"Who wouldn't choose the easiest way out?"

A Study on the Teaching of Fiction within the Swedish EFL-classroom

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1. INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this in the year of 2016, and have at some point in your life attended school in Sweden, chances are you have been assigned to read *works of fiction* as part of your education. Have you ever thought of why that is? Well, as a matter of fact, Swedish schools have been using works of fiction for educational purposes ever since the 19th century —mainly due to a lingering notion that reading them makes us *better people* (Lundahl, 2012:403). It is believed that reading fiction increases our awareness and understanding of ourselves and other people, as well as our consciousness of the world as a whole. Moreover, it is held that fiction engages our imagination, while at the same time conveying universal and timeless knowledge about history, different cultures and other important life matters. In addition, works of fiction are often argued to be *the source of our vocabulary* as well as our ability to handle grammatical construction, which explains the fact that novels have been, and still are, particularly used as didactic tools within the teaching of *languages* (ibid).

However, as a teacher student whose main subject is English, I have made a few interesting observations during my teacher internships regarding Swedish high school students’ willingness to read fiction in their second language. When asked to read novels for English class, I have happened to overhear student conversations, indicating that they *do not* read the books they are assigned. When discussing the matter with their English teachers, most of them claimed that — although students might not always finish them on time — most students do read the books. *How else would they manage to complete assignments based on a novel and its plot?* This matter sparked an interest of mine, to gain further insight into the ways that high school students of today essentially work with the reading of fiction, and its accompanying assignments.

In this study, thirty-eight high school students, as well as four English teachers, were asked to share information about their experiences concerning the teaching of fiction within the course *English 6*. The study examines whether the students *do or do not* generally read the works of fiction they are assigned within the course, as well as *who chooses the novels* — and *if that matters*. Furthermore, the study explores *what assignments* that generally are coupled with the reading of fiction (e.g. book talks, book reports etc.), as well as *what strategies* the students typically apply in order to complete such assignments. Hence, the following research questions will be used as a point of departure:
• Do the students typically read the novels they are assigned? If not — why?
• Who chooses what novels the students are to read? And, does it matter?
• What assignments are normally attached to the reading of fiction, and how do the students solve such tasks?

**ESSAY OUTLINE**

In the sections that follow, I will first provide a brief description of the English 6 course, as well as a definition of the term *Fiction*. Next, a literature review will follow, mainly comprising an overview of the history of the novel, as well as a brief summary of its position within the Swedish school system through time. Thereafter, there will be a section presenting information about some of the most commonly encountered problems when teaching fiction within modern EFL-settings; this information is based solely on previous studies within the field. Next, I will present the methods used in order to conduct my study, succeeded by a detailed description of the compiled results. Lastly, there will be an analysis of the results in relation to previous research, followed by a conclusion comprising a summarization of my findings, as well as some suggestions for future research.

**THE ENGLISH 6 COURSE**

*English 6* is a course at high school level for Swedish EFL-learners, which is typically taken by students in their second year of high school. The course builds on the course *English 5*, and is succeeded by the course *English 7*. Teaching the course *English 6* should give students the opportunities to develop the following:

1) Understanding of spoken and written English, and also the ability to interpret content.
2) The ability to express oneself and communicate in English in speech and writing.
3) The ability to use different language strategies in different contexts.
4) The ability to adapt language to different purposes, recipients and situations.
5) The ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used (Skolverket, 2011).

The course includes *100 credits*, which should ideally correspond to 100 school hours. Usually,
the course runs over two terms, which should equal about 35 weeks (ibid). However, recent studies show that the majority of high school teachers are of the opinion that the typical 100 credit course corresponds to considerably less than 100 school hours, or 35 weeks. In fact, many teachers report that 100 credits typically corresponds to no more than 80 school hours—which is a problem that often makes it stressful for teachers to cover all the intended learning objectives of a course (LR.se). This lack-of-time aspect will be discussed in relation to the results of my study in the analysis section.

**DEFINITION OF THE TERM FICTION**

*Fiction* is a class of literature referring to any story created by *imagination*, while stories based on *history* or *fact* belong to the category of non-fiction. In fiction, faithfulness to reality is not typically assumed; and therefore, characters, settings and descriptions do not have to be factually true or realistic. Due to fiction's freedom from any necessary embedding in reality, the context of fiction is generally open to interpretation. Nonetheless, some fictional works are claimed to be historically accurate, which sometimes complicates the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. Fiction most commonly refers to the major narrative forms of literature such as *novels* and *short stories*, but could be expressed in other formats as well (Oxford English Dictionaries, 2015). Due to the fact that fiction most commonly lead people’s minds to the *written word*, The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) decided that teachers should apply a broader and more extensive concept of the term in the year of 2000. Since then, the term is supposed to include not only written, but spoken texts, as well as music, pictures, movies and videos (Skolverket, 2011). However, research shows that the expanded concept has not yet had a breakthrough, and most teachers still interpret the term as something that is solely to do with *written texts* (Persson, 2012).

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

As stated in the introduction, novels are often argued to be the source of our vocabulary, as well as our ability to handle grammatical construction. Therefore, the reading of novels often plays a significant role within the language classroom (Lundahl, 2012:405). When reading fiction, students learn through the oldest of human traditions, namely that of *storytelling*. However, although storytelling is an old tradition, *the teaching of fiction is not*. So, when and why did
reading novels become a norm in the teaching of languages?

In the Middle Ages, all types of books were perceived as exclusive and authoritative. Agapitos and Mortensen (2012:33) argue that the only book the average person knew of was *The Bible*, which was only ever encountered by the general public when the priest read from it in church. Moreover, the Bible was believed to be made up of God's literal words, and was, therefore, also considered to tell the absolute truth about the world. Hence, the written word was deeply associated with *truth*. However, there were eventually people who felt that the Bible did not provide them with all the answers they were looking for, and, for that reason, the Bible started to receive imaginative makeovers: first orally, and eventually in written form. During the 12th century, books full of fabrications and made-up stories ultimately started to appear in large numbers. As the written word for a long time had been surrounded by grave seriousness, many people felt negatively towards this new “genre” of literature, which now blurred the previous clear distinction between *true* and *false*. From this point and hundreds of years onwards, there was no clear-cut line between fiction and non-fiction, and there was a general opinion that books were strictly supposed to teach people about “real life matters”, as was done in science and religion, not lead someone down an exciting path filled with action, thrill or drama. Thus, novels were by some even considered to be harmful, as they were books filled with “lies”. Nevertheless, people eventually started to get used to the fact that books did not have to tell the truth, but could also be a form of entertainment. As a result, the road was paved for novels as we know them today (Agapitos and Mortensen, 2012: 34-35).

During the 19th century, people started to think of fiction as a powerful way to develop imagination, tap into creativity and exercise the brain. Furthermore, an idea that reading fiction made people more tolerant and open-minded gradually started to grow. As a result of this, Swedish schools started to incorporate works of fiction within the Swedish Subject during the 1860’s (Persson, 2007). In addition, it was about this time that Swedish schools shifted from teaching classical languages such as Greek and Latin, to teaching modern languages such as German, French and foremost *English*. Parallel to this, there was also a shift within the Swedish school system, with the implementation of schools for *the general public*. This enabled language education, which used to be a privilege for the upper-class citizens, to become available to all socio-economic levels of society. Since fiction at this point was considered an effective teaching tool within the Swedish Subject, schools gradually started to include novels within the EFL-
teaching as well. Ultimately, this meant that the novel reached a wider public than ever before (Bernhardsson, 2011:268). Persson (2012) argues that this was the starting point of something that eventually developed into a cultural tradition in Swedish schools. He asserts that teaching fiction is something educators started doing during the late 19th century, and is something educators have done ever since —mainly due to the notion that students, in various ways, simply become better people by reading novels. As a result, novels have constituted a large proportion of the texts students encounter in school for the last 150 years (Persson, 2012).

Today, works of fiction are often argued to increase people’s understanding of the world, other cultures and themselves. In addition, as novels often use a great variety of words and language styles, they are also believed to have great impact on people’s language skills. By exposing the reader to new words and sentence structures, they supposedly help to assimilate the basic rhythms and structures of a language. In other words, novels are believed to train the reader's mind to mimic a range of ways to use a language, and, thereby, push the boundaries of the reader's linguistic competence (Parkinson and Thomas, 2000:8-9). In addition to this, reading fiction in a foreign language is often considered to be one of the best ways to understand the culture, history and traditions of a language, especially in those cases where a visit or stay is not possible (Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014:251).

Moreover, Hardy (1977:12) argues that fiction enriches people's minds and thinking skills because of its narrative text structure. She claims that stories define how we think, and that it is through stories we understand and make sense of our lives:

For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order to really live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future (ibid).

In accordance with this, Lundahl (2012:403) argues that narratives are a fundamental way of organizing human experiences and expressing emotions, and that fiction, therefore, should be a natural part of all curriculums.

Perhaps all this would lead you to think that the teaching of fiction forms a greater part of the language curriculums in Swedish schools today. However, in fact, if we look at the current
Swedish curriculums for the teaching of English at high school level, we can see that nothing but a fairly small percentage of the core content even mentions the teaching of fiction. The three curriculums for the teaching of English consist of 15 key points of core content each, and —only one or two of these key points mention the term *fiction* or other literature. In addition, they do so in a rather vague and indistinct way, which leaves considerable room for interpretation:

**English 5:**
- “Content and form in different kinds of *fiction*”.
- “Literature and other *fiction*”.

**English 6:**
- “Themes, ideas, form and content in film and *literature*; authors and literary periods”.
- “Contemporary and older *literature*, poetry, drama and songs”.

**English 7:**
- “Contemporary and older literature and other *fiction* in various genres such as drama”.  
  (Skolverket, 2011).

As can be seen, the teaching of fiction is rather sparingly mentioned in all of the Swedish EFL-curriculums at high school level, and, none of the curriculums specifically require teachers to teach *novels*. So, how can we then explain the fact that the teaching of novels is a norm in the language classroom? (Persson, 2012). Well, first of all, there is of course room for interpretation regarding the remaining points of core content in these courses, as well as there is room for interpretation concerning the skills and abilities students are expected to acquire by taking these courses. For instance, *the aim of the subject English* notes that students should be: "[…] given opportunities to develop correctness in their use of language in speech and writing, and also the ability to express themselves with variation and complexity" as well as: "[…] 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). The fact that it is possible to argue that these skills could be acquired through reading novels, could perhaps help to explain why novels often seem to be a norm within the teaching of languages —despite the fact that none of the EFL curriculums explicitly require teachers to include fiction in their teaching to a particularly large extent.
However, Persson (2007) claims that much of why teachers choose to teach novels today could be explained by the cultural tradition of teaching them. In other words —teachers do it because that is what they have always done. Furthermore, Persson argues that this cultural tradition is particularly noticeable when looking at what novels teachers use in their classrooms. He asserts that teachers often tend to teach the same novels throughout their teaching careers, as well as at that these books often are the same books as the teachers were taught themselves when they were students. In connection to this, Kåreland (2009:61) conducted a survey in 2009, where 200 high school language-teachers were asked to fill in a questionnaire with questions about their novel-teaching practices. In accordance with Persson’s (2007) claim, the survey showed that the majority of participating teachers had a tendency to teach the same novels, accompanied by the same assignments, year after year. The survey did, however, not examine whether these books were the same books as the teachers were taught themselves when they were in school.

In 2012, a Swedish literature investigation was performed to find out the position of literature among young adults. The study showed that students' desire to read, as well as their reading comprehension when it comes to printed books, had decreased progressively over the last two decades (SOU 2012: 65). This phenomenon is explained differently by various authors. Lundqvist (1984) argues that students' decreasing willingness to read could, at least partly, be explained by looking at how reading sessions generally are conducted in the classroom. She mainly makes reference to the teaching policy of “free reading” (“fri läsning”), which refers to the kind of lessons where students are asked to read by themselves, with little or no guidance from the teacher, with the purpose of letting them “discover the joy of reading on their own” (Stensson, 2006). The term free reading could be found in the Swedish high school curriculums for the first time in the year of 1969. However, Stensson goes on to claim that free reading sessions are still commonly conducted in many language classrooms today. Moreover, Lundqvist (1984) argues that free reading should not be considered a teaching strategy, but a lack of teaching strategy. She claims that these kinds of reading sessions typically are performed without any structured follow-up assignments, which often leaves students thinking that the reading is unimportant. In line with this, Tornberg (2009) argues that students typically are not asked to vent their thoughts or feelings about a book until after they have finished it, and, that they are most commonly asked to do so by writing book reviews. Tornberg asserts that when students are not asked to work with the novel during the actual reading of it, it often sends a signal that the
reading is *not important*. Moreover, Tornberg argues that book review templates typically consist of a set of questions focusing on the following three main components: 1) the plot and its main features, 2) the reader’s opinion about the book, and 3) whether or not the reader would recommend the book to others\(^1\). Tornberg goes on to claim that book reviews like these typically leave little room for students' own involvement and thoughts, as they often consist of questions that are not genuinely open-ended. She explains that, as students are being scored on their answers, there is often a feeling on their part that the teacher might be looking for particular “right” answers to the questions. In accordance with this, Collie and Slater (1987:8) argue that, when assignments do not leave room for students' own responses, there is often a feeling on the part of students that the teacher is edging them towards specific answers s/he already has in mind, which often has a negative impact on students' motivation.

Persson (2012:26), however, claims that students' decreasing willingness to read could best be explained by the fact that the position of reading literature has changed along with the intrusion of social media. He argues that young people today read more than ever—although not in the form of printed books, but in text messages, chats and other digitized forums. Persson claims that this is often looked upon today as a sign of educational deterioration—but that that does not have to be the case. Instead, Persson asserts that, for schools to stay relevant to their students, they must respond to the changes of society and change their teaching strategies accordingly. He argues that teachers today need to challenge their own conceptions by asking themselves: *why* do students *need* to read novels? He claims that there is an idea that the appreciation of novels can directly change lives and inspire great moral insight, which he admits *could* be true—provided that students read the books. However, Persson argues that teachers need to stop idealize and romanticize the image of literature teaching, and start questioning whether there might be more efficient ways to offer students linguistic and worldly insight in today's modern society.

\(^1\)As this definition is in accordance with my own experiences of what a book review is, this is what I will be referring to when mentioning book reviews in this essay.
PROBLEMS IN TEACHING NOVELS WITHIN THE MODERN EFL-CLASSROOM

The following section will list some of the most common problems when teaching works of fiction within modern EFL-settings, according to previous research within the field.

COMPREHENSION

Perhaps the most obvious problem concerning reading in a foreign language, is that of comprehension. If the reader is unable to fully understand the text, s/he is also unable to acquire any intended knowledge from it. The inability to understand a text could, however, have many dimensions and explanations. To begin with, studies show that a reader needs to understand up to 95% of the words in a text in order to make complete sense of it (Lundahl, 2009:48). Nonetheless, books and texts are often full of odd words and unusual grammar. Consequently, there is a high risk that non-native speakers miss important effects created by difficult language (Parkinson and Thomas, 2000:12).

REMTENESS

Problems in comprehending texts do not always have to do with a lack of vocabulary or deficient grammar skills; another common problem is that of remoteness. Texts can be remote from learners in many ways: historically, geographically, culturally, socially and not least in terms of life experience. In order to fully understand a text, the reader needs to have some previous knowledge and understanding of the social and cultural codes that make up the story (Parkinson and Thomas, 2000:12). In connection to this, there is likely to be an imbalance of power between the teacher and her students. Parkinson and Thomas argue that, typically, the teacher chooses, or at least controls what books to read. Parkinson and Thomas goes on to claim that a problem with this is that teachers tend to choose books that they personally like or find suitable, often based on the canon. The canon refers to a metaphorical list of books considered by scholars to be “essential” or particularly important for a certain culture, nation or civilization. The notion of a literary canon carries implications of value and reflects a particular “high view” of art (ibid). Persson (2012) claims that although there is no “fixed” canon today, there is an invisible one which tends to lead teachers to teach certain, often considered “classic” authors, rather than others. A problem with this is that certain books are taught simply because they are considered to be canonical, with little or no regard for students and their interests. According to Kåreland
(2013:90), it is crucial that students can relate to the book they are reading, in order to increase (or perhaps maintain) their willingness to read. She argues that students need to be able to recognize themselves in the different constituents of a book, for example by identifying with the characters or finding the setting plausible. Finally, the fact that teachers often tend to control what books students should read, not only conflicts with Kåreland’s (2013) standpoint, but also with the modern idea that students should have some control over their own learning. As a result of this, learners are often turned off by the remoteness of what they have to read (Parkinson and Thomas, 2000:13).

COMPULSION

Stensson (2006:12) argues that the conditions for successful reading are complex. Her belief is that it is our earliest experiences with reading that affect our attitude towards reading the most, and that learners who have had parents reading to them when they were young, tend to have a more positive attitude towards reading later in life. However, Nilsson (1997) stresses that despite one’s earliest childhood experiences with reading, there is a problem with the fact that reading usually is conducted in compulsory situations. He argues that there are many students who do not understand the purpose of reading fiction; they only do it when they are forced to do so for school assignments. He asserts that, if a teacher’s goal is to get students to want to read, forcing them to do so will only have the opposite effect. Furthermore, he claims that there is too much focus on the mandatory assignments that usually follow the reading of a book. He concludes that if we really want to increase students’ willingness to read, we should let them do it without asking them to take the story apart, explain it or write essays on it; we should let them do it for the experience, the joy and amusement. This is in line with Krashen’s (1985) belief that, in order for it to be a useful learning tool, the reading of novels must be conducted in voluntary situations. Krashen argues that works of fiction could act as the source of our ability to write, spell and understand the world, but in order to fully provide us with all this, reading has to be voluntary; there can be no musts in forms of time limitations, book reports or book talks. In conclusion, Nilsson (1997) as well as Krashen (1985) simply suggest that students would want to read if reading sessions were conducted in less restricted ways. However, in contrast, Lundqvist (1984) believes that the main reason for why some students are unwilling to read is because they find the
reading unimportant — due to the fact that reading sessions usually are conducted under unstructured circumstances (free reading sessions). In other words, there are some differing perspectives on how reading sessions ideally should be conducted in order to affect students’ willingness to read in positive ways.

**LACK OF SEQUENCING**

Another problem in teaching works of fiction within EFL-settings, is that there is often no sequencing in working with novels. For instance, when teaching grammar, we do so gradually. We first teach the rules and then the exceptions; hence, we expose learners to difficult language in sequence (Krashen, 1985). However, in the teaching of fiction there are often no staging posts, which means that students are often “thrown in at the deep end” and expected to somehow just make sense of a story anyway. Some manage to do so, and some do not. Thus, Parkinson and Thomas (2000:13) argue that this only widens the gap between the “successful” and the “failures”, and that many teachers, therefore, need to re-think the ways they work with literature.

**THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION**

The digital revolution means there are more platforms than ever to read on, yet the number of teens reading fiction for pleasure has dropped dramatically over the years (SOU 2012: 65). Persson (2012) argues that the reading of literature suffers a “crisis of legitimacy” in today’s digitized society. He claims that students of today do actually read, but most of them do not read novels, and not in the forms of printed books. Instead, children and teenagers today encounter other types of media in their everyday lives, such as TV, videogames and the internet. Persson emphasizes that these types of media have one important thing in common: they offer instant feedback. For example, when playing a video game, the player is challenged with a set of obstacles or “problems”. As soon as the player has solved one of these problems, the game will typically provide instant rewards for succeeding in doing so. This is in contrast to reading fiction, where a story might not reach its climax until the very last chapter. Thus, reading requires an extended period of concentration and focus, while e.g. playing video games is an activity which could be performed without putting much mental energy into it. Conclusively, students of today may not have the patience to read novels as their brains are “trained” in a different way (ibid). However, Persson stresses that if the main purpose for reading novels within EFL-settings is that
it offers examples of authentic vocabulary use, we need to ask ourselves in what ways novels do this better than other types of media. Research shows that school performance is related to how much students read (Stensson, 2006:17), and since students’ willingness to read has decreased over the last decade (SOU 2012: 65), this could be argued to go hand in hand with the fact that Swedish PISA-results have dropped over the years (Skolverket, 2015). However, research also shows that there is one subject where Swedish students actually have increased their scores over the years: namely English (ibid). This could be argued to be a result of young people spending a lot of time on social media, where English is the most common language used (Axelsson 2005: 96). Hence, students might not see the point in reading novels for formal language learning purposes.

2. METHOD

This section will present a step-by-step description of how the study was conducted. The aim of the study was to gain insight into the ways that students of today essentially work with the reading of fiction, and its accompanying assignments. As I wished to identify the participants’ personal experiences and understandings, but also attain some information in numerical form in order to be able to analyze the data in a clear way, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research methods were considered to be the most appropriate (Patel and Davidsson, 2011). Therefore, two different questionnaires were designed, one that was answered by students and one that was answered by teachers, both comprising closed as well as open-ended questions. The sections below will describe participants, materials and overall procedure in closer detail.

PARTICIPANTS

Two High School classes within theoretical programs, making up a total of 38 students, agreed to participate in the study. In addition, each of these classes’ English teachers, as well as two additional English teachers (making up a total of 4 teachers) volunteered to take part.

The sample of students consisted of 20 females and 18 males, while all 4 teachers were female. The students’ ages ranged from 16-18 years old, and they were all in their second year of high school; thus enrolled in the English 6 course. The teachers ranged from 32 to 62 years of age, and they were all currently teaching the English 6 course. All participants, students as well as
teachers, were from the same high school: a public school in the south of Sweden, consisting of about 1,000 students and 150 teachers. There was no specific motive for choosing this particular sample group; the choice of participants could best explained by the fact that I had personal connections at this particular school, which simply facilitated this part of the survey process.

**MATERIALS**

As mentioned, the materials used were *two questionnaires*: one designed to be answered by students, and one to be answered by teachers. The following section will present information about the two questionnaires and how they were constructed. To view the full *Student Questionnaire*, see Appendix A. To view the full *Teacher Questionnaire*, see Appendix B.

### A. STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

My aim with the 'Student Questionnaire' was to find out more about the students' experiences and ideas concerning the teaching of fiction within the *English 6* course. To obtain this, all 38 students were asked to fill in a questionnaire consisting of seven questions focusing on their personal experiences of working with fiction within the course. The reason for conducting questionnaires rather than interviews, could best be explained by the fact that questionnaires are more efficient when information is needed from a larger group of participants. Moreover, questionnaires are easier to analyze statistically, thus less time-consuming than interviews (Patel and Davidsson, 2011). To avoid misinterpretations and language comprehension issues, all questions on the questionnaire were asked in the students' first language, namely Swedish. The following topics were raised:

- Approximately how many novels they had personally read throughout the *English 6* course.
- Who generally chooses the books within the course, and if they think it matters.
- What assignment usually accompany the reading of a novel.
- How they typically solve such assignments.

The reason for using terms like “approximately”, “generally”, “usually” and “typically” in the questions, was mainly as I wanted to reduce the risk of receiving answers like “*it depends on the*
Patel and Davidsson argue that using terms like e.g. “usually” or “generally” when asking questions, is an effective technique to increase the chances that respondents will provide clear answers, as such phrases “ask less” of respondents by allowing them to answer in *general terms*. However, Patel and Davidsson also assert that using such questions could compromise the reliability of the results, as they only provide generalized information and may leave out detail in respondents’ answers. Nonetheless, as for this study I was mainly interested in the “big picture” and wanted all respondents to provide clear answers to the utmost possible, using such questions were considered to be the most appropriate.

Moreover, as earlier mentioned, the Student Questionnaire used both closed and open questions to collect information. This choice was made in order to be able to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. All closed questions included a list of 3-6 alternatives, from which the respondents could choose *one*. Patel and Davidsson (2011:66) argue that closed questions are especially beneficial when information is wanted from a larger group of participants, as such questions are easier and quicker for respondents to answer —as well as that the results are easier for the researcher to code and convert into measurable data. However, closed questions also limit respondents’ answers, as they lack detail. When responses are fixed, there is less scope for respondents to answer the questions in ways that in an accurate way reflect their feelings. Therefore, I decided to also use open-ended questions, as such questions allow respondents to express their thoughts in their own words (ibid). Moreover, some questions included a list of alternatives *and* a section of blank lines —thus allowing respondents the freedom to pick a fixed alternative *or* answer the question in their own words.

**B. TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE**

As I wanted to establish whether or not the students' experiences of working with novels were in accordance with the teachers' perceptions, I decided to construct a separate questionnaire to be answered by the English teachers. This questionnaire consisted of nine questions similar to the ones the students answered, although these questions were directed towards the teacher. The 'Teacher Questionnaire' was, like the 'Student Questionnaire', designed in Swedish. However, needless to say, the reason for constructing the Teacher Questionnaire this way was not to avoid language comprehension issues. In this case, I primarily wanted to make sure that students and
teachers would answer questions on nearly the exact same topics, in order to be able to fairly compare their answers later on. In other words, I did not want to risk that the two groups of respondents, students and teachers, would interpret the questions in dissimilar ways due to possible differences in nuance between Swedish and English. The teachers were asked to answer questions concerning the following topics:

- The reasons for why they teach novels (or for why they do not).
- Approximately much time they spend on teaching novels throughout the English 6 course.
- Approximately many works of fiction they believe the majority of their students had read throughout the course.
- Who generally chooses the books, and if they think it matters.
- What assignment usually accompany the reading of a novel.
- What strategies they believe the majority of their students typically apply when solving such tasks.

Similar to the Student Questionnaire, terms like “approximately”, “generally”, “usually” and “the majority of students” were used in this questionnaire. This choice was made for the same reason as mentioned above, namely because it is an effective way to avoid unspecified or evasive answers to the questions like “it depends” or “it varies” (Patel and Davidsson, 2011).

Moreover, the Teacher Questionnaire consisted of both open-ended and closed questions, as I wanted to obtain both detailed and quantifiable information. Some questions included a list of fixed responses and a section of blank lines, thus allowing the teachers to either pick a fixed alternative, or answer the question in their own words.

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that, as the group of teachers consisted of only four persons, one might argue that using questionnaires was perhaps not the most advantageous research method. For example, Patel and Davidsson (2011) claim that interviews often are the most beneficial when performing small-scale studies on peoples' attitudes and experiences. This is mainly because misunderstandings can be rectified easily, and also because they allow the interviewer to evaluate and analyze abstract factors as e.g. body language and tone of voice, etc.
However, as previously mentioned, interviews are often considerably more time-consuming and harder to analyze, which is part of the reason why I chose not to use them in this case. Nonetheless, above all, I wanted all respondents, teachers as well as students, to participate on the same conditions. If the teachers would have been interviewed, my understanding is that they would have been given better opportunities to elaborate their answers than the students. Hence, I chose to let both groups of participants answer questionnaires, which were designed to be as similar as possible.

PROCEDURE

This section aims to describe the full procedure of how the study was performed. I began my research study by emailing about ten English teachers at a school where I had some personal contacts, asking them to participate as volunteers in my study. In that email, I briefly explained that I was performing a research study on the teaching of fiction within EFL-settings. Four teachers replied to my email and accepted my request, whereof two agreed to let each of their English 6 classes participate as well.

The 'Student Questionnaire’ was handed out to one class at a time. The first class, consisting of 21 students (10 females and 11 males), answered the questionnaire during the beginning of an English class in April 2016. The other class, consisting of 17 students (10 females and 7 males), answered the questionnaire during a Swedish class in May 2016. No teachers were present during any of these occasions. Firstly, I explained to the students that the purpose of my study was to find out more about the ways fiction is being taught and dealt with within the English 6 course. Secondly, to obtain the students' consent, I clarified that the questionnaire was to be answered anonymously, and that all generated information would be treated confidentially; meaning that the data would be stored and used in such a way that unauthorized persons would not be able to access it (Patel and Davidsson, 2011: 62). Nevertheless, it should be admitted that I decided on an anonymous questionnaire not only due to ethical considerations, but partly also to increase the chances that the students would provide honest answers to the questions. Thirdly, the students were asked to read through the directions at the top of the questionnaire carefully, after which we briefly went over all questions together to make sure there would be no misunderstandings. Lastly, the students were asked to answer the questions to the best of their ability. It was emphasized that they were allowed to cease participation at any time. However, all students
chose to complete the questionnaire; hence, the non-response was 0%. After the questionnaires were turned in, all students were asked if they had any questions, and then thanked for their cooperation.

The 'Teacher Questionnaire' was handed out to all four English teachers by the end of May 2016. Similar to the information they were given in the email I sent out a few months earlier, the teachers were told that I was performing a research study about the teaching of fiction within EFL-settings. Like the 'Student Questionnaire', The 'Teacher Questionnaire' was meant to be answered anonymously, partly due to ethical considerations, and partly as I wished for all participants to feel as comfortable as possible and answer the questions truthfully. However, as this group of participants consisted of only four people—and they were asked to share demographic information about themselves (such as age and sex), the Teacher Questionnaire could perhaps not be regarded as being fully anonymous. Although my understanding was that this was no problem for the teachers—as they did not seem to consider the questions to be of any delicate nature—I emphasized that their responses would be treated with strict confidentiality (Patel and Davidsson, 2011). The teachers were then asked to read the directions at the top of the questionnaire, after which we briefly went over the questions together in order to make sure that there would be no misunderstandings. Due to their busy schedules, they had about a week to answer the questions before I went back to the school and collected the completed questionnaires. The teachers were then graciously thanked for their participation, and I could start compiling the results.

CRITIQUE OF METHOD

As mentioned and argued for, questionnaires comprising both fixed, as well as open-ended questions, were considered to be the most appropriate research method in regards to the scope and aim of the study. In addition, although the advantages of using questions with terms like “generally” or “usually” were considered to outweigh the disadvantages, I would like to stress that this may potentially have left out some important detail in respondents’ answers (Patel and Davidsson, 2011). Lastly, I would like to add that—with an extended time frame—the study most likely would have benefitted from a larger group of participants, as well as a greater spread in respondents’ demographics. In that way, the study would have possibly been able to provide results applicable to other schools and EFL-settings as well. However, as the study was performed as a
small-scale project at one particular school, with participants enrolled solely within theoretical programmes—I would not argue that the results are applicable to other EFL-contexts.

### 3. RESULTS

In this section, I will present the compiled results of my study. As I carried out both qualitative and quantitative research methods, my findings will be reported both in written form and in tables. All questions that were raised on the questionnaires, as well as all responses, will be translated from Swedish into English.

Before I present the results regarding the questions that were raised to both teachers and students, I would shortly like to disclose the teachers' answers to why they teach fiction, as well as their reports regarding how much time they put down on teaching fiction within the English 6 course. I have chosen to account for these results first, as I believe these responses are useful to have in mind when looking at the remaining results of the study.

**WHY DO THE TEACHERS TEACH NOVELS?**

When asked the open-ended question: “Why do you (not) teach novels?” all four teachers responded in quite similar ways, mainly arguing for the linguistic benefits of reading novels. Each of the teachers mentioned that reading novels increases students' vocabularies, as well as it improves their grammatical skills. Other explanations for why they teach fiction were:

- “It teaches students about other cultures and realities”.
- “Works of fiction show authentic examples of how stories are built, which enriches students' creativity”. [My translations].

**HOW MUCH TIME DO THE TEACHERS SPEND ON TEACHING NOVELS?**

The teachers were asked to estimate how much time they spend on teaching works of fiction during school hours every year within the English 6 course. Two of the teachers estimated that they spend around 4 weeks on teaching fiction within the course—whereof 2-3 weeks are spent on letting students read to themselves in class, and 1-2 weeks are spent on having them work with associated assignments. The other two teachers estimated that they spend around 6 weeks on teaching fiction every year. One of them further specified that about 4 of these weeks are spent
on having students read by themselves in class, while the remaining 2 weeks are spent on letting them work with accompanying tasks. Two teachers added that they had taught about **two novels**, so far, throughout the course.

Let us now move on to the results that include **both teachers’ and students’ responses**. In the following section, the questions that were raised on **both** questionnaires will be dealt with one at a time, starting with a report of the students’ answers, followed by the teachers’ answers. The results of the open-ended questions will be accounted for in written form, and the responses to the closed-ended questions will be presented in tables. All tables will present information about **one specific question**, and consist of three columns: the first one will include all the alternatives the participants had to choose from regarding that question, the second will account for the number of respondents picking a certain response, and the last column will specify that number in forms of percentage. Under each of the tables, there will be a brief description in order to help you interpret the results. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the results showed **no significant differences in responses between males and females**; thus, I have chosen not to account for the participants’ sexes in the following report.

## 1. HOW OFTEN DO THE STUDENTS READ IN THEIR FREE TIME?

### STUDENTS

Regarding this closed question, the students were asked how often they read novels (in any language) in their free time. Their responses were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Often</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Sometimes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Never</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>94.7 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the table shows, no students answered that they read books on a regular basis. Two students answered that they read *sometimes*, and thirty-six students responded that they *never* read novels.

**TEACHERS**

The teachers were asked how often they believe *the majority* of their students read novels in their free time (in any language). Their responses were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Percentage (100% =4 teachers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Often</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Sometimes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Never</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, none of the teachers answered that they believe the majority of their students read novels on a regular basis. One teacher answered that she believe most of her students read *sometimes*, while the remaining three teachers answered that they believe that the majority of their students *never* read novels in their free time.

**2. HOW MANY NOVELS HAVE THE STUDENTS READ THROUGHOUT THE COURSE?**

**STUDENTS**

The students were asked to estimate how many books they had personally read throughout the *English 6* course. They answered the question as follows:
As shown in the table, twenty-six of the students answered that they had read no books throughout the course. Seven students answered that they had read 1-2 novels, and one student that they had read 2-3 novels. None of the students answered that they had read 3 novels or more. Finally, four students answered that they did not know, or did not want to answer the question.

**TEACHERS**

The teachers were asked to account for how many books they believed the majority of their students had finished throughout the English 6 course. To clarify, for this question, the teachers were not asked to account for how many books that had been taught, but for how many they believed their students had read. Their responses are shown in the table below.
Table 2B

2. How many novels have your students, approximately, read throughout the course?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) None (0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) 1-2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) 2-3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) 3 or more</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) I don't know or don't want to answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table above, none of the teachers believed that the majority of their students had read no novels at all. Three of the teachers believed that their students had read about 1-2 novels, which is in accordance with the number of books two of the teachers reported to have taught so far throughout the course (when asked how much time they put down on teaching fiction every year in the course). The remaining teacher answered that she did not know, or did not want to answer the question. In her own words, this teacher explained that she found the question difficult to answer, as she believed that some of her students had read far more than 3 novels, while others probably had read none. Thus, she could not pick an answer that fit the “majority” of her students.
3. WHO PICKS WHAT NOVELS TO READ?

STUDENTS

The students were asked who generally decides what novels they are to read within the English 6 course. They reported the following:

Table 3A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Percentage (100% =38 students)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) The teacher</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>92.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) The students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) It varies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.8 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table above, thirty-five of the students answered that the teacher generally chooses the novels within the course. None of the students answered that they most commonly get to choose novels by themselves, and the remaining three students responded that it varies between the teacher and themselves.

TEACHERS

The teachers were asked the same question, that is to say who generally picks the books within the course English 6. They reported the following:

Table 3B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Percentage (100% =4 teachers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) The teacher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) The students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) It varies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table, all four teachers responded that it varies between themselves and the students.
4. A) DOES IT MATTER WHO CHOOSES THE NOVELS?

B) WHY/WHY NOT?

STUDENTS

Regarding the first part of this question: (A) *if it matters who chooses the novels*, students had three fixed responses to choose from: *Yes, No* or *I don't know*. These results are shown in the table below. However, for the second part of this question: (B) *Why or why not?*, the students were asked to explain their viewpoint in their own words. Therefore, these results are accounted for in a separate section in written form, below the table.

Table 4A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) No</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) I do not know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table, fifteen of the students responded that it *does* matter who chooses the novels, while twenty answered that it *does not* matter. Three students answered that they did not know.

4B) Why does it/why does it not matter who picks the novels?

Regarding this follow-up question, the fifteen students who responded that it *does* matter who picks the novels, mainly argued for *the benefits of choosing the novels themselves*. Their given answers were similar, and typically included one or more of the following reasons:

- “It allows you to pick a book that matches your personal interests”.
- “It allows you to pick a book that is not too difficult to read”.
• “It allows you to pick a book that you have read before, which makes it easier to answer questions about it”. [My translations].

The twenty students who answered that it does not matter who picks the books, all gave one or more of the following explanations:

• “It does not matter who picks the books because all books are boring”.
• “It does not matter who picks the books because I do not intend to read them anyway”.
• “It does not matter because I do not like reading in general”. [My translations].

Finally, none of the three students who responded “I do not know” on the first question, answered this part of the question.

TEACHERS

Similarly to the students, the teachers were asked a question consisting of two parts: A) If they think it matters who chooses the novels, and B) why they think it matters or not. The teachers’ responses to the first part of the question is shown in the table below, and their responses to the second part of the question is presented in a separate section under the table.

Table 4B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Percentage (100% =4 teachers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) I don’t know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table above, all four teachers responded that it does matter who chooses the novels.
Concerning this question, one of the teachers especially emphasized the benefits of allowing the students to pick novels themselves. She stated that “[…] it increases students’ motivation as well as their willingness to read” [My translation]. The other three teachers were a bit more ambivalent in their responses, arguing that -if students *always* get to pick novels themselves, there is a high risk that they will keep choosing “the same kind of book”—which the teachers believed to be unfavorable for students’ personal and linguistic development. However, all three of these teachers also mentioned that when students are *never* allowed to pick novels themselves, it might have negative effects on their motivation to read. One of the teachers argued that the best way to solve this problem is to give the students a list of no more than 4-5 books to choose from. Hence, in that way, “[…] the students have a choice, but the teacher is still in control” [My translation].

### 5. WHAT ASSIGNMENT TYPICALLY ACCOMPANIES THE READING OF A NOVEL?

**STUDENTS**

The students were asked what kind of assignment that *usually* goes together with the reading of a novel. The students could choose to pick a fixed response from a set of alternatives, or answer the question in their own words. It should be mentioned that, when the questionnaires were handed out, the students and I went over all alternatives together and made sure that we had the same definitions of the listed tasks. Their answers are shown in the table below. (For the sake of clarity, I have added a brief definition of each task in the table).
Table 5A

5. What assignment *usually* goes together with the reading of a novel?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Book talks (Discuss the book and its plot/settings/characters in class)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Written exam (Answer questions about the book on a written exam)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Oral exam (Answer questions about the book on an oral exam)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) Book reviews (Review the book in written form by answering questions about the plot/settings/characters, + own opinions and reasons for recommending it to others or not)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>94.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F) I don't know or don't want to answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, one student answered that “book talk” is the most common task to be coupled with the reading of a novel. No students answered that written or oral exams are the most common. Thirty-six students responded that the writing of *book reviews* is the most common task to succeed the reading of a novel. One student answered that they did not know or did not want to answer the question. No students answered the question in their own words or added information in the blank lines.
The teachers were asked what assignment they generally couple with the reading of a novel. It should be mentioned here too that, when I handed out the questionnaire, the teachers and I went over all alternatives to make sure we had the same definitions of the different tasks. Similar to the students, the teachers could choose to answer the question by picking a fixed alternative, or answer the question in their own words. Their responses were as follows:

Table 5B

5. What assignment usually follow the reading of a novel in your classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Book talks (Discuss the book and its plot/settings/characters in class)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Written exam (Answer questions about the book on a written exam)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Oral exam (Answer questions about the book on an oral exam)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) Book reviews (Review the book in written form by answering questions about the plot/settings/characters, + own opinions and reasons for recommending it to others or not)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F) I don’t know or don’t want to answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, one of the teachers responded that “book talk” is the most common task to be coupled with the reading of a novel in her classroom. None of the teachers answered that written or oral exams are the most common. Two teachers answered that they generally ask their students to write book reviews. The fourth teacher answered “other”, which she explained in the blank lines. This teacher described that there is no assignment that she generally couples with the
reading of a novel, but rather that she tries to *alternate between tasks* in order to keep her students motivated. As an example, she mentioned that the last time she taught a novel, she asked her students to write an “alternative ending” to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

---

6. HOW DO STUDENTS SOLVE ASSIGNMENTS BASED ON A NOVEL AND ITS PLOT?

STUDENTS

The students were asked to have their answer to the previous question in mind (What assignment *usually* goes together with the reading of a novel?). Thereafter, they were asked to answer how they generally solve such an assignment; meaning, what strategies they apply to be able to complete such a novel-based task. Their responses were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Read the novel</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Watch a film-version</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Use the internet to find information</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) A mixture of the above</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F) I don't know or don't want to answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table, eight students answered that, in order to be able to complete assignments based on a novel, they simply *read the novel*. Two students answered that they *watch a film-version*, while twenty-six students answered that they *use the internet* to find information about the novel. One student answered that they apply *a mixture* of all strategies mentioned in the list of alternatives. One student did not know, or did not want to answer the question. No students added
The teachers were asked what strategies they believe the majority of their students apply when solving novel-based tasks. Their responses were as follows:

Table 6B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Read the novel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Watch a film-version</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Use the internet to find information</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) A mixture of the above</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F) I don’t know or don’t want to answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, three of the teachers believe the majority of their students read the novels in order to be able to complete assignments based on them. None of the teachers answered that they believe their students generally watch film-versions, nor that they use the internet to find information about the novels. One of the teachers answered that she believes the majority of her students applies a mixture of the listed alternatives.

7. WHY DO STUDENTS APPLY THAT CERTAIN STRATEGY?

Concerning this question, the students were asked to have their response to the previous question in mind (How do you solve assignments based on a novel and its plot?). They were then asked to explain why they chose that particular response, in their own words. Their responses were as
The eight students who answered that they typically read the novels in order to be able to complete assignments based on them, explained this with the same key argument: “How else would I be able to do it in a proper way?” [My translation]. Three of these students also emphasized that they enjoy reading the novels.

The two students who answered that they typically watch film-versions of novels to complete novel-based assignments, explained that they do so because they simply “like movies better than books”. One of them also explained that watching a movie does not take as much time as reading a whole book, which allows her to put more energy into the other school subjects. She concluded: “We have so much to do in school, there is no time to read a whole novel, especially not in English” [My translation].

The twenty-six students, who responded that they typically use the internet to find information about the novels they are assigned, had many, but similar arguments. The most common were:

- “It is much easier than reading the book yourself”.
- “There is no time to read a whole novel”.
- “It is boring to read”. [My translations].

Other explanations were:

- “The internet offers explanations of what the book is really about, which could be hard to understand if you read it yourself”.
- “There are many already finished book reviews online, which facilitates the process of answering the questions in ways you know the teacher is going to like”. [My translations].

The student who answered that they did not want to answer what strategies s/he typically applies, as well as the student who answered s/he applies a mixture of strategies, chose not to answer this question.
The three teachers who responded that they believe the majority of their students typically read the books, mainly argued that: “[...] if you know your students well, it is rather easy to spot whether if someone has not read the book” [My translation]. Based on this argument, these teachers reported feeling rather certain that most of their students read when they are assigned to do so. In addition, two of the teachers mentioned that they probably would have answered this question differently, if it were not for the fact that they were currently only teaching classes within theoretical programmes. One of them further explained that, when teaching classes within practical programmes, she does not teach novels at all—as most of those students do not read the books anyway. However, in contrast, she argued that teaching fiction usually “works well” when teaching classes enrolled in theoretical programmes.

The teacher who answered that she believes most of her students apply a mixture of strategies, explained that she thought it would be “[...] rather naive to think that students in today’s modern world would not use all the help they could get” [My translation]. In addition, she stated that, as long as the students do not copy anything straight off, she does not see a problem with them using films or the internet as tools in their school work.

4. ANALYSIS

In this section, I will analyze the results from my study in relation to the previous research presented in the literature review.

I would like to begin with the teachers’ arguments for why they teach fiction, which mainly revolved around the linguistic benefits of reading novels. This seems to be in line with Lundahl’s (2012:405) ideas that reading works of fiction increases students' vocabularies, as well as it improves their grammar skills. Furthermore, these arguments are in accordance with Parkinson’s and Thomas’s (2000:8) suggestion, namely that works of fiction offer genuine examples of how a language works, which ultimately improves the reader’s linguistic competence. In addition, the teachers argued that fiction “offers authentic examples of how stories are built”, which they believed to have positive effects on students' creativity. This argument is similar to Hardy's (1997:12) idea that fiction, through its narrative text structure, enriches people's minds and
thinking skills. Moreover, the teachers also mentioned that reading fiction increases students’ understanding of “other cultures and realities”. This is compatible with Lundahl's (2012:405) claim that fiction is commonly believed to convey universal knowledge about the world and other cultures.

In conclusion, all four teachers seemed to have almost identical explanations for why they teach works of fiction, which where all in line with the lingering notion that reading novels, in various ways, makes students better people. However, if we look a bit more closely at the teachers' responses, all of them seem to be based on assumptions rather than their actual experiences. All teachers listed the benefits of teaching novels; however, none of them gave any authentic examples of how teaching it has benefitted their actual students. To be fair, the teachers were not explicitly asked to give authentic examples — however, as this was an open question, the teachers had no fixed alternatives to choose from, yet all four of them answered the question with the same arguments, expressed in an almost identical way. This could be argued to be in line with Persson’s (2012) standpoint, that the teaching of novels is a cultural tradition, and that the arguments for teaching it have been taught through generations — rather than that they are based on contemporary teachers’ and students’ factual experiences.

Next, the teachers were asked to share information about how much of their in-school teaching time they put aside for teaching fiction in the English 6 course. The teachers reported that they allocated approximately ~3 weeks to in-class reading, and ~2 weeks to allowing their students work with accompanying assignments. As all teachers reported that they let their students read by themselves in class, this suggests that the reading sessions in these cases are conducted in ways that are in accordance with the teaching strategy of free reading. Lundqvist (1984) claims that free reading sessions, because of their unstructured design, often signal to students that the reading is unimportant. And, as the majority of students stated that they typically do not read the books they are assigned within the course, simply because they find it “boring”, I believe the results from this study could be argued to, at least partly, support Lundqvist’s (1984) claim.

When asked how often they read in their free time, the majority of the students (94.7%) claimed that they never read books. This is in accordance with the findings of the Swedish literature investigation performed in 2012, which, among other things, showed that the number of young adults reading novels for pleasure today is immensely low (SOU 2012: 65). However, this
phenomenon seemed to be recognized by the teachers, as three of them (75%) answered that they did not think that the majority of their students ever read books in their spare time.

Nevertheless, by looking at the remaining topics raised to both groups of participants, it becomes quite apparent that the students' and teachers’ perceptions and ideas often differ to some extent. As a first example, when asked to estimate how many novels they had read throughout the English 6 course, twenty-six out of the thirty-eight students, making up a total of 68.4 %, answered that they had not read a single book. Only eight of the students (21 %) responded that they had read any books at all throughout the course. However, three out of the four teachers (75%) believed that the majority of their students had read 1-2 books, which is in accordance with the number of books that had been taught so far throughout the course, at least according to two of the teachers. In addition, two teachers stated that they would have responded differently, if it was not for the fact that they were currently only teaching English within theoretical programmes. Their explanation for this was that teaching novels typically “works well” when teaching classes within theoretical programmes, in contrast to teaching classes within practical programmes. This is interesting, as all of the participating students were enrolled in theoretical classes, and still, the majority of them admit to not ever reading the books they are assigned within the course. From this, I believe it is possible to draw the following two conclusions: 1) the majority of students in this study do not read in their free time, nor when they are asked to do so for school assignments, and 2) the majority of the teachers are unaware of the latter.

Moreover, the majority of the students (92.2%) answered that the teacher usually chooses what books to read within the course English 6, while all four teachers (100%) responded that it usually varies between the students and themselves. The fact that the majority of the students experience that the teacher typically controls what books to read, could be argued to be in line with Parkinson’s and Thomas’s (2000) as well as Persson's (2012) claim, that there often is an imbalance of power between the teacher and the students when it comes to picking the books. These authors suggest that, although the teacher might not always choose the books, he or she at least controls what books to read. This notion is confirmed by at least one of the teachers, who explained that she typically picks out 4-5 books that her students can choose from, in order to “maintain students' interest without giving up her own control”. When students are not allowed to pick the books themselves, Parkinson and Thomas (2000) argue that there is a high risk that the
texts become remote to them, as they may not be able to connect with the plot, or make sense of the cultural, historical or social codes that make up the story. In line with this, Kåreland (2013) argues that students need to be able to identify and connect with a story in order to make sense of it. Hence, the fact that most of the students experience that they usually are not allowed to pick novels themselves, could thereby possibly help to explain why the majority of them do not read novels when they are assigned to do so.

In accordance with this, when asked if it matters who chooses the books, fifteen students (39.5%) argued for the benefits of picking the novels themselves. They argued that, when they are allowed to pick books themselves, it enables them to choose something that matches their personal interests, as well as something that is not too difficult to read. The latter of these arguments connects to one of the main issues when reading in a foreign language, namely that of comprehension. Lundahl (2012) claims that a reader must understand up to 95% of the words in a text in order to be able to understand it. This could obviously be a problem when teachers decide on one specific book (or a set of books) that all students are to read, as language proficiency level may differ greatly between students. However, interestingly enough, the majority of the students (52.6%), in fact, responded that it does not matter who chooses the novels. Their key argument was that “reading is boring” and, thus, they do not want to read books, regardless of who chooses them.

So, what is it that causes these negative attitudes towards reading novels? This question could, naturally, have numerous answers and explanations. Stensson (2006:12) argues that our earliest experiences with reading is what affect our attitudes the most, and that students who were read to as children, therefore, tend to have a more positive outlook on reading later in life. Nonetheless, as the students were not asked about their childhood experiences with reading, the results from this study cannot confirm, nor contradict, this notion. Moreover, Krashen (1985) as well as Nilsson (1997) argue that the main reason for why some students are generally unwilling to read, is because the reading typically is conducted in compulsory situations, which supposedly “takes away the fun” in reading. Nevertheless, this idea suggests that students would want to read if the reading was voluntary. With that said, nor does this fully seem to reflect the complex reality of the situation—as the majority of the students report that they do not read in their free time either.

Next, all respondents were asked what kind of assignment that usually goes together with the
reading of a novel. The majority of the students (94.7%) stated that they are normally asked to write book reviews. In accordance with this, two out of the four teachers answered that book reviews are the most common tasks in their classrooms. One teacher answered that she generally organizes book talks; however, this was only confirmed by one (2.6%) of the students. The fourth teacher responded that she generally tries to alternate between different tasks. This was, nevertheless, not confirmed by any of the responding students. However, the fact that only two of the teachers’ answers seem to add up with the students’ answers in this case, could perhaps be explained by the fact that two of the teachers were not teaching any of the responding students. Hence, book talk and alternating tasks may very well be the most common in two of the teachers' classrooms.

Moreover, the fact that the majority of the respondents answered that the writing of book reviews is the most common assignment to be coupled with the reading of a novel, is in line with Tornberg’s (2009) claim, that students usually are not asked to vent their thoughts about a book until they have finished it; and, that they are generally asked to do so in forms of book reviews. Furthermore, Tornberg (2009) claims that the writing of book reviews typically is a very restrictive and teacher-lead activity, which leaves little room for students’ own thoughts and ideas. In connection to this, Collie and Slater (1987:8) argue that when assignments do not leave open room for students' own responses and thoughts, there is often a feeling on the students’ part that the teacher is “edging” them towards specific answers s/he has in mind, which often has negative effects on their motivation. This was partly confirmed by some of the students, as when they answered the question how they typically complete a novel-based assignment, they explained that they use the internet, as “there are many already finished book reviews online, which facilitates the process of answering the questions in ways you know the teacher is going to like”. [My translation]. This answer indicates that the students feel that the teacher is looking for specific “right” answers to the book review questions. Thus, as this leaves little room for the students’ own thoughts, this may be a contributing factor for why the majority of them seem unmotivated to read.

However, the most commonly used explanation for why the majority of students use the internet, or watch movies in order to complete novel-based assignments, typically were one or more of the following: “it is easier”, “it is quicker” and/or “reading books is boring”. This could be
connected to Persson’s (2012) claim, that students today read more than ever, but perhaps not in the forms of printed books. Instead, Persson argues that it is other kinds of media, such as movies and the internet, that make up essential parts of young people’s everyday lives. He explains that social media offer “instant feedback”; while in contrast, reading novels requires an extended period of patience. In connection to this, he claims that some young people today may simply not have the tolerance to read novels, as their minds are trained in a way that “needs” instant feedback. This could perhaps, partly, explain why the majority of the responding students find reading “boring”, and would rather use “easier” and “quicker” ways, such as the internet and movies, to find information.

Furthermore, one student stated that she found it “too time-consuming to read a whole novel, especially in English” [My translation]. This student never explained her thoughts any further, however, the fact that she added “especially in English” could perhaps be connected to the problems of comprehension in reading in a foreign language. Moreover, this could possibly also be connected to Krashen’s (1985) ideas, that the typical lack of sequencing in novels often makes it difficult for EFL-learners to make complete sense of a story; thus, making the reading of a novel exceedingly time-consuming.

Finally, I would like to discuss the over-all results in relation to the amount of time the teachers report to allocate to teaching novels every year within the English 6 course. The teachers’ answers varied between a total of 4-6 weeks, and as the course ideally goes on for about 35 weeks, this means that the teachers put down about ~15% of their over-all teaching time on teaching fiction (Skolverket, 2011). However, as a majority of high school teachers are of the opinion that the average 100 credit course corresponds to considerably less than 35 weeks, one could perhaps assume that these 4-6 weeks of teaching of novels correspond to slightly more than ~15 \% of the teaching hours in these cases (LR.se). In conclusion, as the majority of students participating in this study admitted that they do not generally read the novels they are assigned — this essentially implies that these teachers are putting aside 4-6 weeks, or more than 15\% of their teaching hours, every school year on something that the majority of their students do not do —at least not in a desirable way.

I would, nevertheless, like to stress the fact that this was a small-scale study, performed at one specific school. Hence, I would not argue that these results are applicable to all Swedish high
schools, nor to all teachers or students at this particular school.

5. CONCLUSION

In this section, I will present the summarized results of my study in regards to the research questions presented in the introduction, as well as some suggestions for future research within the field. As my aim was to gain insight into the ways that high school students of today essentially deal with the reading of fiction and its accompanying assignments, the following research questions were used as a point of departure:

- Do the students read the novels they are assigned? If not —why?
- Who chooses what novels the students are to read? And, does it matter?
- What assignments are normally attached to the reading of fiction, and how do the students solve such tasks?

The results imply that the majority of the participating students (68.4%) do not in fact read the novels they are assigned within the course English 6. The most frequently used explanation for this was that the students find the reading boring, or that it takes too long.

Moreover, the study shows that the majority of the students (92.2%) are of the opinion that the teacher typically chooses what novels to read. In contrast, all four teachers (100%) are of the opinion that it usually varies between themselves and the students. However, more than half of the students (52.6%) report that it does not matter who chooses the books, with the explanation that “reading is boring” —regardless of who picks the novels.

In accordance with Tornberg’s (2009) claim, the greater number of participants (94.7% of the students and 50% of the teachers) report that the writing of book reviews is the most common task to succeed the reading of a novel. To be able to complete such an assignment, only eight of the students (21%) assert that they actually read the books, while twenty-six of the students (68.4%) report that they typically look online for information to base their book reviews on. When asked to explain the reasons for why they apply a certain strategy, the majority of the students typically brought up the same key arguments, namely that they choose to do what is:
“easier” and “quicker” plus, that reading is “boring”. In addition to mentioning all of these arguments, one student added a rhetorical question in their answer, namely: “Who wouldn’t choose the easiest way out?” [My translation]. As I consider this quote to, more or less, sum up the very core of the majority of students’ opinions, I chose to use it as a title for my study.

Furthermore, the study shows that three out of the four teachers (75%) are aware that most of the students do not read in their free time. However, the study also shows that three out of the four teachers (75%) are unaware of the fact that most of the students do not read at all—not even when they are asked to do so for school assignments.

The teachers report that they teach novels for about 4-6 weeks throughout the English 6 course. As the majority of the students claim that they do not read any books at all throughout the course, nor solve the accompanying assignments in a constructive manner, this means that the teachers spend about 15% of their teaching time on something that could be argued to be rather inefficient. I believe these results are of particularly great importance, as none of the current Swedish high school curriculums for the teaching of English specifically require teachers to teach novels (Skolverket, 2011). The fact that all these teachers still do, could perhaps be explained by Persson’s (2012) notion, that the teaching of novels is a cultural tradition, and that the reasons for doing so, therefore, rarely are questioned or criticized.

So, how could this problem be solved? Well, in the cases presented in this study, most of the reading sessions seem to be conducted in accordance with the teaching strategy of free reading, followed by the writing of book reviews. This means that the students are not asked to actually do anything with what they read until they have finished the books—which Lundahl (1984) and Tornberg (2009) argue might signal to the students that the act of reading, itself, is not important. A possible solution to this could be to let other kinds of assignments accompany the reading of novels—assignments that would allow students to work more actively with the novels, during the actual reading of them. Another idea would be to work with shorter texts, as for example short stories, as that would at least reduce the risks of students finding the reading too time-consuming. However, this probably would not automatically solve the issue regarding the fact that the majority of the students simply seem to find the reading tedious and unmotivating. Thus, if high school teachers decide on teaching novels, I believe a good first step would be for them to show awareness of this problem by communicating with their students, and simply ask them what it
would take for them to read—perhaps the students have some ideas for what novels they would actually like to read, and how they would like to work with them?

Nonetheless, as earlier mentioned, the Swedish high school curriculums for the teaching of English do not require teachers to teach novels. However, they do in fact require teachers to teach fiction (Skolverket, 2011). With that said, let us not forget that the term fiction should include considerably more than just printed texts. Therefore, I would like to suggest that a possible key to the solution could lie in applying a more extensive concept of the term fiction. As mentioned earlier in this essay, Swedish schools have, in fact, been asked to do this ever since the year 2000 (ibid). In other words, the teaching of fiction is not supposed to be synonymous with reading novels—but should actually include everything that could be argued to tell a story, as for example music, pictures, movies, and videos. Kåreland (2013) argues that being able to relate to a story is of prime importance when it comes to students’ learning—and, as movies, videos and music are common elements in most young people’s everyday lives—I believe it is fair to assume that most students would find it quite easy to relate to the social codes that make up these kinds of stories. In addition, these types of media could all be argued to offer “instant feedback” in accordance with the ways Persson (2012) claims that young people minds’ are trained. Nonetheless, with all this said, one might pose the question whether this is unequivocally a positive thing—should education really cater to students’ need of instant feedback? What is lost on the way?

Well, in the end, all we know is that novels possibly are able to offer students profound benefits on a personal, as well as an educational level. However, in order to even have a chance of doing that—students must naturally read novels. And, if they do not—what are those benefits really worth?

The French literary scholar Roland Barthes once said: “Fiction holds all knowledge, but is organized as a feast”. By broadening our perspective of what fiction is, perhaps we could arrange this feast in a way that would allow students of today’s modern world to take a more active part?
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following is a list of pressing issues I believe are in need of future research:

- Rather than focusing on the normative teaching of novels, would it be possible to use movies, music, games and videos in effective ways when teaching fiction? If so, how?

- Could social media be used in effective ways for educational purposes, as a means of replicating the things students generally seem to find motivating in their everyday lives? If so, in what ways?

- Would it be possible to argue that social media could offer students the same moral, cultural and linguistic insight as novels? If so, how?
REFERENCES


Lärarnas Riksförbund. (2013). “Undervisningstiden i gymnasieskolan” Retrieved from:


Student Questionnaire

Följande enkät är en del av mitt examensarbete, som handlar om hur litteraturundervisning bedrivs inom kursen **Engelska 6**. Enkäten består av sju frågor, vilka riktar sig mot **dina** upplevelser av att arbeta med skönlitterära böcker inom kursen. **Enkäten genomförs anonymt**, så försök att svara på frågorna så sanningsenligt du bara kan. Observera att frågorna riktar sig mot litteraturläsning i kursen Engelska 6 -försök därför att inte räkna med dina erfarenheter i andra kurser.

**Ringa in** det svarsalternativ du tycker passar **bäst**, **eller svara på frågan med dina egna ord i de linjerade fälten**. Tycker du fler än ett svarsalternativ passar in, välj då det alternativ du tycker passar allra bäst, eller svara på frågan med dina egna ord. Försök alltså att **inte** ringa in fler än ett svarsalternativ. Tack!

Din ålder:________________

Ditt kön:________________

1. Hur ofta läser du skönlitterära böcker på fritiden? (Oavsett språk!)

A) Ofta.

B) Ibland.

C) Aldrig.
2. **Ungefär hur många skönlitterära böcker** skulle du säga att du personligen har **läst** i engelskan det senaste läsåret?

A) Inga (0).

B) 1-2 böcker.

C) 2-3 böcker.

D) 3 böcker eller fler.

E) Jag vet inte/vill inte svara.

3. **Vem** är det som vanligtvis **väljer vilka böcker** ni ska läsa i kursen Engelska 6?

A) **Läraren**.

B) **Eleverna (vi själva)**.

C) Det varierar mellan läraren och eleverna.

4a). Tycker du att det spelar någon roll vem som väljer vilka böcker ni ska läsa?

A) **Ja**.
B) Nej.

C) Jag vet inte.

4b). Varför/varför inte?

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5. Vilken typ av uppgift medföljer *vanligtvis* läsanden av en bok i kursen Engelska 6?

A) "Bokprat" (d.v.s. man pratar om boken på lektionerna i små/stora grupper).

B) Skriftligt prov om boken och dess handling.

C) Munligt prov om boken och dess handling.

D) Bokrecension (frågor om bokens handling/karaktärer, egna åsikter och en rekommendation).
E) Annan uppgift (beskriv i så fall gärna denna i de linjerade fälten nedan).

F) Jag vet inte/vill inte svara.

Vill du lägga till någonting, eller beskriva en annan uppgift som inte fanns med i alternativen, gör det här:

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6. Hur gör du vanligtvis för att kunna lösa en sådan typ av uppgift? Fyll i det påstående som passar bäst, eller svara i det linjerade fältet.

För att kunna lösa en uppgift som baseras på en bok och dess handling...

A) ... läser jag boken.

B) ... tittar jag på en filmversion av boken.

C) ... använder jag internet för att hitta information om boken.

D) … använder jag en mix av ovannämnda alternativ.

E) … löser jag det på annat sätt. (Beskriv i så fall gärna detta i de linjerade fälten).
F) Jag vet inte/vill inte svara.

Valde du svarsalternativ E, eller vill tillägga någonting, skriv här:

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7. Varför väljer du att lösa uppgiften på just detta sätt?

Ange ditt svar här:

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Jättestort tack för din medverkan!

**Ringa in det svarsalternativ du tycker passar bäst, eller svara på frågan med dina egna ord i de linjerade fälten.** Tycker du fler än ett svarsalternativ passar in, välj då det alternativ du tycker passar allra bäst, eller svara på frågan med dina egna ord. Försök alltså att inte ringa in fler än ett svarsalternativ. Tack!

Din ålder:________________

Ditt kön: __________________

1. *Varför/varför inte* använder du skönlitteratur i din engelskundervisning? Motivera!

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2. *Ungefär hur mycket tid* skulle du säga att du lägger ner på att undervisa i skön litteratur varje år i kursen Engelska 6? Specificera gärna i form av veckor, samt gärna vad eleverna gör under dessa veckor.

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3. Hur ofta tror du att *majoriteten av dina elever* läser skön litterära böcker på fritiden? (Oavsett språk!)

   A) Ofta.

   B) Ibland.

   C) Aldrig.

4. *Ungefär hur många skön litterära böcker* skulle du säga att *majoriteten av dina elever* har läst i engelskan det senaste läsåret?

   A) Inga (0).
B) 1-2 böcker.

C) 2-3 böcker.

D) 3 böcker eller fler.

E) Jag vet inte/vill inte svara.

5. Vem är det som vanligtvis väljer vilka böcker elever ska läsa i kursen Engelska 6?

A) Läraren (jag själv).

B) Eleverna.

C) Det varierar mellan mig själv och eleverna.

6a). Tycker du att det spelar någon roll vem som väljer vilka böcker eleverna ska läsa?

A) Ja.

B) Nej.
C) Jag vet inte.

6b). Varför/varför inte?

Ange ditt svar här:

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7. Vilken typ av uppgift medföljer vanligtvis läsandet av en bok i ditt klassrum?

A) ”Bokprat” (d.v.s. man pratar om boken på lektionerna i små/stora grupper).

B) Skriftligt prov om boken och dess handling.

C) Muntligt prov om boken och dess handling.

D) Bokrecensioner (frågor om bokens handling/karaktärer, egna åsikter och en rekommendation).

E) Annan uppgift (beskriv i så fall gärna denna i de linjerade fälten nedan).
F) Jag vet inte/vill inte svara.

Vill du lägga till någonting, eller beskriva en annan uppgift som inte fanns med i alternativen, gör det här:
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8. Hur tror du att majoriteten av dina elever vanligtvis gör för att kunna lösa en sådan typ av uppgift? Fyll i det påstående som passar bäst, eller svara i det linjerade fältet.

_För att kunna lösa en uppgift som baseras på en bok och dess handling, tror jag att **majoriteten av mina elever**...

A) ... läser boken.

B) ... tittar på en **filmversion** av boken.

C) ... använder **internet** för att hitta information om boken.

D) ... använder en mix av ovan nämnda alternativ.

E) ... löser det på **annat** sätt. (Beskriv i så fall gärna detta i de linjerade fälten).

F) Jag vet inte/vill inte svara.
Valde du svarsalternativ E, eller vill tillägga någonting, skriv här:

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9. Varför tror du att majoriteten av dina elever löser uppgiften på just detta sätt? (Vad grundar du ditt svar på?)

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Jättestort tack för din medverkan!