fiction is low for both groups. Most students in middle and secondary school only read in school when they have to for a short amount of time, either “once a day or week” (Vintereka et al., 2022, p.119,129). Teachers have a critical pedagogical role to create reading habits among students. However, there appear to be barriers in getting students to read more in school.

My experiences of students not reading and being engaged in terms of reading non-fiction and fiction were the same after I finished my three VFUs (teacher training internship). The inspiration I got to do this research derived from my third VFU which I completed earlier this year. After the experience of using three of Roald Dahl’s short stories, I thought about short stories as an important part of teaching English in upper secondary school. If I had any impression of short stories it was that the form was too simple for the students and their learning abilities. However, working with these short stories turned out to be a great way for students to finish reading a literary work from beginning to end. The short stories I worked with opened a new set of knowledge where I gained a unique experience from incorporating short stories for the first time in the English multicultural classroom. I could base different units and lesson plans on short stories, directing them toward different learning outcomes. The positive experience I got from incorporating short stories in the classroom led to my interest in finding out other practicing teachers' perceptions and experiences of working with this literary form. A review of previous research reveals different aims regarding the use of short stories in the classroom and suggests possible advantages in terms of motivating students to read and enhancing different areas of their language skills.

The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' perspectives on the use of short stories in the English classroom at the upper secondary level. The research questions were:

- How do English teachers incorporate short stories as teaching material in the multicultural upper secondary classroom?

- What effects of using short stories in the English upper secondary classroom do teachers perceive for themselves and for their students?

In semi-structured interviews with 6 teachers in one municipality in Sweden, I listened to teachers speak about how they incorporate short stories as teaching material in multicultural classrooms and about their experiences, perceptions, and assessments of that practice. I was particularly interested in the effects they perceived of their students and their own professional practice from using short stories, and if these or similar effects were documented in pedagogical research on short stories in the classroom. A primary result of this study is that incorporating short stories in the classroom is a way to introduce literature to the students and motivate them to read a text from beginning to end.

## **1.1 Background**

This section presents the role of literary texts in upper secondary school English according to the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket). As well as an overview of scholarship using literary texts in the EFL classroom. This section describes the development of the short story and its main features. It also provides an overview of the role of short literary texts in the classroom.

### **1.1.1 The Swedish Curriculum and Teaching Language and Culture**

According to the Swedish National Agency for Education, one of the aims of the English subject is that “In teaching students should meet written and spoken English of different kinds, and relate the content to their own experiences and knowledge” (Skolverket 2011). Therefore, it is important to introduce various texts for the students in the English classroom. Introducing various genres of text and information from around the world helps students to understand differences and “develop an understanding of how to search for, evaluate, select and assimilate content from multiple sources of information, knowledge and experiences” (Skolverket 2011). Teaching the English language to EFL learners should help students “develop knowledge of language and the surrounding world so that they have the ability, desire and confidence to use English in different situations and for different purposes” (Skolverket 2011). Exposing students to different kinds of texts in the English subject and including these in the classroom helps the students to understand different kinds of perspectives and experiences. In the core content under the subheading “reception” of

English 5, 6, and 7 one of the aims is to introduce “Literature and other fiction” and “Texts of different kinds and for different purposes, such as manuals, popular science texts, and reports” (Skolverket 2011). The curriculum for the English subject does not prescribe what literature and genres teachers should introduce. It is left to the teacher's professional judgment to decide the type of literature students should work with.

In English, students should also be “given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket 2011). Teaching students that people worldwide have different living conditions and cultures hopefully gives an insight into developing a language awareness where they can interact and engage with people from a different background than their own (Skolverket 2011). The Swedish National Agency for Education does not have a clear definition in the curriculum regarding the concept of culture. However, James Banks defines the term culture in *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*:

Culture can be defined as the way of life of a social group - the total human-made environment. Although culture is often defined in a way that includes all the material and nonmaterial aspects of group life, most social scientists today emphasize the intangible, symbolic, and ideational aspect of culture. It is values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies, and not artifacts, material objects, and other tangible aspects of human societies (Banks 2002, p.52-53).

Culture is the values and beliefs that we have created together in a social group. This creates a number of different perspectives and interpretations of how we understand life, which results in us seeing the world differently. Introducing information about different cultural settings is a way for the students to understand different worldviews and other individuals' life circumstances. In the Swedish curriculum, the students should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge on how to search for and find “non-fiction, fiction and other cultural offerings as a source of knowledge, self-awareness and joy” (Skolverket 2011). Including literature in the classroom that reflects the different environments and cultures of the authors can help students to develop cultural awareness which leads to an intercultural understanding. Literature is a way for students to gain knowledge concerning different cultures and backgrounds with the information presented (Ellis & Brewster 2014, p.46).



### **1.1.2 Including Works of Literature in the Classroom**

Literature and language are linked together where literature is formed by the language of the writer (Llach 2007, p.8). Numerous studies from around the world show that literature is a way to actively engage students with language learning and the different themes and content (Chalikendy 2015, p.225). Literature is a source for teachers to stimulate EFL students into becoming creative and motivated in the classroom. Including literature in the classroom is a way of bringing life to “information and linguistic structures” of the language, where the students get a chance to learn the rules of the language in a more stimulating and fun way (Chalikendy 2015, p.226).

Literary texts in the classroom help the learner to interpret various opinions and perspectives which could be discussed and interpreted in classroom discussions that the students and teacher have together. This leads to the students becoming motivated in terms of working with the literary text because they interpret and work with it together (Llach 2007, p.9). Students then practice different language skills when working together and gain experience from the texts they are working with. According to John F. Povey (1967), “literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, a complex and exact syntax” (p.41-42).

Moreover, engaging students in working with literary texts is beneficial when students feel motivated and when the experience is interesting. Giving the students the chance to enjoy reading literature leads to them feeling motivated which can help develop their creativity and spark their imagination (Chalikendy 2015, p.226). Students become motivated by the story because they can relate to the storyline and characters. Motivating students to read stories leads to them developing a positive attitude “towards the foreign language, culture and language learning” (Ellis & Brewster 2014, p.6). Enjoying something one does at the moment becomes an easier way to learn. This is why literature may encourage students to develop foreign language skills.

### **1.1.3 The Short Story**

Short narratives have always existed among us as an “informal oral tradition” (Boyd 2006, p. 5). The birthplace of the short narrative goes all the way back to short forms of myth and

biblical verse narratives, folktales, and during the 18th-century ballads (Patea 2012, p.2). Early written texts like “The Decameron,” “The Canterbury Tales,” or “A Thousand and One Nights” were linked tales. The 19th century was when short fiction reached the public on a larger scale by being published in magazines and the periodical market (Reid 2017 p.1; Boyd 2006 p.5). This new genre of literature received a considerable amount of attention from international writers. It has been suggested that the first piece of short story fiction was published in 1827 by Walter Scott, “The Two Drovers”, which gained recognition throughout the world. The modern short story skyrocketed when the American author Nathaniel Hawthorne published his collection “Twice-Told Tales” 10 years later in 1837 (Boyd 2006, p. 5-6). Edgar Allan Poe was one of the many practitioners of the short form. The critical analysis Poe made of Hawthorne's short story was the origin of the short story genre in the middle of the 19th century in America. Poe's design of the short story provided a new genre of literature to the rest of the world. He discussed the short form and was one of the theorists and practitioners that developed the form and framework of the short story (Patea 2012, p.2-3, 16-17; Boyd 2006, p.6). Edgar Allan Poe's main argument was that “the short story should be read at one sitting” (Patea 2012, p. 10). The 19th-century short story form focused on the plot and dramatic events while the modern 20th-century short story form developed a narrative that focused on “feelings, moods and impressions”. The 20th-century short story form can be seen in the works of Ernest Hemingway and many other influential writers (Patea 2012, p.17-18).

According to Carl H Grabo (2016), almost all of us understand what a short story is and the idea behind it. However, there is not a clear definition to be found that has reached acceptance throughout the world (Grabo 2016, p.1). An attempt at a definition could be described as “literary prose to fiction” (Pasco 1991, p.411). Esenwein & Carnagey describe a short story as a “brief, imaginative narrative, unfolding a single predominating incident and a single chief character by means of a plot, the details of which are so selected, and the whole treatment so organized, that a single impression is produced” (Esenwein & Carnagey 1928, p.30). According to Friedman, short stories can remain short but still contain a large action and or storyline (Friedman 1958, p.112). To understand what a short story is and what it contains one can compare it to a novel. A short story is a condensed form of a novel and the difference between them is “the length of the narrative” (Gerwig 1909, p. 10; Grabo 2016, p. 4). Allan H. Pasco refers to a short story as being less than 50 000 words in comparison to a novel (Pasco 1991, p.416). In comparison to the novel the short story tends to deal with one

single incident or fragment whereas the novel deals with more incidents (Patea 2012, p.10). Because it is short, a short story tends to have a unified form and be flexible in terms of its content (Gunsekera 2016, p.5, 8). The form of the short story is “a compressed, unified, and plotted form” and the overall short form of both text and oral speech holds the attention span of the learners (Patea 2012, p.3; Boyd 2006, p.1).

#### **1.1.4 The Short Story in the Classroom**

Several studies have documented the benefits of incorporating short stories in the EFL classroom. The studies establish that short stories can make it easy to follow the plot since it deals with only one single effect or fragment (Ompusunggu 2018, p.197). Short stories as teaching material is a pedagogical tool that is perfect to incorporate in the classroom (Boyd 2006, p. 9).

Collie & Slater identify four advantages of incorporating short stories in the EFL classroom:

- Since they are shorter than the average novel it takes a maximum of two classes to finish reading
- Students may find it easier to read the whole story from start to finish and therefore gain a feeling of accomplishment.
- The short story also offers diversity, allowing the teacher to find material that caters to many of the student's interests
- The short story can be read by all ages and different classes (Collie & Slater 1987, p.167).

Pathan sees benefits in the use of short stories in various primary areas. Short stories have multiple pedagogical and educational benefits for EFL classrooms because they are authentic texts which lead students to become more interested and motivated to learn. Short stories can help learners develop their language skills. Short stories also have sociocultural benefits because they introduce different cultural values to students and may enhance their appreciation of them. Short stories can have emotional benefits when the students are introduced to different conflicts and struggles in the stories. This kind of information can help them relate to their own lives. Lastly, short stories have cognitive benefits which can help the

students' learning strategies and emotional intelligence (Pathan 2013, p.21-25). The benefits of incorporating short stories in the classroom will be discussed further below.

## **2. Previous Research**

This section looks more closely at previous research concerning the benefits of literature and short stories in the English upper secondary school classroom. The selected research is primarily on English as a foreign language in the classroom. The articles examine different perspectives in the field of literature and short stories in the classroom. The results from the selected research include different perspectives of short stories in the classroom which will be discussed in comparison to the results in this study in 6. Discussion.

### **2.1 Increase Reading Motivation Among Students Through Literature**

Incorporating literature and short stories in the classroom has been shown to have positive effects on motivating students to read. Spoke Wintersparv (2022) examines “how teachers relate the Reading Experience to literature studies” and what approaches teachers take in literature studies in upper secondary school. The results show that using fiction is an easy way to develop the student's language skills (Wintersparv 2022, p.450). The study found that “literature studies are teacher-centered” meaning the literature is selected by the teacher's interpretation of the curriculum. Teachers also try to match the student's interests when choosing the literature they are supposed to work with to enhance reading motivation (Wintersparv 2022, p.454).

Teachers can increase motivation among students by mixing their methods when working with literature such as short stories. The study “Effects of Blended Learning Pedagogical Practices on Students' Motivation and Autonomy for the Teaching of Short Stories in Upper Secondary English” by Kung-Teck Wonga, Gwo-Jen Hwangb, Pauline Swee Choo Goha and Siti Khadijah Mohd Arrif (2020) aims to find out “the effects of blended learning on students academic achievements, motivation and learner autonomy” through teaching short stories (Wonga et.al 2020, p.513). One way teachers can increase motivation among students is to incorporate a lesson plan that uses blended learning when teaching literature like short stories. Blended learning indicates combining regular classroom methods with computer-mediated methods (the use of technology in support of learning activities). The

study showed that including short stories in “a blended learning classroom can motivate students to learn” (Wonga et al., 2020, p.521).

## **2.2 Enhancing Learning Skills Through Short Stories**

Many studies show that short stories are a way to enhance different areas of the students' language and learning skills. The study “Using Short Stories in the EFL Classroom” by Nimer A. Abu Zahra and Mohammed A. Farrah (2016) focus on examining students' attitudes toward the use of short stories in the classroom (Abu Zahra & Farrah 2016, p. 12). The results indicate that incorporating short stories in the classroom is beneficial in terms of “enhancing the language skills, personal development and reflection, cultural understanding and tolerance”. Incorporating short stories is a way to “enhance students’ critical thinking, imagination, creativity, language structure and acquisition and cultural awareness” (Abu Zahra & Farrah 2016, p. 23).

In “Students’ Perception on Using Short Story to Develop Vocabulary at SMP Regina Caeli Cileungsi”, Marcelia Sembiring (2022) focuses on student perceptions of incorporating short stories in the classroom to develop vocabulary efficiency. Sembiring used cross-sectional surveys as the methodological approach with an online questionnaire for 59 students from middle school, grade eight, in Indonesia (Sembiring 2022, p.150). The results show that the majority of the students had a positive perception of short stories in the classroom. They felt that their vocabulary improved after working with short stories and that it was an interesting way of learning vocabulary. The students also found it easier to remember vocabulary and information from the short stories. Many of the students thought that learning vocabulary from short stories by translating it into their native language was an efficient way of learning. The results show that the students became motivated and encouraged to enhance their vocabulary when reading short stories and it was a better way of improving their language skills (Sembiring 2022, p.151-152).

Short stories may also have a positive effect on student grammar skills. The article “The use of short stories in English language teaching and its benefits on grammar learning” by Seval Şentürk and Ayhan Kahraman (2020) focuses on beginner-level short stories in middle school (Şentürk & Kahraman 2020, p.533). The study found that students did learn grammar through studying short stories in the classroom and that their attitudes towards short stories changed.

Literary texts like short stories have a positive effect in the classroom and can have success in the student's grammar learning (Şentürk & Kahraman 2020, p.547-548).

Teaching short stories has also been found to be beneficial in terms of student development of speaking and writing skills. In “The Effectiveness of Short Story Use on Students' Speaking Skill Development at SMPN 160 Jakarta” Retta Mestika Ompusunggu (2018) investigates the effects of using short stories to develop speaking skills among students (Ompusunggu 2018, p.197). The methodological approach was a quasi-experimental design consisting of pre and post-tests of 60 eighth graders. One group of 30 students read short stories and the other group did not (Ompusunggu 2018, p.199). The results of the study found the group that used short stories in the English classes achieved a higher speaking performance than the group that did not use short stories. The author suggests that short stories have a positive effect on students' speaking skills because students become interested in the real cultural features of the literary text (Ompusunggu 2018, p.202). In a related fashion, Özgür Şen Bartan (2017) examines the use of short stories to improve EFL writing skills. The study aims at finding out differences “in the pre-post-test writing achievements of students who were taught through the Read for Writing model, and between the experimental group and the control group” (Bartan 2017, p. 59). The methodological approach was a quasi-experimental design with students from Turkey with one experimental group of 48 students and a control group of 31 students in seventh grade. Both groups went through pre-post-tests (Bartan 2017, p. 59, 62). A quasi-experimental design means that the two groups are not put together by the researcher. Both groups worked with their workbooks, however, the experimental group also worked with short stories (Bartan 2017, p. 65). The results present a significant difference in the experimental group with higher results in the pre and post-test achievements compared to the control group. The researchers, therefore, concluded that working with short stories affected the student's writing skills “in terms of language, content, organization, and communicative achievements” (Bartan 2017, p. 70).

### **2.3 Enhancing Students' Intercultural and Multicultural Awareness through Short Stories**

Working with short stories that aim to enhance students' knowledge about their own and other cultural values can be beneficial in terms of increasing students' intercultural awareness.

Research suggests that increasing students' intercultural awareness can be done by incorporating short stories where the students develop knowledge of other cultures in society (Lahdenperä 2004, s.19). This creates a dynamic process of exchange that can lead to an understanding of different cultures. A study by Thomas Feeny and Chansongklod Gajaseni (2020) researches “effectiveness of reading short stories to develop three particular dimensions of Byram’s (1997) intercultural communicative competence (ICC)” (Feeny & Gajaseni 2020, p. 126). The students came from Bangkok, Thailand. The results show the three modern short stories selected helped the students develop intercultural communication competence. The results showed an increase in intercultural communication competence of 56,51% in total from the three short stories (Feeny & Gajaseni 2020, p. 126, 137-138). In a related fashion, Saeed Rezaei and Mehrdad, examine the role English literary texts have on the development of language learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence of students in Iran, Tehran. The methodological approach was a syllabus created by the researchers with an intercultural aim containing American English short stories on various cultural topics. The study also used Byram’s model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Rezaei & Naghibian 2018, p.77). The results showed that students developed intercultural competence and the short stories helped with becoming aware of their own cultural values and Western culture. Students were active in including an intercultural understanding when working with the short stories (Rezaei & Naghibian 2018, p.87). The study showed that including literary texts is a way to raise intercultural awareness among students in the classroom (Rezaei & Naghibian 2018, p.92).

In “The Use of Short Fiction in a Writing Class: Pedagogical Suggestions for Secondary Level Teachers in EFL Settings”, Youngjoo Seo and Changhyun Kim (2020) investigate how authentic literature could be used when teaching “short fiction in a Korean high school EFL course” (Youngjoo & Changhyun 2020, p.120). The method was to create a lesson plan that included a Korean novel called “Dongbackkot” and Jane Joyce's short story “Araby”. The reason behind the lesson plan was to motivate the students through different pedagogical purposes in hopes of improving their creativity and linguistic knowledge (Youngjoo & Changhyun 2020, p.120,121, 123). The pedagogical purpose was to enhance the student's intercultural awareness, overall creativity, and learning skills (Youngjoo & Changhyun 2020, p.126).

Working with short stories that offer cultural diversity and bring awareness to issues that exist in our multicultural society is a competency that is useful to develop in order to understand and respect differences in other cultures, religions, and ethnicities. In the study “Evaluating the Use of Multicultural-Based Short Story Appreciation Textbook to Teach Prose-Fiction Appreciation Course” (Sholehuddin et al., 2020, p.831). Muhamad Sholehuddin, Herman J. Waluyo, Suyitno, and Nugraheni Eko Wardhani examine students’ and lecturers’ perceptions of teaching prose-fiction in appreciation textbooks about multicultural-based short stories and the strengths of incorporating multicultural-based short stories in the course of teaching students prose-fiction (Sholehuddin et al., 2020, p.833-834). The participants were 64 students in a third-grade Language education program in Indonesia (Sholehuddin et al., 2020, p.837). The preservice teachers found the “multicultural-based short story appreciation textbook” useful for gaining knowledge on “racial, ethnic and religious issues” that can exist in our society and a broader understanding of prose fiction, which can help students in their future teaching role (Sholehuddin et al., 2020, p.832, 839-840). The results from the lecturers showed that multicultural-based textbooks that include short stories are beneficial to teaching students about multicultural issues that can exist in society. This can help to enhance the “students learning sources and materials”. From the lecturer's point of view, the students were motivated and interested in the lessons the textbook had as instructions about the short stories (Sholehuddin et al., 2020, p.840-841).

Several studies suggest that teaching students awareness of and respect for cultural values from different parts of the world may be facilitated by literature. Main Sufanti, Agus Nuryatin, Fathur Rohman, and Herman J. Waluyo aim to “describe the teachers’ perception of the urgency of integrating tolerance education in short story appreciation learning” (Sufanti et al., 2020, p.112). The study by Sufanti et.al is relevant in terms of the discussion of short stories and the teacher's selection. However, there are limitations to this idea of tolerance. The critique of tolerance is that you can not teach tolerance because the idea is too “subtle and elusive” which leads to one only creating a desire of affecting the mind of the student (De Zouche 1945, p.86). The idea behind tolerance is that only an empowered majority “tolerates” the differences of the culture which leads to no change in power relations. Whereas in an intercultural approach, the focus is to create a dynamic process of exchange and mutual understanding on all sides. The results of the study showed that when learning through the short stories and the examples of the characters, tolerance could be used



as a concept for learning about differences and overall diversity (Sufanti et al., 2020, p.115-116). In the results, 78% of high school teachers in Indonesia select their short stories as teaching material through textbooks because they find them effective and practical. Eleven percent select the short stories from a combination of both textbooks and additional sources and the rest of the teachers chose their short stories from other sources which were not textbooks. The short stories were found to present information about diversity and could work as material for teaching tolerance (Sufanti et al., 2020, p.118, 120).

### **3. Methodological Framework and Data**

In order to explore teachers' perspectives on the use of short stories the chosen methodological framework is a qualitative analysis made of semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research as methodology fits the purpose of my study since the purpose is to find out teachers' perspectives on the use of short stories in the classroom (Creswell & Creswell 2018, p. 204). This section provides a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative interviews and analysis. This section presents the selection process, the analysis method, and how the study adheres to the Swedish Research Councils' four research ethics considerations.

#### **3.1 Qualitative Interviews & Analysis**

Qualitative face-to-face interviews contain open-ended questions that strive to receive information about the participants' views and opinions (Creswell & Creswell 2018, p.187). According to Bryman, to answer the aim and research questions different kinds of interviews can be done. An interview that is structured uses interview questions that are fixed and closed in comparison to an interview that is unstructured. An unstructured interview uses an interview guide and general questions that one wants to cover rather than fixed questions. The interview used in this study is a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview means that the person holding the interview proceeds from a schedule of questions in no specific order and can add questions throughout (Bryman 2018, p.257, 260). Qualitative interviews can be moved in different directions depending on the topic interview participants talk about. There is a possibility to shift the focus of the study depending on what answers and questions one receives. The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that the researcher can alternate the questions of the interview schedule/scheme and can ask follow-up questions. Qualitative interviews are an advantage regarding opening new territory. One disadvantage of a qualitative method in comparison to a quantitative method is that qualitative interviews can take longer to process and code (Bryman 2018, p. 561-563).

A qualitative text analysis focuses on words rather than numbers. In comparison to quantitative methods, the qualitative method focuses on descriptive details in the analysis to understand the environment and context one wants to study (Creswell & Creswell 2018,

p.204; Bryman 2018, p.479). Qualitative analyses are flexible in regarding how descriptively one can analyze the responses of the interview participants (Bryman 2018, p. 561).

### **3.2 The Study Sample/Selection Process**

The teachers selected to participate in the semi-structured interviews were selected through purposive sampling. This means that the interview participants were not randomly selected. The reason for purposive sampling is to make sure that the participating teachers have worked or currently work with short stories. Selecting participants through purposive sampling is a way to find people that can answer the purpose of the study and research questions (Bryman 2018, p. 496).

All teachers participating in this study were asked if they currently work or have worked with short stories in the classroom before scheduling an interview. Five of the interview participants were individuals that I had interactions with previously. I met four of the teachers during my teacher training internships (VFU) and one of the teachers I encountered during my years in school. The last participant was recruited through a fellow teacher-student. During the selection process, I put out a query on Facebook groups for English teachers but did not receive any response. The reason could be because of the timing since national exams had started and it was right before spring break. The interviewed teachers came from one municipality in Stockholm, Sweden but from different schools. The municipality could be described as multicultural. Some of the interviewed teachers work in the same school but have different classes. Four of the teachers worked in a private school and the last two worked in a public school.

### **3.3 The Study's Approach**

After reading and writing section 2. Previous Research, I started working on my interview guide where I focused on open-ended questions that could answer the purpose and the research questions. The interview guide went through revisions with feedback from my supervisor to make them more open-ended where themes are being discussed rather than specific questions. When the interview guide was completed and accepted, I contacted the teachers through email if they would like to participate in my study. I sent out two documents to the teachers, one of which gave information about the purpose and how the data material

will be used (Appendix 11.3). The other document gave information about the consent form (Appendix 11.4). The document about the study stated that the interviews could be done in person or virtually via Zoom/Teams (Creswell & Creswell 2018, p.189). Five of the teachers chose to participate via Teams where I provided a link, and one participated in person. The time estimate for each interview was 30-50 minutes.

Before the teachers could participate they were asked to read the two documents (Appendix 11.3 & 11.4). Since the majority of participants chose to participate via Teams they were asked to sign the consent form or send back a digital consent form (Appendix 11.4 & 11.5). The participant that did the interview in person sent back a digital consent form and gave their consent orally. Before starting the interviews I made sure my recording device worked, I had a pen and paper and my interview guide at hand, and that all themes I wanted to discuss had been mentioned. It is recommended that interviewers audiotape and take notes in case anything goes wrong with the recording device (Creswell & Creswell 2018, p. 190). The reason for using a recording device is to make sure I could go back to the answers and also make sure I do not miss any information that could be of use. I started the interview by informing the participants that the interview is voluntary and anonymous and that they can cancel it at any moment.

### **3.4 Analysis Method**

The interviews constitute the empirical data in this study. The first step after the interviews were completed was to transcribe them. To transcribe means to write down what the interviewers have said orally (Bryman 2018, p.581). I transcribed the data right after the interview because I had everything fresh in my memory. After the transcription was complete, I identified themes and color-coded the information. For example, if the participant talked about their experiences of short stories in the classroom that information was color-coded into green, or if they talked about the titles of the short stories that were coded into pink. I did this with all information presented in the interviews to organize and condense the information. During this step, I tried to take out valid information that could be of purpose for the aim and research questions (Bryman 2018, p.34). After this process, I identified three major themes; **5.1 Short Stories and Reading Motivation**, **5.2 Enriching Language and**

**Learning Skills**, and **5.3 Content, Culture, and Curriculum**. These themes are presented and analyzed in 5. Results and Analysis.

### **3.5 Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba, in qualitative research one uses four principles of trustworthiness which are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Stahl & King 2020, p.26). To create credibility, the study is supervised by a supervisor who I consult for approval and accuracy. The study also adheres to The Swedish Research Council's four research ethics considerations. The participants have been informed how long the interviews will take and the time frame for how long the data material will be saved, which is until the study has received a passing grade (Stahl & King 2020, p.27). To create a transferability in the study it focuses on six interview participants' perspectives on the use of short stories in the classroom. The study focuses on quality rather than quantity of perspectives like in a quantitative study (Bryman 2018, p. 467). The third principle is dependability and here the researcher should use an auditing perspective of how one finalizes the parts of the research process. To create dependability the study is supervised by a supervisor who gives feedback on different parts and the overall analysis (Stahl & King 2020, p.27; Bryman 2018, p. 468). The last principle regarding trustworthiness regards confirmability, meaning one can not remain completely objective but one should not have any involvement that can affect the results (Stahl & King 2020, p.28; Bryman 2018, p. 470).

### **3.6 The Swedish Research Council's Four Research Ethics Considerations**

The Swedish Research Councils' four research ethics considerations are adhered to in the study. These four research ethics considerations are the information, the consent, the confidentiality, and the utilization requirement (Vetenskapsrådet 2002). The information requirement was adhered to when I contacted the participants through email and informed them about the purpose of this study in an attached document (Vetenskapsrådet 2002, p.7). The consent requirement was adhered to when I informed them in the attached documents that this study is voluntary and that they can stop the interview without any consequences (Appendix 11.3 & 11.4). The consent form the participants were required to read gave information about how the data material will be used which will remain anonymous. Before the interview, the participants were asked to sign the consent form by scanning it or sending a

digital one (Appendix 11.5; Vetenskapsrådet 2002, p.9-10). The confidentiality requirement was adhered to where no personal and sensitive data will be presented in the study and such data will remain confidential (Vetenskapsrådet 2002, s. 12). The utilization requirement was adhered to when I informed the participants that the data material received from the interviews would be destroyed when my grade is finalized and the data material will only be used in this study (Vetenskapsrådet 2002, p.14).

## **4. Theoretical Framework**

This section presents the theoretical framework informing the analysis. The theoretical framework regards the implications and advantages of teaching literature and authentic texts in the English classroom. This section also provides a definition of multiculturalism and interculturality.

### **4.1 Teaching Literature**

Theories of foreign language learning emphasize the importance of bringing “authentic” texts into the classroom. Morrow discusses an authentic text as “a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of sort”, meaning that authentic texts are not expressly designed for pedagogical purposes (Morrow 1977, p.13). Authentic texts contain cultural contexts since they are written from the perspective of native speakers. Authentic texts can therefore bring cultural perspectives into the classroom (Kramsch et al. 2000, p. 78). Including such literature in the classroom is a way for EFL learners to learn the language. Incorporating literature as teaching material offers a way to introduce issues from historical perspectives. Such authentic material gives the reader various perspectives through different worldviews. The intent behind “authentic” texts is not targeted towards enhancing language skills in the classroom which is why it counts as authentic material, because the language is genuine and authentic (Collie & Slater 1987, p.5-6).

Including authentic literary texts in the classroom provides a linguistic advantage in enriching the language of the EFL learner. Though it is important to have in mind that some authentic literary texts depending on the time period they are set to be in is not how people speak in modern-day life. Literature can therefore help the reader imagine how things are portrayed in different time periods and settings. When incorporating literature as teaching material in the classroom it is beneficial to combine different literary works (Collie & Slater 1987, p.6-7).

Collie & Slater mentions that one advantage of reading authentic literary texts is that it can help students gain an understanding of cultural values. Even if literary works like novels or short stories are fictional, they can still contain aspects from a real cultural society. Literature

gives the reader a full context of the language in terms of the characters' social background, thoughts, and feelings (Collie & Slater 1987, p.6).

Another advantage of reading literature is that it can help enrich students' writing skills in a way where they learn how sentences and structures are formed. Enhancing students' skill of making “inferences from linguistic clues” can be done by working and reading works of literary texts. Reading literary texts allows the EFL learner to create an understanding of the overall awareness of the language (Collie & Slater 1987, p.7).

An additional advantage that Collie & Slater mention is that literature can foster personal involvement among students that helps them shift focus from a more superficial rule-based system and socio-semantic system to an interest in reading the story when learning the language. Collie & Slater describe it as “the language becomes transparent” meaning the EFL learner does not focus on the so-called mechanical aspects when reading which makes the reader become more motivated when focusing on the characters and the overall story (Collie & Slater 1987, p.7).

Authentic language can help teachers deal with differences in cultural values in that it brings up diverse human issues (Collie & Slater 1987, p.5-6). Culture is derived from human-made “values, symbols, interpretations and perspectives” which is what makes one different from the other (Banks 2002, p.53).

## **4.2 The Heterogenous Classroom**

The terms cultural diversity, multicultural, and multiculturalism were introduced during the late 1960s when countries such as Canada and Australia showed their support for a multicultural identity in society. Immigrants integrated their own cultures into society, which lead to different cultures co-existing in the community. Multicultural approaches are a way to discourage segregation in society and a society that is culturally diverse should aim to only benefit the country (Rattansi 2011, p.7-8). Multiculturalism could be defined as both descriptive and normative. Descriptive multiculturalism describes the demographics of society and its plurality of cultures, ethnicities, and religions. Normative multiculturalism describes the benefit of diversity and cultural differences in society (Lentin 2020, p.204). According to a published article in the Swedish National Agency for Education, a



multicultural society contains the presence of different cultures in terms of a variety of languages, cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions. Schools and classrooms exist in societies that are defined as multicultural and often mirror that appearance (Stier 2020, p.5).

According to Lahdenperä, the term intercultural can in some cases be used equally with other terms such as multicultural or cross-cultural, because they have to do with cultural diversity (Lahdenperä 2004, s.12). Interculturality is a term introduced by “The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization” (UNESCO) in 1974. The idea behind this term is that members of this organization should promote different cultures and their influence to provide a mutual understanding between each other (Lahdenperä 2018, p.1). The description of this term by UNESCO could be described as the starting point of interculturality in connection to educational purposes in the classroom (Lahdenperä 2018, p.1). According to Lahdenperä, the term interculturality could be described as an interaction between individuals who speak different languages and have different cultures. Such interactions lead to individuals having an impact on each other (Lahdenperä 2004, s.24). An intercultural approach in the classroom is a way to create an understanding and awareness of the different cultures that exist in our society. The intercultural approach creates an opportunity for the students to gain knowledge and different perspectives about certain topics (Lahdenperä 2004, s.18). To form an intercultural approach in the classroom, one can use literature as a pedagogical tool to create an understanding among students of other peoples cultures and life circumstances. This approach should give the students an opportunity to develop a mutual understanding of one another and treat others with respect (Lahdenperä 2018, p.4).

## 5. Results and Analysis

This section presents the results and analysis of the interviews. To cite the participants I refer to them as interview participants (IP) A-F (Appendix 11.1). The results from the semi-structured interviews with the teachers are presented according to the major themes that I identified when coding the transcriptions. These themes are: **Short Stories and Reading Motivation, Enriching Language and Learning Skills** and **Content, Culture, and Curriculum**. Each theme is discussed below in connection to the theoretical framework of teaching literature.

### 5.1 Short Stories and Reading Motivation

Motivating students to read is an important but increasingly difficult pedagogical task. All 6 teachers interviewed mentioned that students hardly read and it is difficult to get them to read longer texts from start to finish. The teachers introduced short stories in an effort to encourage them to read and some of them did it as an experiment: “The main reason we started to work with short stories was to attract students into reading because when we brought in like novels. Longer novels. It was usually oh, it's tough to read and it's a bit difficult to get them to do what they have to do (IP E)”. Another teacher seconds this:

But the intent was just simply to give them something different. Give them something simpler to start off with just to give them the idea and just sort of ease them into the process and not just hit them in the face with, you know, this fat book to read. You know, without knowing also, have they read because some might have never read a whole book in their lives. Yeah, you know, and it might be a little bit too much to ask a bunch of already scared first years to read a whole book right away (IP B).

These comments correlate to research findings discussed in the introduction and in more detail in section 6.1, indicating that Swedish students in middle school and secondary school only read for a short amount of time and no longer engage in reading non-fiction and fictional texts (Vintereka et al., 2022, p.119,129). In this context, the short length of short stories can be a way for students to be motivated into reading more. This is because they do not have to read more than a few pages in comparison to a novel that is a lot longer in order to understand the storyline. However, in terms of reading habits, it is difficult to get “[s]tudents to actually get through a whole novel...”, (IP C). The research findings of the study match the

interviewed teachers' perceptions of difficulties in engaging upper secondary school students who hardly read and engage in reading tasks.

Easing students into reading and becoming familiar with literature is done by introducing short stories. Short stories are a way for teachers to adapt to the student's interests and match their learning abilities to the reading task. The teacher's perceptions were that short stories successfully eased the students into reading and into gradually improving their language skills: "So I really like it and I think short stories are a good way of like getting our kids to read a bit more" (IP D). Reading and working with literature can motivate the students more when focusing on the characters and the storyline because they foster a personal involvement in the story (Collie & Slater 1987, p.7). This can correlate to the responses of the participants who said that it is easier for the students to become motivated to read when they find the text or story they read interesting:

I usually pick out something that I myself like but also something that the students can find interesting where they could you know, create a discussion in class about the characters involved or the overall plot or twist of the story. So what I try to do is to show three or four different alternatives on the SmartScreen and inform them what each one is about. I try my best to actually pick something that get them excited hopefully, which can make the process a bit easier when it comes to doing the assignments (IP F).

The interviewed teachers talk more about the general context, characters, and plot when introducing the stories rather than focusing on the mechanical aspects, which research suggests can increase their motivation on reading and focus on the story (Collie & Slater 1987, p.7). Many of the teachers mention that they would "rather read many shorter stories than have them sit and do one long one" because they know that the students do not read the whole novel and therefore choose to read shorter texts where they get to finish it in the classroom (IP A). Short stories go into the storyline a lot quicker than a novel because they are shorter and "things have to sort of get going immediately and things have to sort of happen a bit faster" and the students can finish reading it in one or two lessons (IP B). The interviewed teachers stated that: "you can maybe not read the whole novel during like two classes like it's not possible", which is why they prefer to work with short stories because not as many lessons are needed for students to finish reading.

Many of the teachers mention that they do not want to give the students anything to read at home, or any homework. "They can finish a short story in a lesson or two so they don't have

to read anything at home”, which is why they do most work in class (IP F). In order to get the students more motivated in terms of reading, teachers lean towards short stories because “it's just easier to get them to sort of be optimistic about literature when they realize that, ok, we only have to read,..., a few pages and still it counts as literature” (IP B). Many of the teachers talked about short stories and their benefits in terms of getting the students to read and the possibility to read different genres of short stories. ”Short stories are like a smaller package” or a “pocket format” of different genres that one can introduce to the students (IP D & IP E).

## 5.2 Enriching Language and Learning Skills

A clear theme that emerged from all interviews is that teachers work to enhance general learning skills and a full range of foreign language skills when working with short stories. Reading short stories, according to the interviewed teachers, encourages practice and improvement in speaking, listening, and writing as well as analytical and visualizing skills. In terms of incorporating short stories in the classroom, the majority of teachers use them in English 5 and 6. The benefit of incorporating short stories is that students enhance different areas of their learning and language skills. Teachers incorporate short stories in the classroom because: “It's such a versatile tool when it comes to approaching literature because it can be used in so many different ways” (IP C). Including literature in the classroom is according to Collie & Slater a linguistic advantage to enrich the language of the EFL learner (Collie & Slater 1987, p.7). Since short stories are shorter than novels, teachers think that: “it's just it feels like it has no limits what you can do with short stories in the classroom. It's a brilliant tool to use.” (IP C). Short stories are also a tool that can help cater to student's individual abilities and language levels:

Some students read quite well and quickly, and some take a lot more time and so I just thought that short stories could sort of even the playfield a bit, because if you're a fast reader then you can basically go over it again and try to find some more details or things that you may have missed. And if you're a slow reader, well, then you don't have that much to read, and you don't feel left behind (IP B).

All interviewed teachers work with enhancing the students' reading skills in terms of getting them to read more, which was the overall intention behind assigning short stories for many of the teachers, as previously discussed. The teachers intended to show students that even though short stories are considered short it is essential “... to understand that even short texts can be difficult” (IP A).

Besides working with short stories to enhance the student's reading skills, some of the teachers focused on enhancing the students' vocabulary skills. The teachers found that incorporating short stories is a great way for students to learn new vocabulary and be introduced to difficult words depending on the story and context:

We should learn vocabulary from them... We found that students were more engaged in the sense that they actually were able to read a text from the beginning till the end and have the full sort of picture of it and be able to discuss various questions (IP E).

Some of the participants mentioned that they work with the new vocabulary in terms of adding fillers and how they can work together to create sentences, where they then work with additional grammar skills. “We also tried to work with vocabulary... and adding fillers and practice like how do we use these words in sentences” (IP D). Practicing vocabulary and grammar skills when working with literature can in terms of Collie & Slater enrich students' writing skills in a way where they learn how sentences and structures are formed (Collie & Slater 1987, p.7).

An unexpected finding was that teachers felt that incorporating short stories in the classroom is a way for students to practice enhancing their speaking skills because they engage in group discussions with their classmates: “[t]he students engage in book talks where we sit down and talk about the readings” (IP A). Many teachers found that since the students finish reading from start to finish, they can engage in the discussions more and answer the questions assigned during book talks.

[Students were] ... able to discuss various questions. Without having to feel the pressure of not having been able to finish on time and not having enough information to use in their discussions...Students were able to finish something from A-Z and actually own the material themselves, so without having to feel, Oh my gosh, I haven't had the time to read and I don't understand (IP E).

Teachers feel that there is a beneficial effect of incorporating short stories because students who read the whole story engage in classroom discussions where they can talk about the story and the characters. Therefore, most teachers try to select literature that: “can create a discussion and [be written] about where I know that the students can talk about different characters and their choices etc” (IP F).

Students also get to enhance their writing and analytical skills when working with short stories. All teachers finish their unit with the short stories where the students are going to produce something in writing which could be to write a review, write their own short story, analyze a short story, or do a comparative analysis. The answers were different here. However, they all focused on producing something in writing which aims at enhancing students writing skills. Reading and working with literature is a way for the EFL learner to practice their writing skills of how sentences and structures are formed as well as forming knowledge about “inferences from linguistic clues” (Collie & Slater 1987, p.7).

Furthermore, when working with short stories in the classroom, some of the teachers stated that they work with enhancing the students' analytical and visualizing skills. Students work with analytical skills when discussing: “a theme or moral dilemma of some sort, and different characters that are involved in it” (IP E). Something the students also practice when working with short stories is their visualizing skills. The students get to do an exercise where they are supposed to draw how much they remember from a scene in the story. The purpose is “to show attention to detail and what they had understood so far” (IP E & IP F). Creating a creative and fun way for the students to work while enhancing their learning and language skills helps them shift their focus from a superficial rule-based system and socio-semantic system to where they focus on the story itself. The students become personally involved in the story making the language seem more transparent (Collie & Slater 1987, p.7).

Some of the interviewed teachers mentioned that there is one disadvantage in terms of learning skills when working with short stories. That is that there is not a lot of character development and details in the storyline: “It takes effort and motivation to go through a whole novel, so one of the disadvantages with short stories is that they are in nature relatively short where you do not get to know a character deeper as you would in a novel” (IP C). However, the short story genre demands more from the reader of being able to connect with the story and remain focused. In a novel, it is easier to pick up some details along the way. Many of the interviewed teachers claimed that students experience that when reading short stories one does not get a lot of information about the character's feelings and their own thoughts in comparison to a novel. One of the teachers seconds this about the disadvantage:

This in a way that also tests the students way of being able to read between lines. So trying to create an understanding without too much information having to use all their skills, and sort of understand from subtle meanings. I think in a way it could also be more demanding as well and require more

from the students abilities. But yet again they get to practice this continuously (IP F).

Incorporating literature in the classroom can enhance students' knowledge of linguistic clues when reading (Collie & Slater 1987, p.7). The students practice reading between the lines when reading short stories that do not contain a lot of details, where they themselves get to imagine and be creative about the characters' feelings and fill in the details between the lines

### **5.3 Content, Culture, and Curriculum**

All teachers work with short stories they find interesting. The majority choose short stories from their own experience that they have already read before incorporating them into the classroom. The reason teachers choose short stories from their own experience is to feel confident that the text can be used in connection to the criteria for the English subject, according to the Swedish National Agency for Education. The first thing they review before choosing general literature to work with is the central content of the English subject. This is to make sure that what they are including as teaching material is appropriate and can enhance the student's learning abilities: “[t]he first thing I do, but when you have worked with different units you sort of know what the goals are for the central content, but that is what I look at before anything else” (IP F). In terms of choosing literature to work within the classroom all teachers also find it important “to be sensitive when choosing texts” (IP A) and to have in mind what they portray to the students. The short stories are for different purposes according to the teachers. Some use them to introduce “pieces of cultural and literary history” (IP C). Others use short stories to “create interest for and an understanding for the concept of what a classic is” (IP E). But what all of them focus on is to learn about enhancing the students' learning abilities through “English culture, English society and English history” (IP E). Including authentic literature is a way to give the reader a full context of the language where the EFL learner receives different perspectives (Collie & Slater 1987, p.5-6).

Teachers also take suggestions from students regarding what literature or short stories they want to read and this can result in diversity. Oftentimes they try to provide a variety and “include different perspectives from the Middle East even though it’s West Asia or Levant... because ethics and morals are part of the central content in English” (IP A). Some try to include: “Indian or something South African and African countries. But again, they have ...

some sort of connection with the English-speaking world (IP E). The teacher claims that literature portrays different world views which can include different aspects of ethics and morals. These different world views and perspectives are part of a good education. The majority of teachers describe the schools they work in as multicultural, or as having multicultural aspects. This means that different cultures and backgrounds exist in the classes the teachers have, however, there are some schools mentioned that have students from the same cultural backgrounds, making them more of a majority. Choosing authentic literature from different parts of the world is a way to bring in new perspectives and introduce new cultural values (Collie & Slater 1987, p.5-6). This can help the students develop an intercultural awareness of the different cultural perspectives that are brought up. However, when choosing literature to work with some teachers try to select literature that is “universal” that everyone can relate to. They do not specifically focus on intercultural stories or aspects that the students are going to work with:

I try to pick things that are “universal”, no matter what culture you're from or what background you're from... and I just feel that it sort of spans out more in a way. It doesn't matter where you're from you can most likely relate to all of these things in some way... I don't choose short stories that focus specifically on multicultural aspects. But I think that it sort of can be embedded into the story itself, I mean the characters have different backgrounds or come from different cultures since the story is set in different places (IP B).

Selecting authentic texts that are “designed to convey a real message of sort” is a way for students to connect to the story. It makes the story seem more genuine and authentic which can be easier to relate to (Morrow 1977, p.13; Collie & Slater 1987, p.5-6). Stories that contain different perspectives and values can be a way for students to understand other types of cultures than their own which can create an intercultural approach. According to the teachers reading literature such as short stories can help students understand different perspectives regarding what the characters go through, their backgrounds, and the different details described. “...You can't just like read this you have to understand it culturally and the contexts” (IP A). Such information is an aid for students to understand various cultural contexts. Teachers did not specifically work with interculturality as a theme. However, most stories or literature that are authentic have cultural values and different perspectives students can discuss and compare in order to understand. Authentic literary texts contain a cultural context from the perspectives of the native speaker (Kramsch et al., 2000, p. 78). In literature “[y]ou can understand different like values maybe or the principles of it” (IP F). When



students discuss the readings and try to understand different perspectives regarding the context, history, and cultural backgrounds it is important to discuss them together.

## **5.4 Summary of the Findings**

The results from the interviews were coded into three major themes that were found in the analysis of the material. These themes were considered to be student motivation, enhancement of learning, and language skills in different areas of the student's foreign language skills. The last major theme was selection criteria in relation to the core content of the Swedish National Agency for Education in the English subject to classroom composition, where the teachers select short stories for different purposes and perspectives.

## **6. Discussion**

This section discusses the aim of the study, the results, and the two research questions. The study examines teachers' perspectives on the use of short stories in the English classroom at the upper secondary level in one municipality in Stockholm, Sweden. The study contributes to a new perspective regarding the incorporation of short stories in the classroom. Though teachers' perceptions and experiences of working with short stories can vary, research deals with both students' and teachers' perceptions of short stories.

### **6.1 How do English teachers incorporate short stories as teaching material in the multicultural upper secondary classroom?**

English teachers incorporate short stories as teaching material to motivate and engage the students to read. Many teachers find that students in upper secondary school hardly read as they used to, which relates to the study by Vintereka et al. where students in middle school and secondary school only read for a short amount of time and no longer engage in reading non-fiction and fictional texts (Vintereka et al., 2022, p.119,129). The interviewed teachers in my study rather work with different short stories in the classroom where they know that the students read an entire text. A study by Wonga et al. presents beneficial results in terms of increasing students' motivation when incorporating computer-mediated methods in the classroom in support of teaching literature such as short stories (Wonga et al., 2020, p.521).

When working with short stories the interviewed teachers work with digital tools such as Smartscreens when introducing the short stories to the students. Incorporating blended learning is common these days, where teachers use digital tools such as projectors and computers in the classroom to engage students and vary the lessons.

The short stories teachers select for classroom use come from their own interest in the stories, but also knowing that students will be motivated to discuss the short stories. This result contrasts with Sufanti et.al, where many of the teachers selected short stories from textbooks and other sources (Sufanti et.al 2020, p.118, 120). Before incorporating literature in the classroom the interviewed teachers look at the Swedish national curriculum and the criteria for the English subject. This is to make sure that what they have selected for the students is in line with the requirements of the Swedish National Agency for Education. When incorporating literature in general it is important to be sensitive when choosing texts, in order not to offend anyone regarding something they can be going through or be culturally sensitive. However, two of the short stories that the teachers mentioned for example, “Brokeback Mountain” is about a sexual relationship between two young men, which may be considered sensitive. The same can be said of “Hills Like White Elephants”, which is about an abortion. However, my understanding of selecting different types of stories like the ones they mentioned is that the stories do offer a variety of perspectives in relation to discussing ethics and morals, which is part of the national curriculum. Such stories can be considered authentic because they carry a real message to the reader (Morrow 1977, p.13). These stories can be a way for the teacher to introduce different perspectives that the students can discuss in the classroom.

Two studies mentioned above by Rezai & Naghibian and Feeny & Gajaseni found that including literary texts is a way to raise intercultural awareness and overall competence among students (Rezaei & Naghibian 2018, p.87 & 92; Feeny & Gajaseni 2020, p. 137-138). Including literary texts that contain cultural values helps the students become aware of their own culture and other cultures. The interviewed teachers incorporate short stories for different purposes depending on what goals they are going to work with in the English subject. When working with short stories the teachers focus on the context, characters, and plot rather than jumping to the mechanical aspects of the language right away. Some teachers focus on cultural and literary history when working with short stories and others introduce short stories to explain the concept of a classic. The answers regarding how they work with

short stories were not the same. However, all teachers made sure the stories they selected had a connection to an English-speaking country. Some of the teachers try to vary the literature and include different perspectives where English is spoken, such as in the Middle East, India, South Africa, or Africa. An advantage of using authentic texts from real writers for a specific audience is that they have cultural contexts and can display cultural values. Including such literary works in the classroom is beneficial in terms of bringing new perspectives to discuss. The reason for them to try and provide a variety is that they work in schools that are considered multicultural or have multicultural aspects where students come from different cultures or have different backgrounds. Including literature that portrays different perspectives is also a way to talk about ethics and morals along with culture itself in order to make comparisons of different world views. It is beneficial for the students to receive different perspectives when it comes to discussing literature from around the world. Therefore, authentic texts can be a way for teachers to bring up different cultural values and cultural diversity.

When the teachers choose literature to work with they do not specifically select intercultural aspects, though some teachers mentioned that cultural aspects are embedded within the story since the characters can have different backgrounds or come from different places. The study mentioned above by Sholehuddin et. al, reveals that including short stories that contain values from cultures, religions, and ethnicities is beneficial for students and can motivate them (Sholehuddin et al., 2020, p.840-841). Working with short stories that have interesting storylines and characters leads to students engaging in different discussions with each other. This can help them understand the different perspectives of the story, which can lead to an intercultural understanding. This can be connected to Youngjoo & Changhyun's study where the purpose of their lesson plan was to enhance EFL students' intercultural awareness and learning skills when learning the English language (Youngjoo & Changhyun 2020, p.120 & 126). What some of the teachers try to do is select short stories that are "universal" and classics that the majority of the students can relate to. In terms of choosing "universal" short stories, I interpret this as the story being accessible to everyone in terms of content and can therefore be read and understood by the majority.

## **6.2 What effects of using short stories in the English upper secondary classroom do teachers perceive for themselves and for their students?**

The effects of using short stories in the classroom that teachers perceive for themselves and for their students are similar. The perceived effects of short stories are that they motivate the students to read and be more optimistic about literature in general. The students can finish reading the whole short story and get a sense of accomplishment after reading them. When students complete a literary work it is easier for them to be engaged in book talks and classroom activities because they have knowledge about the story and characters. This helps the students to enhance their reading skills because they read literary works from start to finish. The teachers can also match the short stories to the student's learning abilities in order not to create a difficult level, which can help them be engaged in terms of starting to read and not seeing it as challenging. This is a great way for teachers to ease students into literature and improve their learning skills which can correlate to the study by Spoke Wintersparv (2022) which mentioned that fiction is one of the easiest ways to improve the student's language because the teacher can match the students' interests when choosing literature to work with (Wintersparv 2022, p.454).

Research suggests that short stories help students to enhance different areas of their language and learning skills. The short stories can help the students on enhancing their writing skills, which can be connected to Bartan's (2017) study where short stories affect students' writing skills in different areas such as language, content, and organization (Bartan 2017, p. 70). The interviewed teachers state that the students practice these skills when it comes to planning their texts and adapting the instructions to their own production when writing. Students practice enhancing their speaking skills when working with the short stories by discussing them together in class. Similar results can be found in Ompusunggu's (2018) study, where short stories have a positive effect in enhancing students speaking skills where they feel motivated to learn (Ompusunggu 2018, p.202). The effects of working with short stories that some of the interviewed teachers mentioned were that the students practice their vocabulary skills and learn new words which adds to their vocabulary. These results can be connected to Sembiring's study (2022) which also showed that students found short stories as an interesting and fun way to learn which makes it easier to remember information and new vocabulary (Sembiring 2022, p.151-152). When students practice their vocabulary skills some of the interviewed teachers work with adding fillers to these and create new sentences

which helps the students to practice their grammar skills. This can be connected to both Şentürk & Kahraman (2020) and Sembiring's (2022) study where the results show that short stories can have a successful and positive effect in terms of students learning grammar skills (Şentürk & Kahraman 2020, p.547-548; Sembiring 2022, p.151-152). Other than the mentioned language and learning skills, some of the teachers focus on enhancing the students' analytical and visualizing skills when working with different themes in connection to the stories and assignments.

The unexpected results that the teachers mentioned were that the students experience that short stories do not contain a lot of details in terms of the character's feelings. These experiences were the same for the teachers who mentioned one disadvantage of short stories and that there is not a lot of content in terms of character development. However, the feature of the short story demands more from the reader. This can correlate to the study by Abu Zahra & Farrah, which mentions that short stories are a great way to enhance students' critical thinking, imagination, and overall creativity (Abu Zahra & Farrah 2016, p.23). Students practice being creative and can imagine the characters' feelings or fill in the details in the story. Students get to practice these learning skills when reading short stories that do not contain a lot of details. Short stories are a versatile tool to use in the classroom and can be used for different purposes. The interviewed teachers mentioned that short stories are a great way for students who are new to literature and a way for the teacher to understand their level of learning abilities. Short stories can cater to many students in the classroom, where students who read slowly can take their time and not be overwhelmed by the number of pages they have to read. Students who are fast readers can read the story again and check for details they have missed. Incorporating short stories helps to include students of different levels in the classroom where nobody feels left out.

## **7. Pedagogical Implications**

This study adds to the field of empirical research regarding teachers' perspectives on the use of short stories in the classroom. There is importance in finding out why teachers assign short stories and how they work with them. Introducing short stories according to the teachers helps the students to be engaged and motivated to read. The study by Vintereka et al. (2022), demonstrated that there has been a drop in students reading non-fiction and fiction in school.

Short stories can be a way for teachers to help combat this low reading level because students do not get overwhelmed by the number of pages. Short stories can introduce students to literature and gradually motivate them to start reading more. Incorporating short stories is a versatile tool that can cover different perspectives in relation to culture, time periods, literary history, and themes from authentic texts. Since short stories are short, teachers can include a variety, which can be a way to cater to as many students interests. For future studies, this area could be investigated by comparing how different municipalities in Stockholm, Sweden work with short stories and if there is a difference in terms of their rationale for selection.

## **8. Conclusion**

The present study examines teachers' perspectives on the use of short stories in the English classroom at the upper secondary level in one municipality in Stockholm, Sweden. The research questions focused on: “How do English teachers incorporate short stories as teaching material in the multicultural upper secondary classroom?” and “What effects of using short stories in the English upper secondary classroom do teachers perceive for themselves and for their students?”. The main results show that short stories were intentionally used to motivate and engage students to read. Teachers attempt to be sensitive when selecting literature, in order to not offend anyone or for it to be culturally sensitive. Some teachers select works from around the world since their classrooms have multicultural aspects while others choose literature that is accessible to the majority. The teachers do not specifically select intercultural short stories. However, they state that culture is embedded in the literature and can be discussed from different perspectives. Short stories are a versatile tool that caters to different students' learning abilities and they have the effect of enhancing different areas of students' learning and language skills. One disadvantage students and teachers mention is that short stories do not carry a lot of details about characters and their feelings, however, this demands more from the reader's own imagination and focus to imagine the full picture.

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## **10. Source Material**

Interview 1 2023-04-06 11:00, via Teams

Interview 2 2023-04-07 09:00 via Teams

Interview 3 2023-04-12 09:00 via Teams

Interview 4 2023-04-13 08:30 via Teams

Interview 5 2023-04-17 15:00 via Teams

Interview 6 2023-04-18 08:30 in person

## **11. Appendix**

### **11.1 Information about the Interview Participants**

**Interview Participant A:** This teacher has two advanced degrees in upper secondary education and is a qualified teacher in English. He/she has experience working in different schools that have been heterogenous/multicultural and homogenous. He/she has worked as a teacher for more than 20 years.

**Interview Participant B:** This teacher has a complementary teacher education program and is qualified to teach the subjects of English. He/she has experience working in heterogenous/multicultural schools and has worked as a teacher for more than 10 years.

**Interview Participant C:** This teacher has a degree of master of science in upper secondary education. He is qualified to teach English. He/she has experience working in schools that have been heterogenous/multicultural and homogenous. He/she has worked as an upper-secondary teacher for more than 10 years.

**Interview Participant D:** This teacher has taken English courses and is qualified to teach both English and another subject. He/she is currently teaching English and has worked as an upper-secondary teacher for under 5 years.

**Interview Participant E:** This teacher is qualified in the subjects of English and has experience working in heterogenous/multicultural and homogenous classrooms. He/she also has experience working in preparatory classes and has worked as an upper-secondary teacher for more than 15 years.

**Interview Participant F:** This teacher has a degree of master of science in upper secondary education and is qualified of teaching the subjects English and one other subject. He/she has experience working in heterogenous/multicultural schools and has worked as a teacher for more than 5 years.

## 11.2 Short Stories Teachers Mentioned

Short Stories mentioned	Author & publication year	Number of teachers using the short story	Level of English short stories are used in
“Brokeback Mountain”	Annie Proulx 1997	1	English 6
“A Christmas Carol”	Charles Dickens 1843	1	English 6
“Hills Like White Elephants”	Ernest Hemingway 1927	1	English 6
“A Modest Proposal”	Jonathan Swift 1729	2	English 6
“Everyday Use”	Alice Walker 1944	1	English 6
“The Black Cat”	Edgar Allan Poe 1843	1	English 6
“Lamb To The Slaughter”	Roald Dahl 1953	3	English 5
“Mrs Bixby and the Colonel’s Coat”	Roald Dahl 1959	2	English 5
“Taste“	Roald Dahl 1945	2	English 5
“The Tell-Tale Heart”	Edgar Allan Poe 1843	2	English 6

“Dip in the Pool”	Roald Dahl 1952	1	English 5
“The Hitchhiker”	Roald Dahl 1977	1	English 5
“The Umbrella Man”	Roald Dahl 2013	1	English 5
“Parson’s Pleasure”	Roald Dahl 1958	1	English 5
Gothic era (did not specify which one)	Edgar Allan Poe	1	English 6
“The Cask of Amontillado”	Edgar Allan Poe 1846	1	English 5
“The Most Dangerous Game”	Richard Connell 1924	1	English 6
“The Landlady”	Roald Dahl 1959	1	English 5

### 11.3 Information Letter

Dear teacher,

My name is Alexandra Afram and I study a Subject teacher education program with an intercultural profile with a focus on upper secondary school at Södertörns högskola. I am nearing the end of my education and I will start writing my Advanced level essay in English. My study will be about teachers' perspectives on the use of short stories in the English classroom at upper secondary level.

Your participation is essential to the study. I would therefore be grateful if you could contribute your knowledge and experiences of the subject by participating in an interview that takes approximately 30-45 minutes. The interview can be done in person or via Zoom/Teams. The interviews will be recorded for later transcription, but as soon as the study is complete all data will be deleted. All participation in the study is voluntary and you can therefore cancel the interview at any moment. You and your school will be fully anonymized.

In these and other ways, the study adheres to the Swedish Research Council's four research ethics considerations: the information requirement, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement, and the utilization requirement. I need your consent to participate in the study so I will include a consent form with this letter which I can collect at our

in-person interview or, in the case of an interview over Zoom or Teams, you can scan or email to me prior to the interview.

I hope you will agree to participate in this study. Please respond to this email, so that we can agree on a time to meet between the weeks 14,15,16. I am very flexible about meeting times. If you choose to participate in the study I will need to have a copy of the consent form before the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns contact me via e-mail: [18alaf@sun.se](mailto:18alaf@sun.se)

## 11.4 Consent Form

### **Samtycke till behandling av personuppgifter i samband med studentarbete vid Södertörns högskola**

Jag samtycker till att Södertörns högskola behandlar följande personuppgifter i studentarbete i enlighet med nedanstående beskrivningen.

**Vilka personuppgifter kommer att behandlas?:** Namn, e-postadress, ålder och genus

### **Vad är syftet med behandlingen av personuppgifter?**

Intervjun genomförs inom ramen för en litterär uppsats på avancerad nivå på Ämneslärarprogrammet med interkulturell inriktning, termin 10, Södertörns högskola. Intervjun kommer handla om “examining teachers' perspectives on the use of short stories in the English classroom at upper secondary level”.

### **På vilken rättslig grund kommer personuppgifterna att behandlas?**

Personuppgifterna behandlas med **ditt uttryckliga samtycke**. Deltagande i intervjun är helt frivilligt. Du kan när som helst återkalla ditt samtycke utan att ange orsak. Om du inte samtycker till personuppgiftsbehandlingen kan du göra det utan att drabbas av negativa konsekvenser.

### **Lagringsform och skyddsåtgärder:**

Intervjuerna kommer dokumenteras genom digitala skriftliga anteckningar samt ljudinspelningar. Materialet kommer anonymiseras innan det sparas. Anteckningarna sparas på ett lösenordskyddat lagringsutrymme på Onedrive.

### **Lagringstid och gallring:**

Personuppgifterna kommer bevaras tills dess att ändamålet upphör och personuppgifterna kommer därefter att raderas materialet efter betyget tillsätts.

### **Vilka är mina rättigheter?**

Enligt EU:s dataskyddsförordning har du rätt att få ta del av samtliga personuppgifter om dig som hanteras (registerutdrag) Du har även rätt att få dina uppgifter rättade vid fel. Du har även rätt att begära radering, begränsning eller invända mot behandling av personuppgifter. Fortsättningsvis har du rätt till dataportabilitet, dvs. rätt att överföra personuppgifter från en personuppgiftsansvarig till en annan ”utan att hindras”. Du kan när som helst återkalla ditt samtycke utan att behöva ange orsak.

### **Vem ska jag vända till om uppgifter är felaktiga eller jag vill ångra mitt samtycke?**

Behöver du få felaktiga uppgifter rättade, komplettera med saknade uppgifter (rättelse) eller ångrar du ditt samtycke (återkallelse) kan du i första hand kontakta ansvarig student och/eller dennes handledare (se kontaktuppgifter nedan). Du kan även vända dig till Södertörns högskolans dataskyddsombud på [dataskydd@sh.se](mailto:dataskydd@sh.se).

**Personuppgiftsansvarig:** Södertörns högskola är juridiskt ansvarig för studentens personuppgiftsbehandlingar i studentarbeten. Du kan alltid nå Södertörns högskola via e-post [registrator@sh.se](mailto:registrator@sh.se) eller telefon 08 608 40 00.

**Dataskyddsombud:** Har du funderingar eller klagomål om hur dina personuppgifter behandlas kan du alltid vända dig till Södertörns högskolas dataskyddsombud på [dataskydd@sh.se](mailto:dataskydd@sh.se).

**Klagomål:** Är du inte nöjd med högskolans hantering av dina personuppgifter har du alltid rätt att lämna klagomål till Datainspektionen. Du når dem via e-post: [datainspektionen@datainspektionen.se](mailto:datainspektionen@datainspektionen.se) eller telefon 08-657 61 00.

### **Kontaktuppgifter till ansvarig(a) student(er) och handledare:**

Ansvarig för kursen är Liz Kella, docent i Engelska, vid Södertörns högskola. E-post: [Liz.kella@sh.se](mailto:Liz.kella@sh.se)

Intervjun genomförs av Alexandra Afram, student på ämneslärarprogrammet vid Södertörnshögskola. E-post: [18alaf@sun.se](mailto:18alaf@sun.se)

### **Samtycke med underskrift**

Genom mitt undertecknande nedan bekräftar jag att jag har tagit del av ovanstående information och är införstådd med hur mina personuppgifter kan komma att behandlas. Jag är medveten om att mitt deltagande är helt frivilligt och att jag kan avbryta mitt deltagande i intervjun utan att ange något skäl.



**Datum och ort:**

---

**Underskrift:**

---

**Namnförtydligande:**

---

## 11.5 Digital Consent Form

### Deltagit information av samtyckesblankett

”Jag bekräftar att jag har tagit del av informations och-samtyckesblankett som bifogades i e-post 2023-X-X till mig. Jag är införstådd med hur mina personuppgifter kan komma att behandlas. Jag är medveten om att mitt deltagande är helt frivilligt och att jag kan avbryta mitt deltagande i studien utan att ange något skäl. Jag bekräftar med denna e-post att jag ger mitt samtycke till att mina personuppgifter behandlas inom ramen för studien ”teachers' perspectives on the use of short stories in the English classroom at upper secondary level”.

## 11.6 Interview Guide

### General questions approx. 5-10 minutes

- Tell me a little about yourself as a teacher, your school, and the English classes you have now.
- How long have you worked at X Highschool?
- How would you describe the school that you work in? What characterizes it?
- What does the linguistic/national make-up of the current classroom look like? (Are there different kinds of nationalities, ethnicities, and cultures?)

### Specific questions approx. 30-45 minutes

- Tell me about your experiences of using short stories in the classroom.
- Tell me about this/Can you talk more about this? How would you describe this (large topic)?

1. Level of English class in which stories figure

2. Titles of stories and formats (abridged versions? In text books?)
3. The rationale for use of short stories (including connection to National Curriculum)
4. The rationale for selection of particular short stories
5. Activities in connection with the stories (examples of HOW)
6. Assessment of skills in connection to stories
7. Teacher evaluation of using short stories (advantages/disadvantages)
8. Teacher perception of student responses to reading and activities.