"They can cut out the world as it is, and just move to the world of ideas."

A Qualitative Study on How Upper Secondary Teachers of English in Sweden Introduce Learners to Different Genres of Fiction.

Catharina de Vries & Emelie Strandberg

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“They can cut out the world as it is, and just move to the world of ideas.”
A Qualitative Study on How Upper Secondary Teachers of English in Sweden Introduce Learners to Different Genres of Fiction, and the Beneficial Outcomes of Using the Fantasy Genre

de Vries, Catharina
Strandberg, Emelie
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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore ways in which ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers introduce different forms of literary writing such as poems, plays, fiction, genres and fantasy in the ESL classroom. The main method used was semi-structured interviews with six upper secondary ESL teachers in the South of Sweden. The interview questions were analyzed taking into account current research within the area, and further based on our own experience. The benefits of using the fantasy genre in teaching was one of the main focuses for this study. The compiled results showed varying strategies to teaching fiction in general. Only fifty percent of the interviewed teachers would actively have chosen the fantasy genre in their teaching practice. However, the interviewees saw potential beneficial outcomes from using the fantasy genre. All but one would consider incorporating the fantasy genre in their future teaching. Despite the negative view on fantasy being an unhealthy escapism, the positive effects outweigh the negative. In conclusion, the results and the analysis are in line with the established author Lloyd Alexander who states the following: “Fantasy is hardly an escape from reality. It’s a way of understanding it.”

Keywords

Fiction, genres, fantasy, ESL teachers, teaching strategies, reading culture, escapism
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1. Introduction

In the Swedish English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom of today, it is, in our experience, rare to hear young adults say that they enjoy reading, both during school hours and in their free time. As future ESL teachers, we believe it is our responsibility to encourage and motivate our students to read fiction and experience a range of different related genres, such as romance, horror, fantasy etc. Not only will the reading experience be enjoyable when provided with time and support from the teacher, it will furthermore be beneficial for the ESL students’ vocabulary and writing skills (Barton 2013). Lisa Zunshine discusses in her work *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (2006) the significance of using fiction in the ESL classroom and the cognitive rewards that can be gained from reading, such as reading between the lines and understanding advanced concepts such as symbolism. This not only supports our view on the importance of reading fiction, but is, moreover, directly linked to a cognitive view of learning.

One of the questions we asked ourselves for this project is how working with fiction in the ESL classroom could be made more approachable for both the teacher and the students. Furthermore, what strategies do ESL teachers need to utilise to encourage their students to read a range of different genres within fiction? We consider it essential to introduce students to a variety of related genres, especially those they might not come across otherwise. One of the genres we find is often forgotten is the fantasy genre. In short, fantasy is a literary genre which may include secondary worlds, magic and other supernatural features. Studies indicate that teachers often assume fantasy is only or mainly for male students; however, there is currently a large selection of low fantasy novels that we believe teenage female students would enjoy reading (Nilson 2012, p. 135). We also believe the fantasy genre can help the students who are less motivated to read, and also make them realise that reading does not always have to be forced, it can also be enjoyable.

We wanted to investigate teachers’ views on the fantasy genre, and to discover if and how they use it in an ESL classroom. We find this relevant since we have noticed many benefits from reading works within this genre, both for ourselves and also for our students. Fantasy can be an escape from reality to a place where everything and anything is possible. It can increase the ESL students’ interest in reading, and may, later on, lead to a possibility they will explore other genres. Moreover, it is important for the research to investigate a belief that the
fantasy genre defends escapism, imperialism, oppression of women and glorifying of wars, or if this is merely a common prejudice (Bjällerstedt-Mickos 2004, p.102).

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how ESL teachers introduce fiction and different related genres, such as classics, drama, fantasy etc., to motivate ESL students to read more and encourage them to enjoy reading. It is in our belief that by introducing different genres all with inherent benefits, students can be encouraged to read more. However, we also believe that introducing a popular genre like fantasy, which we believe many teenagers enjoy, could inspire the students to read and explore other less popular genres to a greater extent.

Six semi-structured interviews were held with ESL teachers who work at different upper secondary schools in the south of Sweden. The teachers interviewed were those we have met while doing our practical placements, or recommended through teacher contacts. It was important for us to have a mixture of genders and ages among the interviewed teachers to give an increased credibility to our study.

The following research questions were formed with the intention of investigating how ESL teachers introduce and work with different genres within fiction in the classroom. In particular, we wanted to examine whether the teachers use the fantasy genre while teaching, and what benefits they might possibly see from using this specific genre. The research questions were as follows (see page 23 for the ways we hoped the questions would be interpreted):

1. How do teachers introduce fiction in the ESL classroom?
2. What strategies do ESL teachers apply to motivate their students to read different genres of fiction?
3. Do ESL teachers see any benefits from using the fantasy genre?

The interview questions (see appendix 9.1), which were connected with our research questions, were well answered in our interviews. In some cases more specific questions had to be asked to achieve longer and more relevant answers. We were also well prepared with
additional questions, which is in line with the method of the semi-structured form we had chosen for our interviews. (The interview questions can be found in section 8.1)

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Why do we Read Fiction?

As future ESL teachers, it is, in our opinion, important to explore how teachers in the ESL classroom introduce and teach fiction in order to promote reading by students. Bo Lundahl argues that using fiction in an ESL classroom is crucial for students’ language development as well as for their reading ability (2012, p. 229). Theory of mind (ToM) is a well-known psychological concept explained by Zunshine as a way of understanding what another person is thinking without it being explicitly said. For example, when a person sees another person drinking a glass of water, the observer could reach the conclusion that the person drinking is thirsty (2006, p. 6). She concludes that the reason people read or should be reading fiction is that it engages the theory of mind (2006, p. 164). Zunshine’s approach to encouraging the reading of fiction is also in line with a cognitive view, which means that the learning process first and foremost takes place within the learner’s brain.

1.2.2 Benefits of Different Genres

Jeremy Harmer claims that for students to achieve the maximum benefits from their reading, be it fictional or factual texts, they need to partake in both extensive and intensive reading (2007, p. 283). When reading intensively, students are encouraged to work very closely with short pieces of text. According to Harmer (2007) intensive reading is designed to enable the learners to develop their ability to read for a variety of different purposes, such as gist (finding the general meaning of text), reading for special detail, or for reading between the lines. However, while the teacher’s aim is to encourage students to read for general understanding and not to care too much about what each and every word means, the students tend to want to understand each word (p.286). When asking students to read intensively, the teacher needs to make it clear to the students what they are going to read, the purpose with the reading, i.e. not focus on each individual word, and find strategies for how to achieve it. Furthermore, when working with reading comprehension it is important the students are allowed to read on their
own and for the teacher not to interrupt them while doing so. It is also of importance, when reading intensively, that the students receive feedback on answers to questions by asking the students where in the text they thought the relevant information existed. If the students have not understood this, it indicates to the teacher that the students may have a comprehension problem. Finally, together with the students, the teacher can discuss the language featured in the text (Harmer 2007, p. 286-287). The aim of extensive reading, on the other hand, is to get the students to read as much as possible, often in their own time away from the classroom. It is characterised by exposing the reader to a lot of different texts and lengths, on a level that is appropriate for the reader. The reading is for pleasure and should motivate students to read even more. One of the conditions for successful extensive reading is that the students need to understand the material they are reading (Harmer 2007, p. 283). If students struggle to read the text, they will no longer read for pleasure. We believe that it is important that students start by doing extensive reading to motivate them to read more. If it is hard to motivate the students to read, it is, in our belief, easier to start with a text the students may enjoy, and, later introduce them to other texts where they read more intensively and for other purposes. Furthermore, if a teacher chooses a genre students enjoy, the outcome could be beneficial for the students. Hence, if students start to enjoy their reading, there is an improved chance that their reading skills will progress and they will subsequently keep reading. However, if a teacher begins by giving a non-motivated student a novel which is too far above the student’s level of comprehension, there is a risk they will neither keep reading nor progress any further. This is the reason it is vital to give students a novel they will both enjoy and learn from. Therefore, the intended reader should determine the genre and level of reading material.

1.2.3 Creating a Reading Culture in the Classroom

As ESL teachers, we want to create a reading culture which will benefit all students, and help them reach the learning objectives which are required for the English language courses. We believe that by using well researched strategies to promote reading and by being attentive to the students’ interests and needs, a well-functioning reading culture could be developed.

It takes time to build a well-functioning reading culture in the classroom on a level that works for all students. It is, however, essential to create this reading culture if we, as teachers, want to motivate students to become more engaged and active readers. Our opinion is that teachers should help students find the joy in the reading of fiction. Lundahl claims that stories have a
set place in teaching language since the ability to express experiences is an essential skill (2012, p. 403). Fiction, and its various genres, is something the students should be exposed to in schools according to the Swedish national curriculum for English (Skolverket, 2011). It is important that the teacher explains to the students why they are asked to read a certain text and, more importantly, the reasons for reading it. Furthermore, pointing out the benefits from reading will also help encourage the students to read more. We believe that it is important that ESL teachers inform the students of the learning objectives of each reading-related task in order for the students to understand what is required of them.

Lundahl claims that as the students’ knowledge develops, they will begin to discover new connections and relations in the stories and that they can also benefit from stories that are new to them (2012, p. 403-404). In our opinion, students should be exposed to stories from an early age to stimulate their imagination. Moreover, if students understand how the reading of fiction enables them to meet new characters, understand history and learn about social issues in the world, the ESL teacher has made progress in creating a reading culture in the classroom. Lundahl calls this kind of learning ‘intercultural learning’ (2012, p. 404). Not only will the reading teach the students about all these elements, it will also increase their vocabulary. Therefore, we believe that students who read continually widen their vocabulary compared to those who do not read.

On a more specific level, we have to find very clear ways of working with fiction. For example, teachers can use strategies such as getting the learners to work on pre-reading, during reading and post-reading activities. An example of a pre-reading activity is for the teacher to discuss the main theme of the novel, the title, show a picture etc., to motivate the learners into the text.

1.2.4 Fantasy in the ESL Classroom

In the last century, fantasy, which, as noted earlier, is a genre which may include secondary worlds, magic and supernatural creatures (see section 2.3.2 What is Fantasy? for a more extensive definition), has been a growing and popular genre within fictional literature and thus a genre that may be worked with in the ESL classroom. It has been claimed that fantasy is a genre mainly or only for boys due to the limited number of female characters featured in older fantasy novels. However, in the last decade, fantasy novels increasingly feature a female
main character resulting in more girls reading fantasy novels (Nilson 2012, p. 135). Maria Nilson (2010) argues that working with fantasy novels, such as *Harry Potter* or *Eragon* has been rewarding in various ways, not least because it is a genre teenagers enjoy reading (ibid, p.6). Moreover, Nilson emphasizes that fantasy includes themes such as matureness and taking responsibility for one’s actions, which are themes teenagers are prone to enjoy (ibid, p. 8). Christina Olin-Scheller argues that more teenagers request to read fantasy in the ESL classroom, and to not meet the students’ interests and desires in this case might inhibit their interest in reading interest instead of encouraging and developing it (Olin-Scheller in Nilson, 2010, p. 9). However, Olin-Scheller highlights the need to also provide the students with the tools to critically analyse this form of fiction. However, the authors does not give any examples of what these tools might be (Olin-Scheller in Nilson, 2010 p. 9).

Nilson’s positive view of working with the genre contrasts with Mia Welander’s (2012) that fantasy can be devastating for the way teenagers handle reality, as the genre encourages them to escape from the real world. However, this latter view has often been criticised. As a response to the criticism, Welander conducted a study investigating whether fantasy is indeed an unhealthy escapism that may damage a teenager’s mental development. In the study, Welander first discusses her own beliefs, then introduces existing theories on the topic, and concludes with a section on teenagers’ thoughts and reflections. In her study, where three of the respondents defined themselves as “book lovers”, all the teenagers saw no negative effects of escapism in fantasy novels (2012, p.186-187). What is more, Welander discovered that the fantasy genre may actually have beneficial outcomes, such as encouraging teenagers to handle reality in a positive way (2012, p. 178). She also concluded that fantasy does not encourage unhealthy escapism after all.

Helene Ehriander and Maria Nilson (2012) suggest different strategies to using fantasy in the classroom, and argue it is a way for children and adults’ literature to meet, which makes it rather appropriate for teenagers. There are themes to be found in the fantasy genre which all ages can relate to, such as coming of age, good and bad, love friendship etc. These themes can of course be found it other literary genres as well. However, we believe, that they are very clear, and easier to determine in a fantasy novel, and they may be easier for the reader to accept since they occur in a secondary world.
2. Literature Review

In this part of the study we will introduce previous studies within this research area, and summarize these for clarification. The research for this project was carried out both through active literature research online, and through course literature. Within the field of research, studies have been executed on how to teach different genres, including fiction, in an ESL classroom. Another focus has been to identify and apply the studies on the benefits of teaching fantasy to teenagers.

2.1 Previous Research

Bo Lundahl argues in his work Engelsk språkidaktik - Texter, kommunikation, språkutveckling (2012) that stories have a place in learning a language since it is an essential way to express experiences (2012, p. 403). Furthermore, he shows that the use of fiction in the Swedish ESL-classroom is essential for language ability and for its development. Lundahl claims that stories engage the imagination and can help develop empathy. In addition, he finds that stories help us see connections and remember something already learned. Stories also create meaning and mediate knowledge (2012, p. 403).

Another author who argues for the benefits of using fiction in an ESL-classroom is Geoff Barton. In his work Don't Call it Literacy (2013) he suggests that reading literature has a major impact on teenagers’ life changes, and believes that it is every teacher's job to help the students achieve good reading, writing and communication skills. Barton emphasizes the view that it is the teacher's responsibility to promote the pleasure of reading. Furthermore, he advocates creating a reading culture as a way to promote the love of reading instead of reading as a “functional activity” (2013, p. 80, 119).

In The Practice of English Language Teaching (2007) Jeremy Harmer explains that each genre carries its own characteristics and basics so that the reader can easily determine which genre a text belongs to (2007, p.30-32). As with Lundahl and Barton, Harmer argues for the benefits of promoting a love for reading. He describes the importance of compiling a “library of suitable books” for the students, and that this is well worth the money spent. Harmer, moreover, believes it is of importance to identify the reading level and genre for each book in order for students to also easily identify what kind of book they are dealing with (2007,
Furthermore, he highlights the positive outcomes of allowing the students to read novels of their choice, following their own interests and preferences. The reason for this is that it does not matter what students read, as long as they read. However, it is important that the students report back on their reading in a variety of ways (2007, p. 285).

Lindsay Clandfield (2016) discusses in her article “Teaching materials: Using Literature in the EFL/ESL Classroom” the significance of literature and reflects upon the use of English as a Foreign language (EFL) and ESL in the classroom. This article discusses different strategies which could be used to motivate the students into reading. Clanfield suggests ways the teacher can encourage the students to see reading as an important part in the learning process, and also develop an understanding of the society in which they live. Clanfield uses a five step approach when working with literature for second language learners (see appendix 9.3). This approach mirrors a typical three step ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) approach used in the ESL classroom which divides the lesson into three stages which aim to motivate and activate the student, as well as getting them to engage in some close reading.

When it comes to motivating students in the reading process and their cognitive development, teachers do, in our experience and from research, find this to be a challenge. However, using a cognitive approach can help teachers stimulate the learner in this process by applying different strategies in line with the theory. The positive outcomes of reading fiction, according to Zunshine, could be the same or similar to benefits of pretend play where there is “...a shared capacity to stimulate and develop the imagination” (Zunshine 2006, p.17). Shahin Vaezi (2006) in his article “Theories of Reading” explores the cognitive view with the help of Dole et al. (1991), who suggest that previous experience and knowledge is essential in order to understand and interpret a text (Vaezi 2006, n.pag.). Rumelhart (1977) describes this as schemata theory; the "building blocks of cognition". The theory falls within the cognitive view and emphasizes the importance of the learner’s already possessed knowledge, and how (s)he recalls it from memory in the learning process. When teaching fiction, the students are encouraged to actively process personal memories and experiences that come to mind as they read the story. This is done in order to fully comprehend the purpose, theme or motifs in the novel. The building blocks of cognition could thus be understood as a way of building up knowledge from previously retrieved information (Vaezi 2006, n.pag.).
In *The Cambridge companion to fantasy literature* Edward James discusses the emergence of the modern fantasy genre and its influence on readers. In the 21st century, JRR Tolkien, the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, has been named “the author of the century” and his books are the most popular literature within English fiction, even beating classic novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen (2012, p. 62). To really understand how much Tolkien has actually influenced and helped the fantasy genre to grow, one should carefully study the texts he has produced, such as *The Lord of the Rings* which contains many of those characteristics that are included within the fantasy genre, for example secondary worlds, magic, creatures, etcetera. Fantasy has always been a part of literature; however, it was not accepted as a specific literary genre before Tolkien’s series was published. As Tolkien has had such a deep influence on the genre, many authors have found it difficult to escape following in his footsteps (2012, p.62).

Richard Mathews (2002) focuses on the beneficial outcomes of working with fantasy and how it affects the mind of young adults. He writes about the established fantasy author, Ursula Le Guin, and compares and contrasts the author to JRR Tolkien. In doing so he explores, among other things, the language used in the imaginative worlds they have created. The way these fantasy stories are written is of importance since the authors, as Mathew points out, use language in a particularly powerful way. For example, Tolkien constructs a complete new language, such as Elvish in his stories, while Le Guin suggests new linguistic terms. Mathews states that fantasy is a way to discover identity and love.

Ehriander and Nilson (2012) discuss several ways to incorporate the fantasy genre in the ESL classroom, in their book *Ett trollspö på katedern*. They suggest different strategies of working with the genre, as well as providing examples of different fantasy novels. The gender perspective is a major focus as it provides much support to counter the many presumptions that fantasy is only for boys. Ehriander and Nilson give examples where the female character is in focus and necessary for the story, for example, Molly Weasly in *Harry Potter*. Mrs. Weasly might be seen as a warm mother figure, but when facing dark power, she is willing to do what it takes to protect her family and kills Bellatrix Lestrange, a female villain, and in doing so helps the good to conquer the bad.
Figure 1 presents the academic definitions of genres.

**Figures 1. Academic definitions**

**Types of text**

**Fiction**

- **Classics**
  A classic novel is read generation after generation and is still relevant to the reader. (The definition of a classic in literature 2014)

- **Fantasy**
  A fantasy novel may include secondary worlds, magical creatures, magic and an unexpected turn of events. It can also be sub-categorized into high- and low fantasy. Fantasy could be described as fairytales for teenagers. (Jansson 1995, p. 350)

- **Drama**
  A drama novel includes three focus units: Time, room and the plot. The story usually takes place within 24 hours, in the same place and with the same action. Drama has two sub-categories which are tragedy and comedy. Tragedy ends in an unhappy way and comedy in a humorous way. (Jansson 1995, pp. 31, 80)

- **Romance**
  A romance novel focuses on emotions and an imaginative life with a romantic setting or beautified nature. It has a focus on the love between two people and a hopeful ending. (Jansson 1995, p. 134)

- **Sci-Fi**
  A sci-fi novel includes scientific discoveries or advanced technology, which could be either real or imaginary. (dictionary.com)

- **Magical Realism**
  A magical realism novel is about the real world with elements of magic, where the real world is in focus and the magical elements play a minor part. Magical realism also presents the extraordinary that occurs in everyday life. (Cliffsnotes 2016)

**Factual texts**

- **Horror**
  A horror novel includes different elements of standard procedures to create certain suspense. These types of stories could include voices from ghosts, graveyards and even some supernatural elements. (Jansson 1995, p. 134)

- **Thriller**
  A thriller novel builds up excitement and suspense throughout the story. It usually involves illegal activities, espionage, sex and violence. (Writer’s Digest University)

- **Biographies**
  A biography novel is a story about a real person and the stories in his/her life. They can be written in by both the person in focus or by an outsider. Biographies are always written in a retrospective perspective. They describe what has happened earlier in a person’s life. (Malloy 2011, p.66)
One of the problems we found during the interviews was that the respondents were unsure of how to categorise the literature they were working with. Therefore we found it necessary to provide our respondents with our own definitions of the different genres discussed (see p.17-19 figure 2). In contrast a more academic definition of all the genres in the study can be found in the figure on the previous page (s.14).

2.2 Curriculum

As we have seen, reading of fiction is important, and it is reflected in the Swedish curriculum for English learners. The following part of the study presents the passing grade (grade E) for English 5-7 which focus on fiction and different genres.

2.2.1 English 5 Learners

At English 5 students should be exposed to “Literature and other fiction”. However the terms “genre” or “fiction”, in these parts of the curriculum, are not specified but we interpret it as genres within fiction. It is more specified in the curriculum for English 6 and 7 (see below).

In order to be able to gain a pass, the student should be able to “understand the main content and basic details of English spoken at a varying speed and in clearly expressed written English in various genres. Students show their understanding by in basic terms giving an account of, discussing and commenting on content and details, and with acceptable results act on the basis of the message and instructions in the content.” (Skolverket, 2011)

English 5 learners, according to this quote, need to not only be able to understand the content when reading, but also participate in discussions. This implies that the learner must possess enough reading and comprehension skills to understand general messages which might include figurative meanings, character analysis etcetera.

2.2.2 English 6 Learners

At English 6, the teacher should be including the following genres: “Contemporary and older literature, poetry, drama and songs” (Skolverket, 2011).
In order to gain a pass, the student should be able to “understand the main content and basic details of English spoken at a varying speed and in clearly expressed written English in various genres. Students show their understanding by in basic terms giving an account of, discussing and commenting on content and details, and with acceptable results act on the basis of the message and instructions in the content” (Skolverket, 2011).

English 6 learners, according to this quote, need to know not only figurative meanings and to understand a simpler novel but also the structure and situations and context in a text to form a wider comprehension of a text. This quote directly refers to a variety of genres as being essential.

2.2.3 English 7 Learners

“The teaching in this course should cover the following core content: (...) Contemporary and older literature and other fiction in various genres such as drama.” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 3, author’s translations)

In English 7, the curriculum is more specific as to what the student needs to read, such as older literature and other fiction in various genres such as drama. This clearly states that the students should be exposed to different genres of fiction. However, it is more narrow than the curriculum for English 5 and 6, as it has more detailed requirements as to what the students need to have accomplished by the end of the course. It is also more specific in English 7 with regards to what ‘genre’ actually means, since it is placed in the context of older literature and other fiction.

2.3 Key Words and Definitions

This section will identify key terms and definitions of relevant aspects of this project. One of the issues we noticed during the interviews for this project was the lack of knowledge regarding the definition of genres. Another obstacle was that teachers interviewed tended to associate fantasy as something “lengthy” and “heavy”, something which for example in low fantasy (see page 20 for definition) is not necessarily true. It seems relevant to identify these
terms as the question on potential benefits of using fantasy in the interviews made the respondents hesitant about whether they would have time to teach such a challenging genre.

2.3.1 Genres

Since an issue of how to define genres occurred while interviewing, we felt it was of importance to explicitly define the different genres in our own terms. The genres referred to by the respondent ESL teachers are titled and defined in the next page (s.18) in the way we defined them during the interviews. We are well aware that these terms are simplified, but they were an effective working tool. The more academic definitions can be found in figure 1 on page 14.
Figure 2 presents the authors’ definitions of the literary genres.

- **Fiction**
  - **Classics**
    A classic novel has many different definitions but most would agree that it is a timeless story applicable to any time period. It can also be a representation of the period in which it was written.
  - **Fantasy**
    A fantasy novel may include secondary worlds, magical creatures, magic and unexpected turn of events. It can also be sub-categorized into high- and low fantasy.
  - **Magical Realism**
    A magical realism novel is about the real world with elements of magic, where the real world is in focus and the magical elements play a minor part.
  - **Sci-Fi**
    A sci-fi novel often deals with the future, high technology, space, space travel, time travel and multiple universes.
  - **Drama**
    A drama novel is often written and performed in a poetic way. The reader follows one or more characters and it is often written as a manuscript. Drama includes many sub-categories, however, they all follow the same model. To summarize; drama is the performance of a written text.
  - **Romance**
    A romance novel must revolve around two people as they grow romantic feelings for each other and work towards a relationship. It must also include a conflict which should be linked to the relationship between the two. It ends an optimistic way.
  - **Horror**
    A horror novel is a story where the reader experiences a sense of dread or fears.
  - **Thriller**
    A thriller novel often keeps the reader on his/her feet. As a story builds up to a climax, it usually contains plot twists and cliff-hangers.

- **Factual texts**
  A factual text is a text which contains facts and not assumptions.

- **Biographies**
  A biography novel is a story about a real person and the stories in his/her life. They can be written in by both the person in focus or by an outsider.
2.3.2 What is Fantasy?

We believe that many students and teachers may ask themselves: “What is Fantasy actually?” The answer could be, according to Edward (2012) that it is something that does not exist in our world, but still is partly reality (ibid, n.pag.). A fantasy story is often about a secondary world filled with magic, trolls, mythological beasts and other supernatural creatures. While many people have the view that fantasy is a substandard genre or a genre for children, we believe this is, however, not the case. While reading fantasy the reader must accept the world the author is describing and, furthermore, let go of rational thinking and try to be present in the given world. With this said, we feel children might have an easier time doing this since their view of the world is more limited and they often have a wider imagination. In our view, the fantasy world should never be seen as metaphoric, instead, it should be perceived as the world being explicitly described.

2.3.3 High and Low Fantasy

There are different forms of fantasy and the most common way to describe them as done in current researched literature is to use the terms high and low fantasy. In this part of the study, we define the differences between the two sub genres.

Low fantasy may be defined as stories where very little magic is featured. Sometimes there is no magic at all, which, in some cases, makes it hard to determine whether it is fantasy or not (Long, 2015 p.10). A brief summary of low fantasy is that it often focuses more on the real world than on a secondary world. An example of this is Twilight, which takes place in Seattle in the USA, but includes magical elements. High fantasy, on the other hand, are stories that are filled with magic and magical features. High fantasy can easily be recognised by their secondary worlds, wizards, spells and magical creatures (Long, 2015 p. 8).

The difference between high and low fantasy is described in a recent article by Caroline Ho (2017), where she uses specific examples to explore the worlds in which the stories take place. She writes that the most common way of separating the two sub genres is by determining to what extent they take place in a secondary world or on Earth. This is supported by Long (2015). Ho explores this theory and compares Harry Potter to The Magicians where both stories partially take place on this earth but one of the two is still categorized as “higher” fantasy than the other. Hence, The Magicians (mostly taking place in the real world) would be
subcategorised as low fantasy compared to *Harry Potter* which mainly takes place in a secondary world. According to Ho, the amount of magic used in a fantasy novel (or book series), “…and how heavily magic features into the plot” (Ho, 2017, n.pag) could likewise be a determining factor whether it could be “high” or “low” fantasy. She later explores the importance of the plot, theme and where the main focus lies in the story, and how that could be another factor when categorizing the sub genres. She uses the example of *A Song of Ice and Fire* (otherwise known as *Game of Thrones*) where the attention is more on a military conflict yet includes magical creatures. However, the same could be applied in *Harry Potter*, where there is a clear fight between good and evil which is often a common theme in high fantasy novels.
3. Methodology

The following part of the essay is a description of the method used for carrying out the study; how it was executed, and what material was collected for analysis. Finally, a critical discussion will be presented on the choice of method.

Most of the interviews were performed in the school where the respondents are working. However, one of the respondent’s interview took place by the phone. To give more validity to the results, we selected teachers of various ages and experiences, and who teach a variety of programs.

The interviews started with shorter and easier questions, as Monica Dalen suggests in her work *Intervju som metod* (2015 p. 35). These questions were more general questions about the teachers themselves while the questions later on were longer and more relevant for the study itself. We encouraged the respondents to answer as clearly and in as much detail as possible, thereby ensuring that our material would be as valid and useful as possible.

3.1 Performance of interviews

We decided that the most efficient way to collect data for this essay was to use interviews, more specifically, semi-structured interviews. The reason was that we wanted to make sure to have the most essential questions at hand, but still create space for follow-up questions that might be needed in order to receive more open and honest answers. However, most questions were prepared beforehand which is sometimes unusual for semi-structured interviews. The respondents were given quite open questions and they were given time to reflect and develop their own answers, according to their own experience in teaching. The questions asked in the interviews can be found in the appendices (8.1).

Dalen (2015) describes how to perform interviews and how to create useful questions within a subject. She stresses the importance of having a well thought through interview frame work, especially when conducting a semi-structured interview. With this in mind, we carefully thought through each question and formulated them as clearly as possible to prevent confusion or misunderstanding while interviewing. The respondents were encouraged to use their own words and talk freely about the subject. They could also spontaneously describe different situations where they worked with a variety of fiction in the classroom. We also
made sure, as Dalen (2015) stresses, that each question was clearly connected to the theme of our study and that they were relevant to the research questions stated in the beginning of this essay (2015, p.35-36).

The respondents are addressed throughout the essay as Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, etcetera. The teachers’ genders and ages will be listed at the beginning of the analysis. We found age to be a relevant factor since we had a presumption that younger teachers used more fantasy than older teachers.

3.2 Material and Method

The main material in this study is the data collected from several interviewees. The interviews were executed with six upper secondary ESL teachers from different schools in the south of Sweden. E-mails were sent out to the teachers. These briefly introduced the main focus of the project, and asked if they would be willing to participate. After that, a time and place was determined for the interview.

During the interviews we asked the pre-determined questions and also made time for follow-up questions. Runa Patel and Bo Davidson emphasize the significance of finding out whether the participants wish to be anonymous or not (2011 p. 74). All our respondents requested to be anonymous, which we also preferred to give the study increased credibility. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to aid analysis. Patel and Davidson (2011) argue that transcribing is an effective way of processing and perceiving qualitative data so it can be used for further analysis of the interviews.

3.3 Participants

When selecting the teachers for our interviews we took into consideration gender, age, experience of teaching as well as the levels of English (English 5, 6 and 7) and different program orientation taught. The number of teachers interviewed was narrowed down to six, since we decided it would be sufficient for our small scale study. However, we are aware of the consequences of working with a limited number of interviewees and that we cannot generalize the outcome of this study. The interviewees, equally represented both genders, were between the ages twenty-six and sixty years old, and they all had different levels of
experience in teaching literature. We, unfortunately, lacked a young female teacher in the group, but the person we identified declined our invitation due to her lack of experience and confidence in teaching.

3.4 Ethical Principles

The ethical principles which were applied for the interviews were collected from Patel and Davidson (2011). They focus on the importance of anonymity in order for the respondents to feel comfortable, which, we hoped, would lead to more honest answers. However, we are aware that this cannot be applied to all interviews as it depends on each individual context. The interview questions were structured in a manner which could be easily understood by all respondents. The environment in which the interviews were conducted was also well considered. The respondents were asked to suggest a location of their choice, creating a more relaxed atmosphere and hence decreasing stress and nervousness.

3.5 Critique of Method

We are aware that, due to the limited number of respondents, a generalization of the results cannot be made. However, we feel as though our study provides an insight into the way teachers introduce fiction and different subgenres and in particular the fantasy genre to students. It also suggests different strategies for how ESL teachers may work with the fantasy genre to encourage students to use their imagination and further develop their interests in reading. Another aspect that may be criticized is the fact that the focus of this research is solely from the ESL teachers’ point of view. To create a greater credibility, students could also have been asked to participate with the respondents sharing their experience of how teachers introduce a genre. Moreover, an investigation of whether the teachers’ views align with those of the students could be conducted.

While conducting the interviews we received the kind of answers we had hoped for, and which were in line with the questions we asked. When asking how the teachers introduce fiction, we were curious to find out how they introduce each new and specific novel, which is the information the teachers provided. However, we also realised that some readers might
have interpreted this question as how teachers introduce fiction in *general*, which, in this case, was not the focus. We also believe that the respondents did indeed provide us with different strategies for motivating the students, whereas some readers might have assumed we were asking for detailed plans. However, this is not what we asked for, nor received from the respondents.
4. Results

In this part of the project we will present the compiled results from the interviews. From the qualitative study we did, the results will be reported in written form. All interviews except one were undertaken in English. The interview performed in Swedish will be translated by us when necessary. We will address the teachers as teacher A, B, C, etcetera.

4.1 Summary of Interviews

Below the respondents are briefly summarized where the alias, age and gender are all included. Each teacher’s view on the fantasy genre is moreover explicitly mentioned in the summary, since this is a part of the main focus of the research.

4.1.2 Interview 1

Alias: Teacher A
Age: 37
Gender: Male

The first interview was performed at a school in southern Sweden, where Teacher A, who has been a teacher for six years, has been teaching for four years. Teacher A teaches both occupational and more theoretical programs at upper secondary level, and mainly teaches English 5 and 6. In his experience, he could see differences in the willingness to read when comparing the two programs; in general, the students in theoretical programs would find it “easier” to engage in reading fiction. Teacher A has never worked with the fantasy genre in an ESL classroom. However, he sees benefits of using the genre, in particular for extending vocabulary and finding messages in the text.

4.1.3 Interview 2

Alias: Teacher B
Age: 59
Gender: Male
Teacher B has been working at the same school close to Gothenburg for approximately twenty-five years. Due to his experience, Teacher B has taught all levels of English at upper secondary school. Currently he is teaching English 5 and 6 and prefers to allow students a choice of novels. It is Teacher B himself who makes the assessment as to whether the novel in question is of a suitable level or not. He mainly teaches students in the social science program. Although Teacher B does not use the fantasy genre in teaching, he acknowledges potential benefits from using it.

4.1.4 Interview 3

Alias: Teacher C
Age: 63
Gender: Female

Teacher C is a female teacher who mainly works with drama and music students at an upper secondary school. She has been teaching at the same school in southern Sweden for twenty-five + years and is currently only teaching English 7. She teaches two novels every year, one during the autumn and one during the spring. She provides the learners with the option of choosing one novel from a choice of four to six different ones from different genres. This is executed at the beginning of the semester so that the students have all semester to finish the book. Teacher C has worked with the fantasy genre to a certain extent.

4.1.5 Interview 4

Alias: Teacher D
Age: 44
Gender: Male

Teacher D has been a teacher for seven years and, during this time, has taught at the same school in southern Sweden. He currently only teaches on the IB program where he has everything from levels 5-7. His approach to working with a novel in class is quite similar to the approach used at a university level, where literary terms and concepts such as symbols, similes, allegory, and protagonist/antagonist which the reader needs to identify in a chosen
novel are introduced. The examination forms vary from discussions and theatrical performances, to acting out Shakespeare in modern day time, etc.

4.1.6 Interview 5

Alias: Teacher E
Age: 60
Gender: Female

This teacher has been teaching for over thirty years, and has been at the school she is currently working at for twenty-six years. She mainly teaches the technical program at levels 5 and 6 and spends approximately three to four weeks working on a novel. She allows the students to choose a novel of their own specific interest. She has included the fantasy genre in her teaching. In particular she has presented parts of *Lord of the Rings* as well as low fantasy (e.g. *Divergent* and *Twilight*).

4.1.7 Interview 6

Alias: Teacher F
Age: 26
Gender: Male

Teacher F has not been active as a teacher for more than a few months, but has still had time to teach fiction. He works at a school in a small town in south of Sweden, and teaches English exclusively at level 5. His strategy is to select a number of novels of different genres and he also provides copies of shorter novels with larger text for any student who find it more difficult to read. Teacher F has divided these short novels into different levels of English to allow for students who struggle with comprehension to focus on the external meaning of the text instead of understanding hidden messages, symbolism, allegories, etc. Teacher F plans to use the fantasy genre when teaching and he can see many benefits from using it, such as extending vocabulary and exploring themes.
4.1.8 Summary of the teachers’ choice of genre

It was of importance to our study to determine which genres the interviewed ESL teachers concentrated on, especially those who actively worked with the fantasy genre. To clarify the compiled results, all the genres worked with by the interviewed teachers are listed underneath. It is also specified which genres each teacher incorporates in their teaching. The fantasy genre is marked in bold, since it is the focus for the study.

Figure 3. Teachers’ choice of literary genre in the ESL classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Genres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Classics, factual texts, romance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Horror, drama, classics (Has used extracts from low fantasy novels.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Fantasy, drama, romance, thriller, factual texts, biographies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>Classics, drama, magical realism, horror, thriller. (Has at times used the fantasy genre, but not actively.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>Fantasy, factual texts, romance, biographies, sci-fi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher F</td>
<td>Fantasy, horror, thriller, drama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 presents which genre each teacher focuses on in their teaching. Fantasy is marked in bold since we explicitly intend to expose which teacher is actively using the fantasy genre.

4.2 How do Teachers Introduce Fiction in the ESL Classroom?

4.2.1 The ESL Teachers’ Genders and Age Differences in the Choice of Genres

The interviews showed a difference in the choice of genres to be worked on in the classroom both with regards to the gender and age of those interviewed. The teachers who included fantasy in their teaching were the older females. The teachers who used it least were males in their 30’s and 40’s. However, both the least and most experienced male teachers included a degree of fantasy in their teaching. They did not work with full novels, however, but preferred extracts from texts, such as Stephen King’s short stories. The teachers who did not work with fantasy at all, instead chose genres such as biographies and factual texts. However, even though they did not actively teach fantasy, they did see the possibility for beneficial outcomes.
from using the genre. The teachers who did not include any fantasy when teaching fiction, gave the students novels which had been chosen by themselves; this reflected the teachers own interest in reading. The choice of novels, for some of the teachers, was also influenced by the ratio of male to female students. One of the teachers assumed that girls liked to read love stories and that boys would be more interested in factual texts. Upon further questioning, this assumption, however, seemed to be unintentional.

4.2.2 Introducing of Fiction and Different Genres

Each teacher had a different approach when introducing a certain genre to their students. What they all had in common was a brief introduction to the novel in focus. Other pre-reading strategies included using pictures to describe a setting or a mood, discussion of literary terms such as motifs and characterisation, while one teacher had the students interpret what was going to happen from just looking at the back cover of a novel. The majority of the teachers took the students’ interests into consideration when choosing a novel. However, all the teachers expressed that their choices were limited by the availability of books in their school libraries. Five of the teachers were not comfortable with letting the students choose any novel; but instead gave a few choices within different genres, while the sixth, at certain times, allowed the students to select a novel of their own choice. Two of the teachers did not take their students’ interests into consideration at all, and they always used the same approach when introducing a genre. The other four teachers varied their introduction depending on genre and the orientation of class. The teachers’ choice depended on what programs, levels and examination form of the novel they were teaching. Teacher A, B, C, E and F agreed that their choice of novel was dependent on the program and levels of English they taught. Teacher D was of the opinion that it did not matter what novel the students read or on what level of English, - learning depended on the exercises the teacher prepared while working with the novel.
4.3 Strategies ESL Teachers Apply to Motivate Their Students to Read Different Genres of Fiction

4.3.1 Teaching Different Genres

While interviewing the teachers, one of the questions that we asked was “What genres do you/do you not use in your teaching? Why? Why not?” The teachers quoted titles of novels, instead of specifying what genres they belonged to. Clarification of the question had to be made by us, where we also explicitly suggested different genres. In most cases, the teachers then stated two genres into which most of the novels could fit for example the classic genre (see Figure 1 for academic definition). When the question “Do you or have you ever used fantasy as a genre when teaching fiction? Why? Why not?” was asked, we received three positive and three negative replies. However, when we explained that, for example, Twilight belonged in the fantasy genre, two of the teachers who had replied negatively, changed their mind and realised that they had in fact used fantasy. Hence, the teachers were, in some instances, not aware of the genre they were choosing at the time. To clarify, Figure 3 lists the genres each teacher included in their teaching.

4.3.2 Outcomes from Using Different Genres

For all the interviewed teachers, their own interest in literature played a significant part when choosing the novel. That is, they chose a genre they were familiar with and had an idea of how it would be received by the class. This was due to their knowledge of previous results when teaching that particular novel, and a sense that teaching it again could have a positive outcome. Teacher A claimed he did not have a great variety of genres to choose from, due to the limitation of books at the school. Teachers C and E, who had used the fantasy genre, also complained about the limited range of novels within that genre at their schools, as well as the limited number of copies. Teacher D implemented a variety of ideas when teaching fiction, and was very clear on what outcome he wanted to achieve. His assignments required the students to read at home which provided time in the classroom for discussing themes and characters. This also allowed opportunity for creativity, where the students were to imagine how they would act if they were one of the characters. The reason for these different strategies, according to Teacher D, was to engage the students and to test if they had read and understood the novel. Teacher A, B, C, E and F all provided time in the classroom for the
students to read and, as a result, they needed a longer time period for teaching a novel than Teacher D.

4.4 Do ESL Teachers See Any Benefits from Using the Fantasy Genre

The data collected from the interviews shows that all the ESL teachers could see positive effects from using the fantasy genre in the ESL classroom. The interviewed teachers all saw positive outcomes from using typical themes such as friendship, love etc., as an approach to teaching fantasy. Hence, they all thought that themes were clear and easy to identify in a fantasy novel. We are aware that these themes can also be found in other literary genres. However, as mentioned before, we feel that, in a fantasy novel they are often very clear and can easily be identified by the reader. The respondents did not elaborate why they saw these positive outcomes from using fantasy specifically, and in the future we would ask them why that is. The teachers who actively focused on the genre noticed that teenagers could also often identify themselves with the characters in fantasy novels. To quote Teacher A: “Surely there must be some strategies that one could use. Most of them have seen the movies, for example Twilight…most of them know Harry Potter. It wouldn’t be too hard to get students to understand the messages in the books and also to identify themselves with the characters…”

All the interviewed ESL teachers, except one, discovered new strategies to work with the fantasy genre after the interviews, such as by exploring messages, allegories, symbolism etc. Some also explicitly expressed that the interview had increased their knowledge of different existing fantasy novels. Teacher B expressed himself as follows: “Yes, I now realise I have used more fantasy then I first thought. I have used extracts from low fantasy novels, and some of my students have chosen to read The Twilight saga […] I believe they focus more on the fact it is a love story than a fantasy novel”.

4.4.1 Benefits from Fantasy

All of the interviewed teachers, even those who did not actively use the fantasy genre, saw potential beneficial outcomes from using the genre. Teachers C and E, who chose fantasy, noticed benefits for the learners such as increased imagination, creativity in other subjects
(due to thinking outside the box), ability to identify literary terms as well as a renewed motivation to read. The teachers who did not work with the genre saw benefits to their teaching of literary terms and concepts such as allegories and symbolism. They could also see the benefits from using a genre that matched their students’ interest as it led to increased motivation to read. Another advantage, according to Teachers C and E, is that students can explore something that is not connected to the ordinary world (e.g. magic, creatures, surreal nature, etc.) and later recognize the structure of both the real world and the secondary world in the fantasy novel. In *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, which Teacher E admitted to having taught on several occasions, there is a certain order and hierarchy in the two societies. When the students come to know how these societies function, it will, according to Teacher E, simplify the process of gaining a deeper understanding of how the society in which they live is structured. Teacher E stated while discussing this “They can cut out the world as it is, and just move to the world of ideas” which indicates a healthy escapism.

4.4.2 Disadvantages of Fantasy

A problem all the interviewed teachers noticed with the fantasy genre is how the length of many fantasy novels generated a declining interest among the students. However, the teachers who worked with fantasy actively were also aware that not all fantasy novels are long and heavy. A related obstacle the teachers noticed when teaching this genre was time constraints. According to the teachers, a fantasy novel includes many aspects, such as abstract themes, symbolism, a secondary world, etc. Therefore, according to the teachers, it is not a project they take on easily, unless they have a clear focus and the right tools. Another issue the teachers who did not use the genre saw was that boys were more inclined than girls to be interested in the fantasy genre. They also believed heroes in the novels are more frequently male, thus creating a decreased interest among girls. Another issue that Teachers A, B and F saw was that if a student enjoys reading, and more importantly enjoys reading fantasy, he or she is most likely to have read the novels already, which makes it unnecessary to teach in class.
5. Discussion

In this part of the study we will discuss and analyse the above results in relation to previous research presented.

All the ESL teachers we interviewed had different ways of choosing and introducing a novel in the classroom. However, each teacher applied different strategies when presenting a new text. For example, Teacher E implemented pre-reading activities in order to engage her students’ imagination. She would introduce a novel by showing a picture, which may be linked to Clanfield’s (2016) step by step approach which is also in line with using an ESA strategy. Here, the teacher engages the students in discussing what they see in the picture, examining what they feel and what they think the connections with the novel might be. Furthermore, Teacher E had the students do some research about the setting of the novel, potential themes and study characterization. This strategy activates the students’ engagement in the reading process, and prepares them for the novel itself.

The teachers had different approaches to how and where the students were to read as well as to activities relating to the novel. Teacher E, as well as Teacher B, C and F allowed the students time to read in the classroom after introducing a novel, but also expected them to read at home. Teacher D, on the other hand, did not allow the students the option of reading in class; instead it was a home activity. He also approached the reading in a different manner compared to the other teachers. He handed out the novel with no further information, apart from a brief introduction on literary terms. However, Teacher D had a wider focus on post-reading activities, such as the students performing a play and presentations rather than just writing book reviews. Teacher D emphasized the importance of using different forms of discussions with the students after reading a novel. Barton (2013) discusses the importance of promoting reading for pleasure, and rejects the idea of silent reading in class. He rather believes the concentration should be on discussions about the book (p.119). We feel that Teacher D follows Barton’s suggestions where the goal is to encourage the students to discuss what they have read. Teacher D also embraces Barton’s (2013) idea that students should read for a purpose.

Barton (2013) states that, as teachers, we need to create a level of independence in reading among the students; the interviewed teachers interpreted this in different ways. Teacher E
helped her students while introducing the novel. She also gave the students time to read in the classroom, while she was there as support, which is the opposite approach to Teacher D. Nevertheless, both teachers were clear about the purpose of reading the novel, as well as ensuring the students knew what was asked of them while reading the novel. In our opinion, all teachers work towards creating a well-functioning reading culture in the ESL classroom, even though they may apply different strategies. Teachers A, B, C, E and F’s approach contradicts that of Teacher D where they feel that the choice of novel and genre should depend on the level in English and the orientation of the class. Teacher D focused on different ways of teaching a novel instead of the novel itself. We believe that both choice of novel and strategies to work with the novel are equally important factors to consider.

It is our belief that teaching fiction should vary depending on the level and program where the teaching occurs. Teachers A, B, C, E and F have experience in teaching different programs, while Teacher D has only ever taught the IB program, where teaching is in English (authors’ explanation). Due to the high level of English and the students’ experience of English in the IB program, the ESL teacher might not have to be as involved in the students’ reading process. This is in comparison to the teachers who teach programs where subjects other than English are not taught in the English language on a daily basis.

The results of this study show distinct differences between theoretical and practical programs and how the reading was done. For example, Teacher A, who taught the theoretical social science program as well as the practical mechanical program experienced differences in study motivation among the students. Students who study the mechanical program often have a lower level of knowledge of English and, therefore, require more help from the teacher. Teacher A also had to allow those students more time to read in class in order for the students to finish reading the novel. Teacher A claimed he did not have this problem with the social science program, due to an advanced command of the English language. Therefore, especially with the practical program, Teacher A had to both promote the novel and motivate the student in order to increase the love of reading and develop empathy, which is in line with Barton (2013) and Lundahl’s (2012) view on a reading experience.

All the ESL teachers emphasized the importance of introducing a variety of genres to their students, which supports Harmers (2007) discussion on applying different genres to ESL students. All the teachers aimed to use a variety of genres in their teaching, to maintain the
students’ interest. However, they found it hard to find a mutual interest amongst the students. Another problem that occurred was the schools limited range of novels and genres. Only Teacher E allowed the students to choose freely from all available novels, while the other teachers preferred to limit the students to one or more choices. All the teachers wished for a better variety of genres, and as Barton (2013), Harmer (2007) and Lundahl (2012) state, it is important to build up a library of suitable novels. Only Teacher F had the privilege of deciding what novels and genres to include in the school library. Harmer (2007) suggests the method of marking each novel with genre and level and we believe this would assist with the teachers’ confusion with regards to categorising genres. This confusion was a recurring issue during all interviews and often had to be clarified by us. When asking what genres the teachers included in their teaching, they would instead reply with specific titles. When furthermore asked which genre that title belonged to, they often needed support from us, or stated two different genres (which might have been caused by uncertainty). We find it interesting that the teachers, for example, often said they taught ‘classics’ because it is presented in the curriculum. However, when asked which classics, most of the teachers were hesitant to suggest titles, but those who did mention a title used examples like *Pride and Prejudice*. We suggest that this may be because they are not sure which novels would be classified in the classic genre. For example, *Lord of the Rings* is considered a classic, however, none of the respondents acknowledged it as such.

Many of the interviewees said that reading classics was a part of the learning aims in the curriculum, and, therefore, they felt obliged to use novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* which they considered a classic. What we found interesting is that, just as James (2012) states, *The Lord of the Rings* has sold more copies than *Pride and Prejudice*. This confirms the growing interest in the fantasy genre. We believe the students can better relate to the main characters Bella Swan and Edward Cullen in a modern low fantasy novels such as *Twilight*, than to Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy who are the main characters in *Pride and Prejudice*. The Swedish curriculum includes the importance of the students’ understanding of what they have read. This can be demonstrated, for example, in discussion or commenting on events in the novel if the students can relate to the characters or the themes in the novel they have read. Thus, the importance of choosing a novel where the students can recognize themselves should be acknowledged. Welander (2012) concurs with the importance of this recognition, since it provides the students with an opportunity to confront reality.
If the students can recognize themselves in texts by incorporating previous experiences and knowledge from their own lives, we believe, just as Vaezi (2006) and Zunshine (2006), that this could be a strategy to engage and motivate further reading. This is something we could envisage while choosing a modern fantasy novel, for example *Twilight, Hunger Games* or *Divergent*, which are all novels which include a coming of age process (meaning the reader is allowed to follow a characters growth with all its challenges and confrontations (authors’ explanation). An author who supports this is Beth Webb who claims the following:

“Most importantly, fantasy isn’t just for children. Becoming a teenager, rites of passage, facing failure and defeat, coming to terms with betrayals and disappointment- all the stuff of emerging adult life also has to be faced and coped with. Psychoanalysis and counselling have their place, but the most important tool we as humans have to tackle reality, is the creation of metaphor- the allegorical story” (2007 n.pag).

The fantasy genre includes these previously stated elements, which is why we asked the teachers if they use or have used the fantasy genre in teaching. Teachers C, E and F said they worked with it actively and currently, Teacher B and D said they had chosen the fantasy genre at times, while Teacher A had not implemented fantasy at all. The teacher who thought that they did not actively focus on the genre was unaware that by including novels such as *Twilight*, they had in fact included novels that could be defined as a *low* fantasy. Hence, a problem that occurred while interviewing was that all the teachers were not familiar with the definition of fantasy, and they had all, except Teacher A, at times included it in their teaching.

Surprisingly, after completing the interviews we found out that the teachers who worked with the fantasy genre the most were the older female teachers, thus challenging our preconceived ideas about younger teachers being more inclined to use fantasy in their teaching. All but one of the male teachers, on the other hand, instead focused on factual texts and classics, and did not demonstrate much interest in using the fantasy genre either. Another interesting aspect we found was that the female teachers had a genuine interest in fantasy themselves, and enjoyed reading and watching fantasy in their spare time. This contradicts many of the existing theories that fantasy is only for males. Maria Nikolajeva claims in her book *Barnbokens byggklossar* “It is in reality fantasy that exclusively and science fiction that with some reservations portray female characters completely free from stereotypes” (2004, p.130)
(author’s translation). This supports our view on fantasy: it is “gender neutral”, and many new fantasy novels portray a female heroine, and, thus, more females have become the main characters.

During the interviews we asked the teachers if they saw any benefits/disadvantages from using the fantasy genre. All the teachers could see some beneficial outcomes from teaching the genre, such as clear themes and a variety of characters (for example, clear antagonists and protagonists). They could furthermore see the beneficial outcomes from students reading something they loved. However, Teacher E stated that students who read fantasy, often exclusively explore that genre which creates another issue; how to motivate them to read alternative genres. We believe, that by providing the right tools, just as Olin-Scheller (2008) suggests, the students could be encouraged to explore a variety of genres. By tools we interpreted this to mean the same as strategies. Examples of these strategies could be pre- and post-reading activities where students are allowed to reflect over fantasy related themes. The benefit of using pre-reading activities is, for example, that it activates the students’ schemata, meaning, the learner uses already possessed knowledge to process new knowledge. We believe that, if the student gains an interest in reading from a genre they can relate to, in this case, the fantasy genre, this may encourage them to explore other genres too.

Choosing the fantasy genre as a natural part of teaching will benefit students’ reading interest and imagination. Lundahl (2012) claims that stories have a certain place in children’s lives and their cognitive development. Another author who supports this view is Selma Lane (2004) who states: “When a young child says, ‘Tell me a story’, he is hoping for something a bit outside his everyday experience, but something that still deals nonetheless his own real concerns” (p.29). Just as with stories where children are stimulated to use their imagination, we believe the students could do the same while using fantasy. A fantasy novel often includes themes teenagers can relate to, such as good and bad (including confrontations), love, friendship, family and growth. As mentioned previously, we are well aware that these themes occur in other genres too. However, we agree with Jane O’Hanlon (2007) who claims: “Fantasy consistently asks universal questions concerning humanity, good and evil, life and death” (p.87). Welander (2012) investigated the effects on teenagers reading fantasy both in their reading experience and their view on reality. She concludes that it has several beneficial outcomes, for example, teenagers could find new strategies for coping with reality (loss, love, the unexpected). If the students are allowed to escape reality, but still read about real themes,
it can benefit the students’ cognitive and imaginative ability which is something Zunshine (2006) discusses in her work.

A negative aspect which the teachers envisioned was the length and extent of fantasy novels, which is a common assumption considering the classic fantasy stories, i.e. *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. Teachers A, B and D, all agreed with this assumption. Our beliefs were that a deeper understanding of the genres is essential in order to know that there are shorter and less advanced levels of fantasy. Teachers C, E and F all agreed with this, due to their deeper knowledge of and interest in the genre. When we gave further information on different subcategories (high-and low fantasy) and suggested a number of titles, Teachers A and B admitted that shorter fantasy novels could be found such as *Narnia*. Teacher D on the other hand, remained firm in his view that fantasy novels are too extensive.

Those interviewees who were more involved within the fantasy genre could, despite the negative aspects, see more positive outcomes from using the genre. Teacher E still saw the effects of working with shorter extracts from high fantasy novels as beneficial. Mathews (2002) discusses the positive effects of looking at the power of language used in a fantasy novel, which is one of the strategies that could be applied in shorter extracts from a high fantasy novel. A teacher who did this was Teacher B who focuses on the language when using extracts from Stephen King novels, and comparing these to, for example, an extract from a biography.

As with many researchers within the fantasy genre, we agree that the lack of knowledge of the genre as previously highlighted, is the reason the interviewees stated that they do not like fantasy. Karolina Bjällerstedt-Mickos claims: “Some accuse fantasy for defending escapism, imperialism, oppression of women and the glorifying of wars. Others do not know what fantasy is. They only know, they do not like the genre. Lack of knowledge often lies behind these prejudices” (Bjällerstedt-Mickos, 2004 p.102) (authors’ translation). This was true with most of our interviewees who were open with their presumptions about the fantasy genre, except for Teachers C and E, who had a more expanded knowledge of the area. Despite seeing the benefits of using certain themes in a fantasy novel such as love and relationship; the themes of escapism, imperialism and oppression of women are in contrast those that the teachers react to and thus result in a choice to abstain from working with fantasy novels. Escapism is something Teachers A, B, D and F found to be confusing for the students.
However, this is not in line with current research. We believe, as Ehriander and Nilson (2012) argue, fantasy might allow students to both escape reality as well as find strategies to cope with real everyday problems. As Welander (2012) discusses, fantasy should be praised rather than accused since it actually deals with real problems in a confrontational way (p.183).

We feel that the former statement made by Bjällerstedt-Mickos (2004) that many accuse fantasy of defending escapism, imperialism, glorifying wars and female oppression, is false. This is why we, in the next few paragraphs will explore these concerns further. Our experience as readers, as well as former students, is that escapism is an asset instead of an obstacle. The reader, through escapism in a fantasy novel, may be allowed to relate to the focalised character, where (s)he can emerge into the story through the characters’ actions and journey. An example where the reader can find this escapism is in the fantasy novel *The Hunger Games*. In this story, the reader follows the trials of Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark, in which they both face challenges in life, such as the relationship with each other and with their families. We believe that both a female and a male reader can associate with these characters, and it is our hope that students can receive these messages of the story despite the fact it takes place in a secondary world. Even though the games are about surviving, the focus is on relationships and how people can together conquer evil. At the end of the first novel, Katniss and Peeta are confronted by a higher power which demands that one has to kill the other in order to survive and reunite with their family. In the end they stand up to the higher authority. This presents the authority with the dilemma of either killing or saving the main characters. This all takes place in a secondary world, but the message; (that working together defeats evil), could be very much applied to our world as well.

The glorifying of wars and oppression of women could be interpreted as true, in for example, *The Lord of the Rings*. There are nine characters in the fellowship; all male, and the main focus is to win the war against the evil Sauron. However, the female characters play a significant role in winning the war. For example, one of the most important character is Éowyn, who single-handedly slays one of the Nazgûls (one of the knights from Sauron’s original army), which could only be done by a female. Hence, evil could never be conquered without this female character. In this case, the war is not glorified, but seen as a necessary evil to keep the world safe.
The fourth and final accusation made of fantasy is that fantasy defends imperialism. From an outside view this could be the case in a fantasy novel. However, at closer inspection, even though fantasy novels often include extending the power of a nation, the focus is often concerned with deeper themes (good and bad, friendship, love, and loyalty). A fantasy novel usually (not always) begins with introducing an already existing dark world, generally in contrast to whatever light there is still left in this world. As the reader is allowed to explore the story, the light grows and the dark’s power decreases. To give an example, this occurs in the fantasy novel *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S Lewis. In this story, Lucy, the youngest of four children, walks into the secondary world, Narnia, where the evil has taken over. As the story develops, the hope of the good prevailing increases, and in a final battle the good conquers the bad.

After examining all these positive and negative aspects from different authors’ and our own experience, we have reached the conclusion that choosing a genre like fantasy will in most cases have beneficial outcomes for the reader and in this case, our students. We also conclude that the choice of novel and strategies for working with them are of much significance to reach the learning aims stated in the Swedish curriculum.
7. Conclusion

In this part of the study we will summarize and conclude the compiled results of the research questions stated in the beginning of the work. Furthermore, we will connect the results with previous research in the area. In the following section we will also provide suggestions for how to further develop the study.

The focus of this study has been to examine how ESL teachers introduce fiction and in particular, different genres in the ESL classroom. We also investigated whether they had included fantasy as a genre in their teaching and if not, if they could still see beneficial outcomes from using it. To investigate this, semi-structured interviews were performed with six upper secondary school teachers, who all had different levels of experience in teaching literature. The results from these interviews provided a good indication on the various approaches to teaching fiction, and more specifically, how fantasy can have positive outcomes when teaching fiction.

We can firstly conclude that all six ESL teachers interviewed had different strategies for introducing fiction and different genres. One of the teachers focused more on pre-reading activities, in comparison to another teacher whose focus was more on post-reading activities. All the teachers were well aware of what the Swedish curriculum requires with regards to receiving fiction and genre literature, but interpreted this differently. This, in many cases, depended on their own interests as well as the books they had access to.

Our second conclusion is that all six ESL teachers we interviewed used different strategies when working with fiction. A tendency we observed with all interviewees was how they all adjusted their strategies depending on what level of English and programs they were teaching. One teacher strongly reacted to what strategies were necessary to undertake when teaching, depending on if the programs taught were theoretical or practical. The teacher concluded that in most cases, the levels of English capability were higher in the theoretical programs. All teachers, except one, agreed that they played the role of promoter and motivator to a certain extent when teaching literature depending on the students’ level of motivation, which is in line with Harmer’s (2015) view on reading. The sixth teacher, who worked in the IB program, was more used to a higher level of independence from the students with regards to their reading habits.
The third and final conclusion we reached was that all six interviewed teachers could see beneficial outcomes from using the fantasy genre. Three of the ESL teachers actively worked with fantasy novels, while two of the other teachers preferred using shorter extracts, if they used the fantasy genre at all. The remaining teacher did not include any fantasy in his teaching, preferring to focus on classics and factual texts, which are something he assumed the students would enjoy more.

Analysing the results provided an expanded knowledge of how teachers work with literature. However, a problem that occurred to us, was that most of these teachers did not know the definition of fantasy and, as a result, did not know which novels are classified as fantasy. Some of the teachers had in many cases worked with a low fantasy novel, without reflection on the specific genre. The teachers who had less insight in the fantasy genre claimed that all fantasy novels are “lengthy” and “heavy”. We agree with Bjällerstedt-Mickos (2004), that “lack of knowledge often lies behind these prejudices” (p.102). As we discovered it was the one teacher who had a deeper knowledge within the area, who knew that shorter fantasy novels exist and also knows how to work with extracts from high fantasy novels.

Some of the teachers with little experience in teaching fantasy presumed that fantasy did indeed defend outmoded ideas of gender and society (Bjällerstedt-Mickos, 2004 p.102). In contrast, and as highlighted before, one of the teachers with a deeper understanding of the fantasy genre instead found that fantasy provided healthy escapism, allowing students to move into a new “world of ideas”, which indicates a positive translation of the term escapism. According to this teacher, the students could be allowed to cope with their real life problems through exposure to a secondary world. As Welander (2012) states, fantasy provides an opportunity for students to handle real life struggles in a confrontational way. This is a benefit that could be found not only in fantasy, but in other types of fiction too.

We are aware that we cannot generalize due to the limited number of teachers interviewed. However, because of the selection of teachers and their different experiences in teaching, this study provides a good indication of how teachers work with fiction (especially the fantasy genre). After completing this study, we stand firm in the belief that fantasy is in various ways important for students’ cognitive development and a healthy escapism where the students can confront real life problems. In conclusion, we would like to concur with the author Lloyd Alexander who states the following: “Fantasy is hardly an escape from reality. It’s a way of understanding it.”
8. Recommendations for Further Research

For further research we would recommend expanding and developing our current study. Due to our focus on the teachers and their application of different genres in their literature classes, we would strongly suggest that further studies investigate the students’ reactions to the way teachers introduce novels and, furthermore, how they experience the reading process.

Recommendations for further research are listed below:

- Include a greater range of teachers. Include both males and females and a variety of ages.
- Include students in the research. Interview or provide questions to investigate if they perceive their teachers’ strategies as they are intended.
- Collect lesson plans. To clarify exactly how and to what extent teachers work with fiction.
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9. Appendices

9.1 Interview Questions

Part 1

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. What programs do you teach?
4. What levels of English do you teach?

Part 2

1. How do you interpret the curriculum when it comes to teaching reading literature and different genres of fiction?
2. How do you introduce fiction to your students?
4. How do you decide what genre of literature to use in your teaching? Do you consider the student's interest when choosing the novel?
5. How do you motivate your students to read the novel of your choice?
6. Does your choice of literature depend on what levels of English you teach? If so, how?
7. In your experience, does genre have an impact on different learning outcomes for students? In what way?
8. How much time to you approximately spend on teaching a novel?
9. Do you or have you ever used fantasy as a genre when teaching fiction? Why? Why not?
10. (If answered yes on question 8) If using fantasy in your teaching, what do you find are some of its potential benefits?
11. What kind of fantasy could you see yourself using in the future, if at all? What would be some of your strategies for working with this genre in the classroom?
Dear English teacher,

We are two students that are studying to become upper secondary school teachers at Halmstad University. We are now writing our C-essay and looking for teachers to interview. Therefore, we are contacting you. We are wondering if you would like to be a part of our C-essay and help us answer a few questions. Our essay’s main focus is within literature, more specifically different genres within fiction and how teachers apply it. The interview would take approximately 30 minutes. It would be very much appreciated if you would like to help us out. We are pretty flexible so you could decide the place and time, we do, however, prefer mornings on Mondays, Wednesday or Thursday.

Regards, Catharina de Vries & Emelie Strandberg
9.3 Clanfield’s step by step approach

**Stage one: Warmer**
The student discuss in pairs on the topic in focus, what they already know about the author. They could also be provided brief background information and receive a presentation on why this novel is well known.

**Stage two: Before reading**
This stage is in a way similar to stage one where the students are provided maybe a vocabulary list on words in the novel that might be difficult to understand. According to Clanfield, it is also a good idea to read the first chapter together. This is something that the teacher could do to the students or that the students could have time to do in class.

**Stage three: Understanding the text, general comprehension**
This could be applied after for example reading the first chapter together so the students could receive a deeper feel for the text. Clanfield writes that using evocative texts could make this stage very powerful.

**Stage four: Understanding the language**
For this stage the students are to collect difficult or unfamiliar words after reading a bit of the novel. The students can also look at the meaning of words in special contexts or at descriptions of characters to investigate what the author’s impression is and what (s)he is trying to say about that specific character.

**Stage five: Follow up activities**
For this stage the students are finished reading the novel and to keep working with literature this stage provides ideas for how to do so. Since the learners already have experience from looking at texts and try to understand it by for example explaining it to each other, they are now able to start working with deeper understanding such as symbolism, metaphors et c. Suggestions on how to do this could be by using: poems, extracts from stories or short stories, and extracts from plays.
Thank you to…

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Finally, a big thank you to Ineke for proof-reading our work.