Teaching Strategies

Teachers’ views and attitudes towards reading problems

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Abstract:
The aim with this study is to discuss teachers’ individual views and thoughts regarding working with pupils with reading problems in foreign language learning. The study is based on qualitative research and includes interviews with four working teachers at the upper secondary level at one school. The main focus is to illustrate strategies expressed by the teachers involved in this study concerning pupils and reading problems in foreign language learning. Some of the earlier studies done regarding this subject emphasize motivation as a good strategy to use in school in order to pay more attention to pupils and encourage them to do better. Furthermore, teachers should work with literature in a new way, thus making use of the new technology available such as computers and projectors. New technology would make education more appealing and allow pupils to be involved with literature in a new way, familiar to the pupils’ daily life activities.

This study is done accordingly to the approach of two theories, namely phenomenography and reader-response theory. This study does not aim to show any right or wrong strategies from the teachers, it only assumes to show their own thoughts and views regarding this issue. Hopefully this study would help and bring new ideas to forthcoming teachers about reading disabilities and teaching strategies.

Keywords: teaching strategies, reading disabilities, foreign language teaching
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1. Introduction

When pupils begin upper secondary school after nine years of primary and secondary school, they are likely to find the education at that level to be different, quite many pupils notice it to be more fun and at the same time more challenging. A lot more is expected of them in different kinds of areas and subjects in school, such as foreign language learning for instance, which plays an important part in their education. The English language, as a second and foreign language next to Swedish, is the language most connected to our lives and we are exposed to it, whether we like it or not, all the time from TV, music, computers and more. Nevertheless, in school the English course has different criteria that need to be fulfilled by pupils in order to pass the course, among them reading skills. However, while for some pupils reading books and other kinds of literature in school can be an enjoyment, it is at the same time a distress for others. The reasons for this are many. Focusing on foreign language reading (English), pupils might have difficulties in various areas that make it intricate for them to read and understand texts. There may also be many hidden reading disabilities among pupils that teachers need to be aware of and work with in order to help pupils with various of problems. How do teachers work with pupils that have problems with reading in foreign language learning? Two of the goals to aim for in upper secondary school concerning the English language are, (among others) to:

- Develop their ability to take part in conversations, discussions and negotiations and express with subtlety their own views and consider those of others, [and]
- Improve their ability to read with good understanding literature in English and reflect over texts from different perspectives

(National Swedish Agency For Education 1)

The first goal is related to literature in the sense that literature can be discussed in conversations with others. Moreover, the pupils, through these conversations, are able to express their own views in relation to others and also exchange those in relation to different kinds of texts they read. After all, a good way of learning a language is to read e.g. novels in the same language. Literary texts provide pupils with an opportunity to cope with a language intended for native speakers, thus making them familiar with many different linguistic forms (Collie and Slater 4). The second one is to improve their reading skills but also the
understanding of texts. It is a challenge for the teachers to ensure that every individual in class is able to achieve these goals. If pupils are expected to “reflect over texts from different perspectives” (National Swedish Agency For Education 1), they have to understand the texts that they read. Therefore, this essay will focus on the teachers and examine their own view on working with pupils with reading problems. This study will hopefully help us learn more about teachers’ views on their own teaching strategies regarding reading disabilities. By focusing on the teachers, we get an outlook of the reading problems from their own perspective, which would hopefully help us learn more about how to work with pupils in the future regarding this matter. The thesis in this study demonstrates that many pupils, when it comes to reading, have problems with concentration and motivation in school, among others. This study illustrates also that many pupils are embarrassed to talk about their difficulties they might encounter in reading.

1.2 Previous research

Problems with reading, many would agree, are difficult to point out and define by using one single word or sentence. Since this essay is about teaching strategies regarding reading problems, it is important to explain what reading problems means in the context of foreign language learning. By knowing different aspects concerning reading problems, it helps to understand teaching strategies and the reasons they are used in such ways.

In an article written by Radislav Millrood, it says that many unsuccessful learners, in particular teenagers, have too much pressure on them by teachers and parents. Accordingly, teenagers are sensitive to failure and as a result they build up all kinds of defense between what they get and what they need (405). Millrood argues that more attention should be given to unsuccessful learners, who according to him, are neglected when teachers are not encouraging enough towards pupils and not noticing them (406). As a teacher, working with teenagers for instance, it is important to be aware of reasons for pupils’ difficulties other than those involved with school activities. With this in mind, one is more able to understand their “failure” and reasons for it. Therefore, as the author also points out, motivating them is a good strategy to show more attention and encourage them to do better. In addition, Millrood argues that a solution would be to create awareness in unsuccessful learners of their cognitive strengths, among others (406). This means that teachers should be aware that different pupils
have different cognitive strengths. For instance, some pupils need more time for tasks, others with remembering what they learn (Millrood 406). It is important for teachers to be aware of the fact that every pupil has a different individual learning ability. Millrood also points out the importance of classroom environment:

[…] a ‘success – building context removes the excessive constraints emphasizing teacher-learner co-operation. Such classroom context is much more open to considering the congruence of teacher-learner cognitive styles, individualizing the tasks, teaching in the zone of proximal development, motivating the learners, and keeping the pupils involved (406)

Millrood argues that unnecessary constraints upon the class occur if teachers focus on correct pronunciation, grammar accuracy and language fluency, among others (406).

Characteristics for reading comprehension, according to Blachowicz and Ogle, are stated as a process demanding strategic approach (31). In the book is says that teachers need to access comprehension and an important part of developing good readers would be to have them read material of increasing complexity and difficulty. It is important to know how pupils read and what they can read in order to build on strong strategies and introduce new ones (Blachowicz and Ogle 62). When it comes to helping less able readers and engaging reading of informational texts, a strategy that is presented in the book, is “Reciprocal teaching”. This strategy is developed in order to help less able readers handle the demands of clarification (114). Reciprocal teaching includes four strategies, which the students need to learn, these are: summarizing, questioning, clarifying and predicting. However, pupils learn these with the help of a teacher (114). This strategy combines interactive strategies with shared teaching and learning approach in order to help students maintain interest and focus on the material they are studying. This strategy is stated to be effective to help less able readers make sense of difficult text material (Blachowicz and Ogle 116).

Author Bo Lundahl in his book Läsa på främmande Språk (1998), argues that when it comes to reading and its significance, there are two models of reading: the bottom-up and the top-down model. According to the bottom-up model, reading disabilities occur due to lack of decoding and that a text has many difficult words with a complicated meaning structure in it. The reader takes notice of the small detail of the text and to every single word resulting in that the reader cannot see the overall picture (15-16). The top-down model, Lundahl argues, takes
its starting point from the reader’s knowledge, experiences and pre-understanding of a text (16). Reading a difficult text, for example, which we do not have a pre-understanding of results in a bottom-up reading where the overall meaning is missing. In practice, a teacher for instance, can introduce a text to the pupils by letting them get acquainted with it by asking questions and such before starting to read the actual text. This enables the pupils to receive some degree of pre-understanding of it, which would make it easier for them to see the overall meaning of it when reading. Moreover, Lundahl argues that teachers can guide pupils towards bottom-up reading respectively top-down reading, mainly through the choice of texts (20). He argues that pupils need to use top-down reading in order to get an overall meaning and not get caught in details, for instance when they read stories (20). It is important, argues Lundahl, that pupils know that an understanding of a text is allowed to be approximate. Without using top-down reading, pupils would not manage to read novels in English outside of school (Lundahl 20).

Another aspect, mentioned by Lundahl, is the aspect of culture and reading abilities. He argues that the culture content in a text can have significance concerning our ability of understanding it. The greater the cultural distance is between a text and its reader, the greater the difficulties of understanding it. Therefore, he argues, it is significant that the text is related to the pupils’ own experiences (Lundahl 24). Explaining this further, a text, which is connected to pupils’ everyday lives and connected to their youth culture, would be easier for them to read.

Teaching literature in school can be done in many ways, it is good to be aware of the fact that every new generation of pupils diverge from each other and so do their strategies of learning. In the book Learning Literature in an Era of Change (2000), we are given many new ways of introducing literature for a new generation of pupils. One strategy mentioned is to work with literature through online-letters. In this way, pupils learn to read and write not just for the grade but also for their colleges [classmates] as well, in a learning community in the classroom (Hickey and Reiss 19). Moreover, it says in the book that pupils are aware of the importance of communication. A quote will explain this further:

When private and personal, letters are expressive and intimate: when public, they demand clarity and accuracy for transmitting and recording information and ideas […] In literary studies letter
exchanges among students [...] can engage students in close reading with attention to the language of the texts under study as well as their own texts

(Hickey and Reiss 20)

When it comes to literature, this kind of communication also offers opportunities for reflection that face-to-face conversation would not allow (Hickey and Reiss 20-21).

Another strategy deals with visual learning techniques. The authors argue that with new and familiar technology, teachers are helped to include visual learning techniques resulting in a more broad, creative classroom activity (Hickey and Reiss 87). Before reading a novel, pupils are introduced to a visual page, which can be shown on a big computer screen or an overhead projector concerning the author’s life for instance (87-88). This previous information allows pupils to get involved in discussions concerning the literature in question and also about the text’s structure. Every pupil does his or her own interpretation of the text and later on discusses the information and ideas with others in class. Moreover, this strategy allows pupils who do not perform well on text-based assignments to take lead in discussions (Hickey and Reiss 87).

1.1.1 Pedagogical framework

When it comes to reading, one thing that we all can agree on, is that each and every one of us interprets texts differently, no matter the category or genre of it. According to Dall’Alba, all people have dissimilar experiences and therefore phenomena will also appear diverse to different people (84). On the basis of this statement, both teachers and pupils in school would have a diverse idea about how literature should be taught respectively learned and what kind of literature ought to be used in school, according to their own experiences, that is, what would be considered useful and exciting to each. Nevertheless, the strategies are also dissimilar when it comes to pupils that have reading problems and how teachers work with this matter. As this essay focuses on the teachers, a way of approaching their thoughts and views would be to use the pedagogical theory of phenomenography. Phenomenography is about forms of thoughts or ways of functioning no matter what source they stem from (Dall’Alba 110). In the article “Undergraduate Geographers’ Understandings of Geography, Learning and Teaching: A Phenomenographic Study” (2004), it says that the phenomenography approach does not make any judgments about the accuracy of truth of conceptions such as the way we experience the world around us and the phenomenon in 5
question. It is further argued that a way of experiencing has two elements, one being on what is experienced and the other concerns how a phenomenon is experienced (19-20). Focusing on this study, the main issue is to find out what the teachers experience working with reading disabilities in a foreign language and how they experience but also approach it. In other words, perspectives on learning and teaching literature differ and are very individual based on experiences and the way we perceive the world around us.

Dall’Alba argues that reality is considered to exist through the way in which a person envisions it; therefore, it is impossible to reach absolute truth about something since new interpretations are made continuously both by ourselves and by news generations (112-113). This statement can be viewed in the sense that the way literature, for instance, is taught and learned today differs from the way it was used before and will probably change in the future due to new interpretations and new generations. For this reason, this study does not focus on showing any true or false pedagogical ways of learning/teaching, but on how views and thoughts are now.

1.1.2 Literary theory

The theoretical approach used in this investigation is the reader-response theory. In difference from other theories where the main focus has been on the text and its author, reader-response theory places the focal point on the text and its reader. The reader, according to this theory, is an active participant as a replacement of a passive consumer (James 421). Moreover, the reader interprets the words of the text in the same way one makes sense of personal experiences (James 421). What role has the teacher in all of this? Does any literary text serve as a possible option for reading as long as the reader comprehends the text in question from personal experience? While the reader-response theory focuses on the text and its reader, it is important as well the way literature is presented. Furthermore, James states that the reader must know how to re-create the text (422). The teacher should present literature as an experience rather than an object. The meaning of a text construction requires an interaction between the textual instructions and the reader’s own life experiences (Davis 422). Moreover, the article clarifies, that a way for pupils to interact with a text is to observe their responses as reading is occurring. Direct instruction is elucidated to be the best way of improving reading ability (Davis 424). Another approach towards meaning-production mentioned in the article,
would be to model our own questioning of the text (Davis 424). An example of this would be to present the text in short segments and engross the whole class by asking questions. Text interaction, direct instruction and model questioning of texts are all strategies which teachers can use in order for the pupils to receive a good understanding of texts no matter the difficulty. The aspect in reading, which is studied in this investigation, is then how teachers’ outline their strategies regarding pupils with reading problems. What do they consider the best way of approaching the pupils would be?

Duckworth argues that the realization accomplished by various readers will produce dissimilar reading and value judgments due to their diverse backgrounds and experiences (339). The teachers’ choice of literature and how it is presented would then affect the way various learners understand texts. Consequences, which the reader-response theory perhaps would have on pupils with reading problems, are that different pupils have in fact divergent backgrounds and miscellaneous types of reading difficulties, which would make the choice of method and teaching from the teacher more complex. If a teacher chooses an intricate text to the readers, it would have consequences for the learners since they would not be able to understand the substance of it. Moreover, since sundry of pupils with various experience value a text differently, perhaps the outcome of it in class would not be what the teacher had expected.

1.2 Aim and scope
The aim of this essay is to investigate teachers’ strategies in school regarding pupils with reading problems in foreign language teaching. How do teachers manage to assistance to every individual’s different needs and abilities? This study will examine teachers’ own view of working with reading disabilities. However, this study will only be based on an analysis of interviews with four teachers in one school, upper secondary level, and does not give an outlook of teachers’ strategies regarding reading problems in general. It should be noted that every teacher that was interviewed for this study taught in different educational programs at the same school. The reason that the teachers were chosen from dissimilar educational programs was to gain diverse perspectives from different programs respectively. Moreover, this study will only present the opinions from the teachers themselves. This reflects the fact that no observations were made in the school regarding classroom activity as to how the
teachers work in practice and no pupils have been interviewed. This essay assumes only to show these teachers’ own views and thoughts regarding reading problems in foreign language learning and their approach towards it.

1.2.1 Research questions

1. What are the teachers’ thoughts and views regarding working with pupils that have problems in relation to reading in a foreign language?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using literary texts in the language classroom for students with reading difficulties according to the teachers?

2. Material

The interviews have served as the main material in this study, especially concerning the analysis section since this investigation is based essentially on the interviews (see the Analysis section). The material from the interviews consists of answers dealing with teaching strategies, reading problems in the foreign language, how and what kind of literature is used concerning this issue. A book, which has been a great help for the investigation is Steinar Kvale’s *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing* (1996). This book deals with interviews, data collection and more, which has been useful throughout the investigation. Another necessary book has been the book about phenomenography by Gloria Dall’Alba & Biörn Hasselgren (1996), which contained valuable information about the approach on which this essay is based. Moreover, the main articles that have used concerned the reader-response theory. The articles are “The act of reading in the foreign language: pedagogical implications of Iser’s Reader-Response Theory (Davis 1989) and “The act of reading: A theory of Aesthetic Response (Duckworth 1979).

3. Approach/Method

This essay is based on an empirical study. I have done interviews with four teachers on the upper secondary level. Since this essay is about teachers’ strategies towards reading problems in foreign language learning, the questions of my interview have dealt with this issue (see the appendix). Furthermore, the theoretical approaches chosen and applied in this investigation are phenomenography and the reader-response theory, which have also been acknowledged in
The former theory allows researchers to approach particular phenomenon and people on an individual level. In recent times, phenomenography has developed as an empirical approach in educational research (Dall’Alba 104.). It is beneficial for educational research, among others, since this theory has its focus on the human mind and its conceptions and experiences of it in the surrounding world (103). In addition, the interviews in this essay are based on the teachers who by sharing their experience and thoughts give an outlook of their teaching strategies. Conversely, the latter one, the reader-response theory, focuses on the pupils and the literary text. It is of crucial importance in this investigation since teachers and pupils affect each other and the outcome of teachers’ work is vital for the pupils and their learning.

The interviews in this study have been performed individually. One reason for this is to unearth the teachers’ individual views and perspectives towards reading disabilities in foreign language learning. Kvale argues that group interviews tend to reduce the interviewer’s control of the interview situation and the affect of that would be an amount of data collection which would be difficult for the analyses since more than one voice is heard (102). He also says that individual interviews vary, but often they are used in order to seek factual information and opinions and attitudes (Kvale 101). Therefore, by performing the interviews individually, I was able to receive the teachers’ own opinions and attitudes more than perhaps a group interview would have allowed. Another reason for this, considering the phenomenography theory, which takes its point on studying individuals, it was evident that the interviews would be performed individually.

According to Merriam, case studies are not done to find out the “true” or “correct” interpretation of something, but rather to show peoples’ opinions and views (43-44). Therefore, it is important as an interviewer to keep in mind that there are no true or false answers; it is only their opinions and thoughts that are relevant during the investigation. Hence, this study will not show any “wrong” nor any “correct” ways of teaching strategies. This investigation will only illustrate these teachers’ own individual views and opinions regarding their strategies in working with pupils and reading disabilities.

The interviews were audio recorded with a minidisk player. Kvale argues that by recording interviews, the interviewer can in this way concentrate on the topic and the dynamics of the interview (160). With this in consideration, it would be possible to listen to
the recording over again and would give a clearer analysis. However, two of the interviews were performed without a recording. The first interview was done without a recorder due to problems managing the instrument and the other time was due to a teacher’s own wish of not using a recorder. The interview was written down instead. Difficulties, which occurred when performing the written interviews, were that the answers tended to relate to other issues, which made it hard to determine and write down the important things that were said and which were relevant to the essay. Since the conversations also went rather fast, it was a bit difficult to keep up. However, I explained to each teacher respectively that the interview might be a bit longer since more time was needed in order to write down the answers, than it would have been using a recorder. Nevertheless, the other two interviews were recorded. My interview questions were in English and so I also expected to receive the answers in English. But two of the teachers shared the wish of talking in Swedish. Now and again during the interviews, the languages were switched between English to Swedish and vice versa. Again, in respect of their wishes, and for the teachers’ convenience of expressing themselves easier and give more of their own opinions, this was also acceptable. Before each interview it was explained and informed to the teachers about the substance of the essay and also about the confidentiality aspect, about them being anonymous. It was informed that no names and such would be mentioned in the essay.

Limitations for this study occurred for a larger or perhaps a deeper investigation, since the teachers’ classroom activity was not observed and no pupils were interviewed. There will only be an analysis of the interview answers that were expressed by the teachers themselves based on their own thoughts and views. Moreover, for ethical purposes, the teachers’ real names are not mentioned in this essay but there are pseudonymous for them in order to make the essay easier to read.

4. Analysis
In this section an analysis will be presented from the collected empirical data. The data will be presented in different sections in order to give a clearer analysis. The teachers are named:

**Eva**- Hotel and restaurant program

**Marianne**- Handicraft program
4.1 Constructing a safe environment

As Blachowicz and Ogle point out, reading comprehension is acknowledged as a process demanding a strategic approach (31). For pupils with reading problems, comprehension in reading is essential for their ability to understand texts and improve reading. One of the research questions is to examine teachers’ views and thoughts on working with pupils with reading problems. When the teachers talk about reading problems in general, they argue that many pupils do not like to read due to reasons of insecurity. Many of the strategies thus mentioned in the interviews deal with the issue of making the pupils feel safe and secure in themselves and building a constructive safe environment:

Eva “Most of them in class don’t want to read out loud. They think it’s so embarrassing. They are so afraid of what others would think of them. So I sit them in pairs and they will usually sit with their best friend and they don’t get embarrassed, after some time I let them sit in groups of more than pairs”

Eva says that by letting them sit in pairs, the pupils usually sit with their best friend and they feel more secure and are not ashamed of reading aloud and/or of making mistakes. It is good to let the pupils sit in groups like Eva states so that the pupils can develop and get to know each other a bit more. In situations like these, the approach mentioned by Hickey and Reiss about on-line letters would be a good way of working with literature. With on-line letters the pupils are allowed to communicate on a more abstract level with each other and offer reflections on the text which face-to face conversation would prohibit (Hickey and Reiss 20-21). This would be a good strategy to use, at the beginning at least, when the pupils perhaps do not know each other and feel insecure. Teacher Marianne says that she reads out load to her pupils in order to get them involved and make them feel safe about reading, since they feel embarrassed by their classmates to sit and read for themselves:

Marianne “ I have done reading out load. Most of these guys were not being read to when
they were little, like fairy tales”

Marianne says that her pupils were not being read to when they were kids. One might also think that the pupils are not familiar with reading and literature in general. Therefore, they are not comfortable with reading. In order to build up their confidence and make them feel safe, she uses this strategy of reading out load to the pupils; similar to a way a parent might read to her/his child. The insecurity from the pupils, it is shown from the interviews, come across also when the issue of reading problems is current. They feel insecure of talking about their difficulties:

Marianne: I didn’t know that he had difficulties; I just assumed that he didn’t want to read, because he never said anything.

The interviewer: Why?

Marianne: He didn’t want anybody to know. He didn’t want to stick out in class”

Eva “The ones who have serious problems they say it early but they are really embarrassed”

The views that Eva and Marianne express regarding the pupils’ insecurity of reading are that pupils often feel insecure due to their classmates and what they would think of them. Moreover, according to Eva and Marianne pupils feel apprehensive talking about their problems in reading for the reason that they are embarrassed to stick out in class. As a result, pupils tend to get timid and do not convey difficulties in reading even to the teacher. As Marianne points out, it is easy for a teacher, to obtain the assumption that pupils do not want to read because the teacher is not informed of various problems that a pupil might have.

4.2 Reading comprehension

Strategies and approaches towards pupils with reading problems vary from one teacher to another. However, this also seems to diverge between different educational programs. One of the reasons of interviewing teachers from dissimilar educational programs was in order to achieve various perspectives on English teaching (see section 1.2). Nevertheless, a factor,
which surfaced in the interviews, thus affecting strategies that the teachers use, is mainly that pupils seem to differ in reading comprehension depending on which programs they study:

**Marianne** “Reading comprehension varies between different programs. For instance, industry guys have low grades, they hate school”

Reading comprehension, according to the teachers, varies between different programs. However, the strategies mentioned from the teachers do not stand out in any special way in the interviews. There seem only to be assumptions that the pupils diverge in various programs when it comes to understanding and liking reading and literature. The phenomenenography approach thus suggests that all people experience the world in various ways and therefore phenomena will also appear diverse to various people (Dall’Alba 84). Perhaps the teachers due to dissimilar experiences with diverse classes thus have built an idea of the difference between each program. Another quotation will illustrate this further:

**Eva** “It depends on what kind of program they choose in upper secondary school and how many points that are necessary in each particular program. For instance the social science program, you know usually they want to study at the University”

With this statement, Eva is arguing that difficulties occur in English overall, but that one might distinguish their abilities in school by the programs in which the pupils study. However, it is interesting, since it is not obvious in the interviews that the strategies somehow diverge between different programs. They indicate, moreover, that reading problems are expected to differ between pupils in different educational program. In the syllabi, it says for English A and B:

- The course provides opportunities to read for pleasure, knowledge and cultural familiarity. English A is a core subject course [and]
- English B is a course common to the Arts, Natural Science, Social Science and Technology Programmes

(The National Swedish Agency of Education 1)
Perhaps the interpretation of the difference in the programs is due to the syllabi. As seen above the different courses are related to diverse subjects in the syllabi. This could be a reason why the teachers see a difference in the pupils’ understanding and motivation for the English literature and language.

4.3. Motivation

As seen evident in the four interviews, many pupils are not happy about reading. There are many reasons for this and the main common reasons were the lack of concentration, embarrassment for other classmates and in some cases there were pupils with dyslexia that had difficulties in reading and understanding texts. All of the teachers agreed that the way literature is presented is important for the pupils in order to find literature appealing. If the literature is interesting, the greater is the chance for the pupils to read it. The relevance of types of literature that is connected to the pupils’ lives was also of significance. Although all four of the teachers thought this issue of great importance, nevertheless, they all had different strategies as to how to make literature interesting to those with reading problems:

**Pernilla** “Imagine what they like and the age of the group. I choose books for instance about kids of their own age”

**Eva** “Film is also a kind of literature and I sometimes let them watch films which are suited for their age level”

**Marianne** “You need to read something which lies in their interest, something that they will like. Take time and choose something that suits them”

According to Lundahl, the culture in a text can have significance concerning our ability of understanding it. Hence, literature containing great cultural distances between the content and its reader, risk lead to a difficulty understanding it (24). Therefore, as these teachers argue, it is important that literature is connected to the pupils’ lives in one way or another. As the reader-response theory implies, the reader interprets the texts in the same way as one makes sense of personal matters (James 421). If pupils find a text connected to their lives in some
way, then they are likely to find the literature appealing. However, this theory also implies that the reader must know how to re-create a text (422). A teacher argues that when it comes to literature she focuses on everyday words, expressions and idioms.

Susanne “I focus mostly on everyday words and expressions, it is a way of learning idiomatic expressions. It is important to see them in the actual context”

The way a teacher receives literature is expressed in how literature is presented. What a teacher herself/himself thinks is important to know reflects on what kind of strategy he/she uses. Although it is important to see words and expressions in the actual context in literature, we should not forget that there are many sides to literature and many ways of working with it, thus only focusing on words in literature does take away and disregard the aesthetic side of literature, which would perhaps be appealing to pupils. Lundahl argues that aesthetic reading is concerned with how the reader interprets a text based on what the reader is experiencing during a particular text. Moreover, the reader also responds to a text in forms of feelings, memories and more (Lundahl 37). Nevertheless, helping a pupil to re-create a text can be done in three ways (see Literary Theory section). One example of model questioning comes from one of the teachers’ response concerning strategies when working with literature:

Pernilla “I make them read chapters and then I make questions and take out words and then discuss the questions to see that they really understand the text and I try to take out main words that they can follow”

Pernilla uses the strategy of model questioning in order to ensure that the pupils have fully understood a text. Moreover, it is important to consider that different pupils have need of different approaches. However, there have not been any direct answers from the informants indicating that literature somehow is not beneficial for pupils with reading problems; one teacher said that literature is only beneficial if the pupils find a text appealing:

Marianne “The pupils need to have the feeling that they are not just reading because they have too: It’s good for them to read a book that evokes their interest and which they can play
Choosing a text connected to the pupils’ lives and presenting it in a “good” way is essential for pupils with reading problems, as mentioned. However, in some cases, this may not be enough to get pupils involved in a text. Millrood argues that more attention should be given to unsuccessful learners, who according to him, are being neglected because teachers are not encouraging enough towards pupils and not noticing them (406). As seen evident in the interviews, lack of motivation and bad self-confidence from the pupils’ perspective, often result in the fact that they neglect reading. Motivating pupils seem to be essential in order for teachers to get the pupils interested and getting them involved:

**Eva** “I try not to give them too difficult texts. I try to build up that level. Increase difficulties slowly. It has to do with bad-self confidence. You have to tell them all the time that you will manage, It’s OK.”

Many times, it is up to the teacher to involve and motivate pupils to do well and improve. For Eva, it is the only way of getting through to her pupils. However, motivation also comes in different shapes and the oral aspect is one out of many. One teacher says that to give the pupils motivation means also to give them opportunities:

“She motivation is important, give them opportunities; give them books on tape and more. Also tapes, read aloud, it helps to hear as much as possible” **Marianne**

On the basis of the teachers’ answers concerning motivation, it is clear that pupils differ in many ways and so does the motivation for each and everyone of them. They all need different kinds of approaches, and therefore, it is good to have a variation in the education. When it comes to reading problems, the teachers argue that in order to get the pupils involved and improve their reading ability, literature needs to be appealing and interesting.

**4.4. Bottom-up & Top Down Reading**

When it comes to reading problems in a foreign language, the teachers say in the interviews
that most pupils, when reading texts, tend to focus much on words and their implication rather
than grasping the overall meaning of a text. This type of reading is also known as the “bottom
-up” reading (Lundahl 15). According to Marianne, most students are focused on all the
words that they do not see the general picture:

Marianne “ Most pupils are interested in knowing all the words in a text that they do not see
the overall picture of the content. I tell them to try to see the overall picture and not just get
captured on a word or two”

This strategy that Marianne uses for her pupils is also referred to as top-down reading, the
opposite of bottom-up reading (Lundahl 16). According to Lundahl, this model takes its point
from the readers’ knowledge, experiences and pre-understanding of a text (16). Using this
strategy requires a good introduction of a text from the teacher. This strategy is strongly
connected to the way literature is introduced and presented.

4.5 Mediums for teaching
As seen evident in the interviews, different types of mediums are necessary for pupils with
reading problems in order to help them understand texts better and also facilitate their reading.
One of the interview questions is to find what the advantages and disadvantages are of using
literary texts in the classroom for pupils with reading problems. In their answers, the teachers’
explain what mediums they think of as important concerning reading in the foreign language
and how they approach this matter:

Eva “ I use small books for easy readers, books that contain a lot of dialogs and have an easy
language”

Marianne “ I use tapes and larger texts with big intervals”

Susanne “ You give them texts that are easier than the original because it is important for
them to read as much as they are able to”
Many of the teachers say that it is not essential how fast you read but how well you understand the content. By using books that contain dialogs with large interval, reading becomes easier for those with difficulties:

Marianne “Many read fast but they do not understand the content. If you read slowly then they understand better”

Lundahl argues that it is the teacher who, by choice of texts, has the control of guiding pupils towards bottom- up and to top-down reading (20). Choosing an easy text is of course beneficial for “weak readers”. However, these teachers do not discuss in which way they present the literature and if it is the same easy language all the time. Moreover, according to Blachowicz and Ogle, an important part of developing good readers, would be to have them read material of increasing difficulty. It also says in the book that teachers need to access comprehension and know how and what pupils read in order to build on strong strategies and introduce new ones (Blachowicz and Ogle 62). It is then, not beneficial for pupils to only read easy books. As the process of reading improves, even the text should increase in its difficulty.

Millrood argues that a teacher should be aware that different pupils have different cognitive strengths, e.g. some pupils need more time for tasks, and more (406). One should also be aware that different cognitive strengths also require different approaches and strategies. A strategy that perhaps works with some pupils does not necessarily work for others. However, all teachers agree with the fact that knowing about the reading difficulties at an early stage is the key to presenting different approaches in general towards reading disabilities:

Marianne “It’s good because they need longer time for texts. Its good to discuss, and that you can plan better so that they have time to read the books”

Pernilla “You can help them more and you can get books for them to listen to instead of reading, for instance when they have dyslexia “

Again, the strategies that are used depend on what kind of difficulties the pupils have. In the
interviews, it became clear that pupils who have problems of some sort occasionally express this to the teachers themselves. However, most of the times, the teachers argue, one is able to see if the pupils have difficulties:

Susanne “You see it in class when you start working with newspapers material. Also when they read books, novels.

Interviewer: How do the problems come through?

Susanne: “They don’t know what the text is about; it is the same more or less with novels”

It is a bit difficult to comment on this statement since the teacher does not explain further about what kind of newspapers articles or novels used. At the same time, she did not get a follow up question about what kind of material she refers to. We as readers do not know the reasons why the pupils have difficulties in understanding this material. It could be a difficult text or a text that they did not find interesting; it could also depend on other issues. Therefore, it is good to be aware of the types of difficulties that pupils might have. It would help teachers approach the pupils and help them with their problems.

Conclusions:
This study has in many ways illustrated different aspects and ideas concerning teaching strategies and reading problems in foreign language learning. One of the research questions is to find what the teachers’ thoughts and views are regarding pupils with problems in reading in the foreign language. This study shows that many pupils have difficulties in reading since many of them tend to focus on the understanding of words instead of grasping the general meaning in a text. Another factor, which affects the pupils’ ability to read, is that the pupils feel insecure due to several issues. Embarrassment, for what other classmates and teachers would think of them results to the point that the pupils neglect reading. Moreover, the insecurity that the pupils feel in school prevents them to also share their difficulties they may encounter with the teachers. According to the teachers, the pupils often do not want to stick out in class and are embarrassed of both their classmates and teachers.

Other issues that affect the pupils’ reading ability, mentioned by the teachers, are the lack of concentration and pupils that have dyslexia. Some of the strategies expressed by the teachers deal with the issue of constructing a safe environment where the pupils do not feel
insecure of various difficulties they might have when it comes to reading. One strategy mentioned by two of the teachers is to read out loud to the pupils. Another teacher said that she lets the pupils work in pairs so that they are seated with the person they feel safe with, and gradually she lets them work in groups.

A factor, as seen evident in the interviews, is that reading comprehension seems to differ in pupils depending on the program in which they study. The assumption here is that pupils differ in the various programs concerning their ability to read literature and be motivated to do so. One reason, that has also been discussed in the analysis section, could be that the syllabi for the upper secondary school, has different criteria to the English courses A respectively B. In the syllabi it says that the B level, for instance, focuses more on the theoretical programs, whereas A level is described in the syllabi more of a “pleasure” course. Hence, literature reading on the B level is more analytical and advanced, and therefore demands the pupils understanding of it in a different and a more complex way. This was a surprise to find out, since I believe that pupils are different and have dissimilar relations regarding reading literature no matter the program in which they study.

The second research question deals with the issue of literature and its use in the language classroom. Is literature beneficial or not when it comes to pupils with reading problems and in what way? There have not been any direct implications that literature somehow would not be beneficial for pupils with reading problems, it has been stated by one teacher that literature is beneficial as long as literature is presented in a “good” way and that the text should be connected to the pupils’ lives in some form. According to the teachers, using literature that the pupils find appealing is a good way of getting them involved. Motivation seems to be essential for the pupils in order for them to read and like reading. Motivation is a strategy thus mentioned by all of the teachers. However, one teacher said that motivation is also an aspect of giving the pupils opportunities. She says that to give the pupils opportunities, is also a means of giving them material for learning that would facilitate their reading by using material such as hearing tapes and easy books with an easy language. Another strategy mentioned by the teachers is to offer pupils with reading difficulties texts or novels that contain a lot of dialogs.

This second research question was a bit problematic to answer, I believe, since the teachers discuss that literature need to be appealing in order for the pupils to be involved and
that they argue about the best approach towards it. However, these teachers have not in some way talked about literature and how they work with it in class in order for the pupils to find it appealing. Working with a novel could be done in many ways, and none of the teachers have talked about the aesthetic side to literature. They discuss that literature needs to appealing but they do not talk much about presenting literature in an appealing way. Making the literature appealing and connecting it to the pupils’ lives can be done in many ways. New technology, as the Internet for instance, or more visual ways of working with literature has not been discussed at all by the teachers. Since every new generation has different types of lifestyles, it would be good to connect literature to something that they occupy themselves with in daily life. These new methods of teaching, would be beneficial for those with reading problems, since they would find these new ways more appealing and easier if it is also connected with their everyday life.

The aim of this study has been to show the teachers’ thoughts and views regarding problems in reading in the foreign language classroom. However, limitations for the investigation occurred since the teachers have not been observed in the classroom activity and interviews with pupils have not taken place, thus, limiting the study to some extent. For future research, I think it would be good to get a view from the pupils’ perspective as well concerning reading problems in the foreign language classroom. Seeing this issue of reading problems from different angles would help us understand the phenomenon and in addition would perhaps give us new ideas and improve our teaching strategies. Another aspect would be to make this study larger by making more interviews and involving different schools around the country.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Are there many pupils in your class with reading difficulties? Does it vary over time, or is it usually the same number?
2. How do you usually find out if there is a student with reading difficulties in the class?
3. Is it good to be aware of the difficulties that may occur from the beginning? Why?
4. How do you work with those students in your class that may have difficulties with reading?
5. Is it hard to manage pupils with special needs when you have a class of 17-20 pupils?
6. Is it tough to manage by yourself? Do you have help in the form of some assistance in class?
7. How often do you use literary text in the language classroom? Why is literature used?
8. Is it beneficial for those with difficulties to use literary text in the classroom? Why? Why not?
9. How do you work with literature in the class?