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Ways to Good Reading Comprehension
A qualitative study of teachers’ views of the teaching of reading comprehension and reading strategies

Vägar till god läsförståelse
En kvalitativ studie av lärares syn på läsförståelseundervisning och lässtrategier

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During the work, we tried to do as much as possible together to achieve a unified work that we are both happy with. In some sections Asmaa put some focus on reviewing previous research and looking for new articles related to the use of texts and reading strategies, while Abeer spent time investigating how teachers work with reading comprehension and tasks to develop reading comprehension for pupils. However, the final text was written by both, as so many changes have been made during the work that it is not possible to say who wrote which part. First, a big thank you to our supervisor Bo Lundahl who supported and helped us progress through our writing process. We also want to thank all the teachers in this study, who not only made it possible for us to carry out the work, but also inspired and motivated us for an increased interest in English teaching. We can take the insights that they so generously shared with us in our future professional role. Finally, we would like to thank our families who were helpful and patient as we spent so much time on this study.

Abeer Aldibs & Asmaa Khalel
Abstract

The purpose of this study has been to explore reading comprehension with a focus on how teachers talk about their teaching of reading comprehension. To gain knowledge about how teachers work to increase and stimulate pupils’ reading comprehension, we decided to use qualitative interviews to further our knowledge and understanding of reading comprehension. Therefore, we interviewed five teachers who teach English in years 7–9, asking them to define reading comprehension and reading strategies, describe a lesson opportunity when they worked with texts and tasks, and encouraging them to talk about what reading strategies they usually promote in their teaching to enhance pupils’ understanding of texts.

The results show that teachers defined reading comprehension in similar ways. From the interviews it appeared that all teachers believe that pupils can understand texts if they link them to their own experiences. Therefore, it is important that texts are interesting to read. The results differed among the teachers regarding the teaching of reading strategies. Even though several of the interviewed teachers believe that it is important that pupils use different strategies to develop their reading comprehension, four of them do not spend time on teaching them. Instead, they advise pupils to use some strategies that they think are useful. In addition, the results reveal that pupils also need to distinguish between strategies and adapt them to the purpose for reading texts. The findings also show that teachers work with different types of texts and they design various tasks for texts according to pupils’ levels and needs.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, reading strategies, tasks, texts.
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1. Introduction

This qualitative study offers an insight into some of the key factors that benefit pupils' reading comprehension and provides awareness of how teachers can teach so that pupils can develop good reading comprehension. As prospective teachers, we believe that one of the school’s most important tasks is to motivate pupils to read and to understand what they read on different levels which are on the lines, between the lines and beyond the lines. According to Sweden’s results on the international measurements of reading ability, such as PISA and PIRLS, too many Swedish ten-years-olds (PIRLS) and fifteen-year-olds (PISA) are only able to read fiction and non-fiction texts with basic comprehension, that is, they can only read texts at a literal level (Skolverket, 2017, Skolverket, 2019). That complies with what we noted during our internships at different Swedish secondary schools, that many 7–9 graders achieve only low levels of reading comprehension. This can be due to various factors but this study focuses only on how teachers design their reading instruction in order to develop their pupils reading comprehension, as well as, how they encourage them to use reading strategies.

Reichenberg (2014) shows that good reading comprehension is important for society as a whole, but that it is also a key to success in subjects at school. This is because almost all subjects in school require pupils to be able to understand what they read. According to Skolverket (2022) reading is vital for pupils' language development as well as their ability to imagine and empathize. Reading also provides new experiences, meetings, and thoughts. It is crucial that pupils are not only able to decode words, but also to comprehend what they read and interpret what is not immediately stated in the text, as well as to draw conclusions, in order to pass their studies in all subjects. Besides, choosing various types of texts other than textbooks is crucial in order to increase the pupils’ reading comprehension proficiency, and encourage them to apply different strategies that could help them to comprehend what they read (Lundahl 2022). Furthermore, Lundahl (2021) believes also that using different types of texts has increased in the information society and that has created a continuous demand for strong reading skills. Besides, Alderson (2000) states that we read in different ways since we read texts for several purposes, such as to learn, to understand the content or to answer certain questions. At the same time, he refers to reading approaches which are linked to several purposes of
reading such as skimming, scanning, extensive reading, precision reading, and critical reading. Therefore, the teacher’s instructions and the tasks pupils receive before, during, or after reading texts are vital since they affect their reading and the way they treat the texts at different times.

Moreover, the focus in this study is on traditional reading since the syllabus for English 7–9 comprises two types of reading: traditional as well as digital reading. These two types of reading partly differ from one another in that they involve different cognitive processes and have different outcomes (Lundahl, 2022). The goal of traditional reading is comprehension where the pupils read, understand and explain the meaning in texts. On the other hand, the goal of digital reading is the use of the information from different sources (oral or written) in the pupils’ production and interaction (Lundahl, 2022).
2. Aim and research questions

Our aim is to investigate what views a selected group of English teachers have of reading comprehension and how they work with reading strategies. Our interest is also in how they choose texts and choose/or design tasks in order to promote reading comprehension for pupils in Years 7–9.

Based on the above aim, the following questions have been formulated:

1. What views do the participating teachers have of reading comprehension?
2. On what basis do the participating teachers choose texts and choose/or design tasks that promote reading comprehension for pupils in years 7–9?
3. How do the participating teachers encourage the pupils to use reading strategies?
3. Background

This section is divided into three sections. The first section displays the reading comprehension in the syllabus for English 7–9. The second one presents the theoretical perspectives in which we introduce sociocultural theory we depend on in our study as well as other studies and key concepts of reading comprehension, texts, tasks and reading strategies. The last section includes findings of previous research in reading comprehension and reading strategies.

3.1 Reading comprehension in the syllabus for English 7–9

The syllabus for English 7–9 states that teaching of English should give pupils the opportunity to develop a versatile communicative ability. It also states that the first goal among the five overall goals is that pupils should develop their ability to “understand and interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts” (Skolverket, 2018, p. 34). This indicates a clearer goal for the importance of reading comprehension and can be seen as an expression of the demand to strengthen pupils’ knowledge and skills in reading in order to increase reading comprehension. This also correlates with the knowledge requirement for grade E at the end of year 9 which gives another clear picture about the importance of promoting reading comprehension:

Pupils can understand the main content and clear details in English spoken at a moderate pace and in basic texts in various genres. Pupils show their understanding by presenting an overview with discussion and comments on content and details and also with acceptable results acting on the basis of the message and instructions in the content. (Skolverket, 2018, p. 39)

This demonstrates that pupils need to show that they understand not only the content of texts but also details. In order to develop these literacy skills, pupils need to be equipped with a wide range of strategies.

Although the knowledge requirements in the revised syllabus for English 7–9 (Skolverket, 2021) do not explicitly state that drawing conclusions is required by the pupils, doing so
can be considered a basic element for the ability to read a text for meaning (Lundahl, 2014), and when considering that the knowledge requirements for traditional reading in the revised syllabus for English 7–9 include the words “understand and interpret”, it is reasonable to infer that the word interpret suggests understanding beyond the literal meaning of texts.

3.2 Theoretical perspectives

3.2.1 Sociocultural theory: zone of proximal development, scaffolding

Our study is based on the sociocultural theory of learning which has been further developed from the theorist Lev Vygotsky's thoughts on learning. From a sociocultural perspective, knowledge never arises in a vacuum but rather in a social context (Säljö, 2000). Vygotsky believes that the learning process starts when an individual participates linguistically in a social context and then develops further by the individual processing the knowledge on an individual level. It follows that when children are put in a situation to participate with other knowledgeable people, their cognitive functions will develop and consequently, the children will be able to use the knowledge on their own (Säljö, 2014). Therefore, engaging pupils in reading with each other or with teachers is very important to develop their reading comprehension skills (Westlund, 2013).

Besides, according to Vygotsky the zone for learning consists of the level where the pupil can develop with assistance until he/she can manage it on his/her own (Westlund, 2013). This is what is called the Vygotsky zone of proximal development and scaffolding. It means that the child has an opportunity to develop based on the actual level of development in an area to a higher level of development (Säljö, 2014). Westlund (2013) stressed that teachers’ awareness of their pupils’ ZPD is important because this is individual and pupils must be given the appropriate challenges in order to develop.

3.2.2 Reading and reading comprehension

In this section, we refer to different research on reading in both L1 (first language) such as Persson (2016) and Bråten (2008) and L2 (second language) such as Lundahl (2021, 2022). According to Singhal (1998) there are similarities and differences between L1 and L2
reading processes. When reading in both contexts, the reader interacts with the text to construct meaning from it. These mental activities are generally referred to as reading strategies. Successful L1 and L2 employ certain behavioral strategies to improve their comprehension of texts. They use their background knowledge while reading to develop, control, and assert predictions. However, Singhal (1998) argues that reading in L1 and L2 differs significantly in three cultural differences which are content (Background) schema, formal (textual) schema and linguistic (language) schema. At the same time, Singhal refers to two hypotheses that discuss the relationship between the L1 and L2 abilities. The first hypothesis is the linguistic interdependence hypothesis and the second is the linguistic threshold hypothesis. The Interdependence hypothesis suggests that there must be a basic cognitive ability shared between L1 and L2 so that reading ability transfers from L1 to L2 automatically. On the other hand, the linguistic threshold hypothesis suggests that before L1 reading skill transfers to L2, a certain degree of L2 language competence is required. This means that L2 learners must first acquire some fundamental linguistic knowledge before being able to read in their second language.

Many researchers of reading in L1 context agree that reading is a process which means more than being able to read what our eyes meet (Persson, 2016). Reading always requires active cognitive effort both before, during and after reading, regardless of whether one reads non-fiction or fiction texts (Skolverket, 2016). According to Bråten (2008), reading comprehension is about extracting and creating meaning when one searches through a written text and interacts with it. He believes that the reader should not only read but also give a meaning to what one reads. In the same context, we can refer to Grabe and Strollers’ (2018) definition of reading comprehension “Reading comprehension is the ability to extract, interpret and use information from a print or digital text” (as quoted in Lundahl, 2021, p. 307). Therefore, reading comprehension needs to be understood as a process of interpretation and meaning construction. Further, how reading comprehension is developed depends on what texts one meets and how (Skolverket, 2016).

Researchers have defined different aspects and levels that are related to reading comprehension. According to Pinnell (2002), knowledge of the language is a significant aspect of reading comprehension such as linguistic awareness, vocabulary, pre-comprehension in different areas and the development of different strategies for reading comprehension. Through reading stories aloud, the teacher can ask questions and have
discussions and dialogue with pupils regarding the content of the story. Gibbons (2002) believes that reading aloud by teachers is the key to early reading because the life and pleasure the teacher gives to the reading can arouse the pupils’ interest. Reading by teachers is considered as scaffolding that helps learners achieve what they would have found difficult to do independently. The learners should be active listeners, invited to respond to the text after reading "While reading the text, the teacher encourages pupils to talk about the text, explain words and ask questions" (Lundahl, 2022, p. 257). Reading in pairs or in groups, which Lundahl (2022) calls shared reading, is also significant for promoting pupils’ reading comprehension and is an appropriate method for developing their understanding of a text, which is related to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development and scaffolding. In addition, formulating questions on texts is considered a way to give pupils examples of different strategies for reading comprehension (Ivarsson, 2016).

When it comes to different levels of comprehension, Gray (1960) distinguished between three key levels that are central in reading comprehension, which are reading the lines, reading between the lines, and reading beyond the lines. Reading the lines means a basic level of comprehension which is information-based, whereas, reading between the lines means to be able to draw conclusions and make inferences, while reading beyond the lines signifies connecting to one’s experiences or other books or films.

3.2.3 Reading strategies

The core content in the syllabus for English 7–9 emphasizes the importance of reading strategy instruction in English language teaching and learning (Lundahl, 2022). Besides, both the syllabus for English 7–9, as well as the comments to the syllabus 7–9 stress the demand for using strategies as ways to solve problems and to deal with learning difficulties through developing various strategies. People need to use strategies in order to understand, make themselves understood, communicate and learn. Strategies may be conscious or partially unconscious; they may be planned or spontaneous. They can also be more or less effective. Also, using various aids such as dictionaries and digital tools is considered a type of strategy (Skolverket, 2017; Skolverket, 2018).
Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2017) define strategies as “deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader’s efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings of text” (Afflerbach, et al. 2017, p. 38). According to this definition, reading strategies are conscious actions for absorbing textual content. However, Lundahl (2021) states that the concept of reading strategy can be defined in different ways and in different contexts because we read different texts for various purposes. Lundahl illustrates reading strategies in an educational context where pupils are aware of ways that support them during their process of reading and navigating texts (Lundahl, 2021). He also argues that reading strategies should not be taught in isolation. Instead, different strategies should be linked to the purposes for reading. Sometimes, skilled pupils can understand the meaning of a text drawing on their prior understanding and making use of their linguistic resources. If the text represents a reasonable linguistic level, they can guess the meaning of unknown words and identify other cues and clues that can help them to comprehend the text. However, weak readers probably need to use more strategies in order to understand the same text (Lundahl, 2022). Furthermore, Lundahl (2022) stresses that reading strategies have a crucial role in promoting pupils’ good comprehension such as, for example, summarizing texts, asking questions to texts, activating one’s prior knowledge, drawing conclusions, paying attention to the structure of texts, and distinguishing between what is more or less important. In addition, one needs to distinguish between positive and negative reading strategies or whether strategies are conscious or unconscious processes (Lundahl, 2022).

Another way of approaching reading strategies is to consider different stages of reading, for example, before reading, during reading and after reading. Bråten (2008) clarifies that reading strategies consolidate a reader’s understanding. Before reading includes the ability to take for granted and have certain expectations of a text (Bråten, 2008). Before-reading strategies can be a kind of scaffolding which includes activating prior knowledge, making predictions about the topic and/or presenting some important vocabulary (Lundahl, 2021). Researchers show that activating prior knowledge is an important element in paving the way to good reading comprehension as it promotes better and deep understanding for the texts and supports problem solving in new situations (Bråten, 2008). During reading, the use of strategies can deepen one’s own understanding of the reader. This is done by asking questions about the text itself, making an attempt to answer them.
Bråten (2008) believes that teachers should give their pupils some control questions during or after reading which helps them to see if their pupils perceive the meaning of the text. After reading other strategies may come into play, for instance, by summarizing the content (Bråten, 2008).

Furthermore, Dymock & Nicholson (2010) show that reading strategies should be learned explicitly over a long period of time and the teacher has a critical role for pupils’ acquisition of the strategies. Teaching the strategies explicitly means that the teacher has a clear goal in the teaching and expectations of the pupils. However, it is important that pupils know both how the strategies work and when to use them. Therefore, the lessons should be structured and give many examples and demonstrations of the strategy. The pupils will then have many opportunities to practice the reading strategies under the teacher’s guidance and with many different types of texts (Eckeskog, 2013). Similarly, Jönsson (2007) confirms that teachers are an important support in pupils’ reading comprehension development and the teacher has an important task in making pupils ready to absorb different kinds of texts. Teachers’ support is also important in getting pupils to apply the reading comprehension strategies on their own because it gives teachers the opportunity to be there as a support in pupils’ reading and give feedback to pupils and help them move forward.

Correspondingly, Hajer (2020) emphasizes that teachers need to attract their pupils’ attention to knowledge all the time in order to achieve the goal. Therefore, it is important that teachers discuss reading strategies with them. "Overview of the text" can be a strategy where pupils can look at the headings, pictures, text genre, and words in bold to try to understand what a text is about. The purpose is for pupils to expand their repertoire. However, since pupils are different, Hajer stresses that teachers should introduce pupils to different strategies and ask them which way of working suits the best. Furthermore, Hajer shows that the pupils need support when they read texts. The support could be for example, by pointing out language features (words, sentences, text structure and different features) that the pupils need to understand and process the material (Hajer, 2020). Another kind of support structure according to Stensson (2006) is reading aloud, which is a dynamic process where there is no time for relaxation and dreaming. The creation of meaning is central where both listeners and readers are active. When reading aloud, the teacher is a model for the reading itself and makes the printed text clear, so the pupils do not have to struggle with
reading technique (Stensson, 2006). Thus, reading becomes a social activity which is a crucial element for developing a good reading comprehension (Bråten, 2008).

3.2.4 Texts and tasks

In the core content, the syllabus for English 7–9 mentions that pupils need to read several types of texts from various media, written instructions and descriptions, literature and other fiction in spoken, dramatized and filmed forms to develop their linguistic ability (Skolverket, 2018). Lundahl (2022) refers to diverse types of texts that have several functions such as narrating, giving descriptions, instructions, informing, discussing, arguing, and explaining. Reichenberg (2014) also highlights that texts play a major role in school’s everyday life. Therefore, it is important that the texts that pupils read have a high degree of readability and that they can arouse their interest in reading.

Similarly, Lundahl (2022) states that no textbook can cover the various texts that pupils should encounter as part of their studies in English. Therefore, selecting relevant and appropriate texts is an important part of the English teacher’s work. Furthermore, Lundahl (2021) shows that text types can vary, be in different structures, and have varied purposes which define what type of comprehension is aimed for. For example, many messages are short and pop up in the form of ads, notes, text messages, emails, shopping lists, recipes, or other information. Other texts are longer, such as newspaper articles, fairy tales and short stories. Moreover, Lundahl (2022) emphasizes that reading generates an interaction between three key factors which are readers, texts, and tasks. However, there are many crucial elements that are related to each factor. Reader-related factors depend on the pupils’ competence, motivation, previous knowledge, interests, language proficiency (especially vocabulary range) as well as cognitive ability. Text factors are related to the types of texts, how complex the language is, as well as the amount of text. Furthermore, task factors are related to what purpose we have of reading the texts, the amount of scaffolding supplied as well as how complex the task is. Teachers need to choose texts as well as design and/or use tasks and questions that help and motivate the pupils to formulate their thoughts, understanding and opinions (Lundahl, 2022).

The choice of texts is fundamental in all reading instruction. It is preferable that texts are attractive and challenging at the same time (Skolverket, 2016). Felski (2008) focuses on four aspects of reading. One of these aspects has to do with recognition, which means that
readers want to read about things they know again and can relate to in order to gain good comprehension of the text. Besides, teachers should adapt teaching to their pupils’ levels (Skolverket, 2011). This correlates with Piaget’s developmental psychology theory that there is a relationship between learning and development. Vygotsky also believes that the learning process starts when an individual participates linguistically in a social context (Säljö, 2014). This supports Reichenberg and Lundberg (2011) claims that structured text conversations are based on Vygotsky’s theory, and such conversations have the potential to challenge pupils in their immediate development zone.

Besides, Reichenberg (2014) believes that it is the teacher who, through structured text conversations, can develop pupils’ reading comprehension. She emphasizes that the conversation before, during and after reading is crucial for the pupils’ reading comprehension development because it gives the pupils the tool of how to proceed through the teachers’ support and guidance. Reichenberg (2014) believes that in the conversation, pupils can share their thoughts, discuss, ask questions, solve problems, compare, argue, interpret, develop their ideas and connect experiences to theirs or others. At the same time having conversations about texts can be meaningful and clarifying when the pupils have problems in understanding (Reichenberg and Lundberg, 2011). Similarly, Molloy (2008) states that when pupils get to talk and discuss fiction books together, they practise discussing the author’s message, asking questions and presenting different interpretations.

According to Westlund (2015), teachers need to ask their pupils questions which require interpretation and reflection. This may give teachers the chance to check what answers that pupils know. In addition, teachers can see how their pupils respond and argue. Reichenberg (2014) refers to several studies that show that pupils, who receive questions where reflection and problem solving are required, and who can describe how they came up with their answers, show better reading development. Similarly, Bråten (2008) confirms that one of the factors that was most strongly connected to good reading comprehension development is the choice of good questions. According to him, good questions are ones that often consider what prior knowledge the pupils have or try to activate their prior knowledge when they encounter new texts. Good questions are also those that encourage pupils to draw conclusions and justify their answers (Bråten, 2008). Tasks and questions are considered one of the important tools that teachers can use to motivate their pupils to be able to formulate their thoughts, viewpoints as well as opinions. In order for questions
and tasks to fulfill the required function, there are certain factors that teachers need to take into consideration. Some of them are that the questions should focus on the pupils’ understanding and on motivating them to express what they understand. Questions need to focus on various comprehension dimensions such as basic comprehension and critical comprehension which is related to thorough understanding (Lundahl, 2021). As mentioned, teachers need to distinguish between literal meaning and inferencing when they construct assignments and ask questions. According to the PISA international survey 2018, reading comprehension questions are asked with the aim of capturing and including different comprehension levels in reading. These levels are finding information in texts, comprehending the literal meaning, as well as comprehending meanings that are not explicitly expressed in texts (reading between the lines) and lastly reflecting and assessing the content and structure of texts (Lundahl, 2022).

3.3 Previous research on reading comprehension and reading strategies’ instruction

In this section, we demonstrate two different studies related to reading comprehension and reading strategies.

The first study is a review organized by Skolforskningsinstitutet based on a combination of several empirical research papers on reading strategy teaching and their usage by pupils. Such studies included mixed study methods which helped the review to obtain wide results to answer its research questions about how both teachers’ instructions and pupils’ use of reading strategies impacted pupils’ reading comprehension (Skolforskningsinstitutet, 2021). There are advantages to using Skolforskningsinstitutet’s review study, because this aims to put research in a context to help teachers make extensive use of research and, eventually, use research results to develop their teaching. However, there are also limitations, since this review is also directed towards professionals to have access to a wide range of research findings to depend on in their further research. Besides, it does not provide answers to 'what works' in teaching. They can only give a basis for making teachers aware of their choices and decisions when they tailor their teaching activities (Skolforskningsinstitutet, 2021).
The findings of these studies revealed that reading strategy instruction and usage support pupils’ understanding of texts and that teachers need to take into consideration various elements when they plan to teach reading strategies. The results also showed that there is a wide range of reading strategies that could have various purposes that might help in developing pupils’ reading strategies and supporting working with various types of texts. Three groups of reading strategies have been defined covering about 30 types of strategies. The first group is memorisation strategies which helps pupils spot information in the texts. The second one is elaboration strategies which helps pupils spot information in the texts. The second one is elaboration strategies which helps pupils spot information in the texts, while the third one is control strategies which aid pupils to control and compensate for lack of comprehension. When pupils encounter comprehension problems it is vital that they have a collection of reading strategies that they can choose deliberately and appropriately. Thus, it is the responsibility of teachers to guide and teach their pupils how to employ various sorts of strategies for different purposes (Skolforskningsinstitutet, 2021).

The results reveal that not all these groups of strategies are beneficial for good reading comprehension. Those that boost good reading comprehension are the second and third groups where pupils generate a summary of their comprehension of the text’s primary concept or activate their existing background knowledge based on the text’s basic theme and meaning, as well as monitor and judge their own reading process. Memorization strategies keep the pupils close to the text by memorizing or repeating the same material. Thus, they do not enhance understanding as other strategies do and do not encourage pupils to build their own knowledge and meaning of the text. However, the results also show that memorization strategies can be used to get access to a text and recover information, laying the groundwork for the use of other reading strategies and the development of deeper comprehension of texts (Skolforskningsinstitutet, 2021).

In addition to reading strategy instruction, the results show that teachers need to think of other important factors that could impact pupils’ reading comprehension, such as raising the engagement and motivation of their pupils. Motivating the pupils could be through letting them be aware of the content purpose, choosing attractive texts with tangible activities, and asking them to cooperate with each other (Skolforskningsinstitutet, 2021).
Moreover, research has shown that readers who face difficulties in reading comprehension get more advantage of reading strategy instruction than strong readers. At the same time, results show that teachers face a significant issue in providing texts that are appropriately challenging for all pupils (Skolforskningsinstitutet, 2021).

In the second study “Teachers’ perspective on reading comprehension”, Eckerholm (2018) investigated teachers’ statements about reading comprehension in grades 4–6. Twenty-two teachers were interviewed about their own teaching of reading comprehension. The research questions concerned the methods, strategies, and activities the teachers say they use to successfully teach reading comprehension. The results of this study showed that three phases of reading can be distinguished, which require different reading strategies. These are strategies to use before, during, and after reading (Eckerholm, 2018). It is vital that the pupils use their prior understanding or background knowledge to be motivated to read. Visualizing, inferring, and being able to assess their understanding are all strategies that may be used during reading; strategies after reading, maybe different tasks to a text, such as summaries. These strategies will make it easier for pupils to comprehend what a text may mean by knowledge and new insights. Besides, the teaching would draw the pupils’ attention to trying out their own ideas, so each reading involves a developmental dimension and the deepening of prior knowledge (Eckerholm, 2018).

The study also emphasised that interaction and conversations between teachers-pupils, or pupil-pupil, can help pupils better grasp texts and enhance their reading comprehension. Eckerholm (2018) refers to Langer (2005) who underlines the need of teachers varying their working methods to enhance pupils’ reading development. Moreover, Literary teaching is a social activity in the sense that pupils together discuss texts from several perspectives. Eckerholm (2018) further stresses that while discussing texts together, pupils should use their prior knowledge and compare their own opinions to those of others in order to broaden their understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Another key dimension emphasized by Eckerholm (2018) is that the selection of texts should be based on pupils’ interests. Thus, if they are really interested in what they read, they are more likely to be able to link the content to their own experiences. In addition, factual texts are important to discuss along with explanations of words and concepts. The
results also showed that pupils should work with different texts together in order to help each other’s perceptions and experiences. This has the potential to broaden their interpretive ability, change their way of looking at texts and increase their knowledge of the world around them. Through conversations about the meanings of texts, pupils are given the opportunity for a more comprehensive understanding and a richer experience (Eckerholm, 2018).

The overview of matters related to reading and reading comprehension provides background to our investigation into some experienced English teachers’ thoughts about reading comprehension and descriptions of how they go about selecting/designing reading comprehension activities and working to include reading strategies in their teaching and their pupils’ learning. Furthermore, many of the ideas of the overview will return in our discussion of the results.
4. Method

For this study we have used qualitative research, based on semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2018) with five teachers, from different secondary schools, who teach English in years 7–9. The interviews aim at gaining knowledge of what views some English teachers have of reading comprehension, how they choose texts and/or design tasks, as well as what reading strategies they promote. In this section the following method considerations are described and discussed: the participants, the selected methods, ethical standards, the data collection, procedure, and the analysis of the collected data.

4.1 The participants and their schools

When we started this research, we decided to interview 7–9 English teachers that were our supervisors during our internships. After that, we reached out to another school in search of volunteer English teachers. Two teachers responded positively from the beginning. However, three other teachers complained about lack of time. Even so, we were eventually able to book an appointment with them. In our selection of the teachers, we depended on Bryman’s considerations (2018). In addition, to avoid a homogeneous sample, the English teachers with varying experiences were chosen from five different schools located in distinct locations. This resulted in a heterogeneous sample and, therefore, contributes to more valid results (Alvehus, 2019). Our original plan was to have more participants to achieve the aim of this research but due to the hectic schedule of all teachers, we succeeded in having the approval of just five teachers. However, according to Hatch (2002) the number of participants does not determine the quality of qualitative research.

The five participants are female English teachers (See Table 1) who remain anonymous and are given pseudonyms as teacher 1, teacher 2, teacher 3, teacher 4, and teacher 5. Table 1 includes the teachers’ work experiences, what classes and subjects they teach, as well as the dates of the interviews. The teachers work in five different schools. The first and second schools selected for this study are located in a large city in southern Sweden, and they are secondary schools for years 7–9. The third, fourth and fifth schools are located in a small city in southern Sweden. Two of them are secondary schools for years 7–9 and one of them is a primary and secondary school for years 0–9.
Table 1

*Participating teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Grades they currently teach in English</th>
<th>Work experience</th>
<th>Date of the interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>English, and French</td>
<td>7\textsuperscript{th}, 8\textsuperscript{th}, and 9\textsuperscript{th} graders</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>02 December, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>English (special education teacher)</td>
<td>7\textsuperscript{th}, 8\textsuperscript{th}, and 9\textsuperscript{th} graders</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>07 December, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>English, Swedish, Swedish as a second language, Art, and Spanish</td>
<td>7\textsuperscript{th}, 8\textsuperscript{th}, and 9\textsuperscript{th} graders</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>10 December, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4</td>
<td>English and Swedish</td>
<td>7\textsuperscript{th}, 8\textsuperscript{th}, and 9\textsuperscript{th} graders</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>14 December, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 5</td>
<td>English and German</td>
<td>7\textsuperscript{th}, 8\textsuperscript{th}, and 9\textsuperscript{th} graders</td>
<td>39 years</td>
<td>15 December, 2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Choice of method for collecting the data

4.2.1 Semi-structured interview

Our choice of qualitative interviews is based on scientific grounds. The method of presentation of a study can be called scientific when scientific methods and theories are applied (Molander, 2003). According to Bryman (2018), qualitative methods aim at achieving understanding rather than explanations that may result from quantitative studies. The starting point in a qualitative study is the participants’ perspective of what they perceive as important and significant. Accordingly, in order to find out English teachers’ viewpoints about reading comprehension and reading strategies, and to be able to find answers to our research questions, we approached qualitative research by conducting semi-structured interviews. Through such interviews, a deeper knowledge of the informants’ understanding may be gained (Bryman, 2018), as well as a deep understanding of their thoughts (Alvehus, 2019).

According to Bryman (2018), interviews are the most widely used method in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews mean that the conversation is focused on specific topics that the researcher has chosen in advance. They also provide the freedom to ask flexible questions so that the informants can express themselves freely and develop their answers. Furthermore, follow-up questions have the potential to invite the respondents to link their answers to their experiences. Another possible strength is that informants often prefer semi-structured interviews because they feel comfortable when they talk and that interviews are more similar to conversations than formal interviews (Bryman, 2018).

Moreover, Alvehus (2019) states that semi-structured interviews allow interviewers to use a format that consists of a few open questions around which the conversation is centred. This provides informants with the opportunity to influence the content of the interview, and the interviewers must be more active in their listening and in formulating follow-up questions. Larsen (2009) emphasizes that follow-up questions give the opportunity to the informants to explain, develop, and proceed in their explanation. However, this presupposes an interviewer who is an attentive and active listener.
4.3 Ethical considerations

The aim of human research is to provide an understanding of real conditions, the study of effective methods, the examination of behaviours, and the improvement of life in other ways (Bryman, 2018). When researchers decide to conduct research, they need to keep in mind that the research includes important ethical considerations. These considerations protect the rights of research participants, improve research credibility, and maintain scientific integrity. The first main requirement of ethical considerations that is followed here is informed consent. First, we communicated with the potential teacher participants through email, and we informed them about our project’s purpose and benefits behind the study before they agreed or joined. Participants were told that they were free to participate or withdraw at any time. The second requirement that is followed is confidentiality and all the participants were advised that their data and their schools are kept confidential (Bryman, 2018). As for the interviews no one will have access to them except us, as well as the supervisor and examiner. In order to keep our data confidential, we used a USB adapter to store our recordings. Finally, to fulfil the utilisation requirement, we informed the participants that the data would only be used for this research and that all the records will be destroyed once we pass the degree project.

4.4 Procedure

All our interviews were conducted in December 2021 due to two reasons. First, we could not begin interviewing before our research questions and interview guide had been approved by our supervisor. The second reason was that the teachers were busy, and they could not participate before they were done with all the national tests. Moreover, the procedures for all interviews were fairly consistent. Before contacting the teachers, we designed an interview guide (Appendix) based on our research questions. The interview guide is structured and detailed, and is meant as a support for us, to know that we have covered all the areas we are interested in (Bryman, 2018). Our interview guide is divided into four themes corresponding to our research questions. The first one is about reading comprehension, the second is about tasks, the third is about reading strategies and the last is about texts. The interview guide was organized in English and Swedish, and the teachers were informed that they had the possibility to participate either in English or in Swedish. All the interviews were in Swedish according to the participants’ requests. This
choice gave the participants confidence to express themselves freely since Swedish is their first language. All the interviews were conducted online via Zoom. The teachers were informed that they had the possibility to do the interviews on site or via Zoom. They welcomed the idea of doing it via Zoom. This way suits us as well because we live in different places and it is good to avoid commuting. Bryman (2018) denotes that if the participants are in remote places, there are two possibilities for conducting the interviews; the first one is via telephone and the second one is online or via email. The zoom meetings took between 30-45 minutes. In addition, all the interviews were audio-recorded using a Motorola Mobile voice recorder. Furthermore, to facilitate the conversation process to help teachers speak, we asked some follow-up questions (Bryman, 2018), and sometimes we had to rephrase questions in another way to complement the recordings. For the informants to feel as comfortable and relaxed as possible, there was a little short talk about Christmas and the nice snowy weather. In addition, the participants were told that the interviews were going to be recorded and that all the participants’ names would remain anonymous, including the name of the school.

4.5 Analysis of the collected data

In order to prepare the interview material for analysis we transcribed the interviews from oral speech to written text. To transcribe is to transform, that is, to change from one form to another and that printing is a translation of spoken language into a written language (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). A problem with transcription is that it is a time-consuming process and generates a lot of paper to process during analysis (Bryman, 2018).

We divided the writing of the transcription between us, starting from some common points. All the interviews were transcribed directly after they were conducted. All answers were collected in a shared Google document and the interview transcripts were carefully read several times so that we could get an overview of the entire data material. Then we underlined meaningful units based on our research questions, took notes and looked for connections. We chose to make a summary of how the informants reasoned about the issue. Since we recorded using a voice recorder, we could concentrate on our questions and the participants, such as having eye contact, listening actively, and asking questions if we wanted to know more about something or if we needed more clarification.
5. Results

In this section, results of interviews are presented based on the research questions of what view the participating teachers have about reading comprehension, how they choose texts and choose/or design tasks that promote reading comprehension. In addition, how the participating teachers encourage the pupils to use reading strategies. The subheadings in this section are based on the thematic categories mentioned in the interview guide.

5.1 Teachers’ views of reading comprehension

Teacher 1 believes that reading comprehension is the pupils’ competence to understand the content of texts they read as well as to be able to retell it. She added that pupils need to show that they understand texts through answering posted questions either in writing or orally. Teacher 2 believed that reading comprehension is “the ability to understand the content of the text and to be able to answer questions regarding the text”. Teacher 3 described reading comprehension as the pupils’ ability to read a text and to understand it. She added that understanding the texts requires that the pupils can answer what is on the lines, interpret what is between the lines and to some extent reflect on what is beyond the lines. Both teachers 1 and 3 stated that it is important that pupils can read between the lines to show that they comprehend the texts they read. Teacher 1 emphasized that less competent readers can only read on the line. They cannot answer all questions, especially those that require details, nor can they summarize texts. Teacher 1 stated further that reading comprehension also depends on what the teacher wants the pupils to show that they understand whether it is just to understand the context so they can retell it or to understand the details of texts. Likewise, teacher 5 affirmed that reading comprehension is the ability to read a text, to comprehend it, and to show that one understands through answering relative questions. She confirmed that it is very important to work with reading comprehension to encourage the pupils to read more and to increase their interest and desire to read. Teacher 4 defined reading comprehension briefly as the ability to read any text and to be able to answer different questions, related to the text, orally or in writing.
5.2 Teachers’ choice of texts for promoting reading comprehension

We asked the teachers how they choose texts that would help their pupils to develop reading comprehension. According to teacher 1, reading a lot has a key role in promoting her pupils’ reading comprehension skills. She emphasized that reading comprehension develops when pupils read and listen to texts that suit their level and interests. She prefers that her pupils read novels, about two books a term. She urges her pupils to go to the school library and to borrow books that would arouse their interest, so they feel motivated to read. She tries to make sure that her pupils choose books suitable for their level, which means a balance between easy and difficult. For such reading, she designs special tasks that will show her pupils’ reading comprehension. During reading, she organizes varied tasks such as writing journals, making summaries and discussing their books in groups. Additionally, the whole class reads a joint book each term for which she designs various tasks before, during and after reading so that she can assess her pupils’ reading comprehension. Reading aloud in class is one of the strategies that she uses during reading followed by discussions and dialogue with pupils which can help develop her pupils’ comprehension. Moreover, the pupils read textbooks, both traditional ones and digital versions. She designs special tasks for each text such as reading in pairs or in groups. Teacher 1 tries to work in a way that pupils could develop their reading comprehension while expanding their language ability, not least their vocabulary.

Teacher 2 thought the same way as teacher 1, stating that she usually brings texts from various educational sites like the British Council at different levels A to E. She gives each pupil a text that suits his/her level to gradually develop their reading comprehension. What matters for her is that the texts are interesting and engaging, as well as convenient to the pupils’ levels so that the pupils are motivated to work with.

Similar to the first respondent, teacher 3 emphasized that she makes the pupils vary their reading approaches by reading diverse types of texts such as novels, factual texts, and short stories. She likes working continuously with short texts, to be mixed with longer texts. She believes that to get a breadth in the result, teachers should work with different types of texts to engage as many pupils as possible, making them think it is fun to read.
From a different point of view, teacher 1 thinks that reading long texts such as novels is more fun for the pupils and helps them to become good readers. Teacher 3 makes her pupils read by themselves, while at other times they read in pairs or together in the classroom. Teacher 3 usually designs tasks such as questions to be answered or discussions activities.

Teachers 4 and 5 also affirmed that their choice for reading comprehension texts is based on pupils’ interest. Teacher 5 gave an example, “if the teacher knows that the pupils are interested in fishing or horseback riding, all texts that are about it they love to read.” Additionally, both teachers said that teachers should discover their pupils’ level before they decide which textbook their pupils will read. Teacher 5 mentioned that in her school there are different variations of texts at different levels. Besides, she usually brings texts with different levels from a teaching material which is called ESL-PITS. ESL-PITS also makes it possible for pupils to read and listen to texts simultaneously. Teacher 4 indicated that working with books is central in promoting reading comprehension. She gave an example that she recently made with her pupils. Pupils read different books and when they were done with reading, she divided them into groups in order to discuss their books. Teacher 4 also makes adjustments either by letting pupils choose books themselves based on their levels or that she chooses for them by herself if she feels that some pupils for example are very smart and she wants to develop their language and reading comprehension by challenging them to read more difficult books. Teacher 4 usually works with texts depending on a model which is called “genrepedagogik”. It is a model that has four different phases. Pupils start with phase one and end with phase four. Each phase works with an area, for example “Phase one focuses on pre-understanding while phase two is about concepts. Moreover, in the different phases, the pupils not only develop the content and understanding but they develop their language at the same time. She also added that she usually chooses texts for those pupils who have reading difficulties such as dyslexia, books that pupils can read and listen to at the same time to be able to assess their reading comprehension orally.
5.3 The teachers’ choice of tasks for promoting reading comprehension

We asked the teachers about whether they use tasks from textbooks or whether they design tasks themselves for the texts they use in their classroom, as well as, what distinguishes a good task. Teacher 1 stated that she mixes between using ready designed tasks and questions from textbooks and other online materials. She also designs special tasks and questions for books that her pupils read such as making summaries or writing book reviews. Further, she said that she usually uses old examples of national exams of reading comprehension which have suitable texts with relative tasks and questions that suit all the pupils’ levels in class, which means questions for A level pupils and questions until E level pupils. She added that she adapts designing the tasks and questions according to the text type and level, as well as the purpose of reading whether the focus is on the context of the text or on the details “understanding the whole text”. She described a good reading comprehension task as the one that develops pupils’ reading comprehension abilities and their language. According to her, a good task shows that the pupils can understand the context and the details as well as what is between the lines.

Four of the teachers usually combine using texts with tasks from both textbooks and online materials and they design their own tasks and questions for texts and books that the pupils read. Teacher 2 indicated that she focuses on having discussion questions before reading, during reading and after reading. Questions before reading can be a kind of supporting and warming up for the pupils, that means to give them a kind of prior comprehension for what they are going to read. She also prepares discussion questions during reading. Questions after reading have the purpose of figuring out if the pupils understand the text or not, through drawing conclusions and reflecting on what they have read. Teacher 3 confirmed that a good task is one that focuses on questions that cover all three levels of comprehension that are on the lines, between the lines and beyond the lines. She said that she prefers that the pupils work first with questions alone, discuss them with a friend and at the end, discuss them in class. By this way, pupils can both give and receive input several times and can develop their reading comprehension. Teacher 4 mentioned that she focuses on having varied questions covering various levels of comprehension. Furthermore, what she takes care of is to design questions at various
levels to meet the right level of pupils’ that is who are at E level, C level, challenging those who are at higher level. She wants to give them the challenge they need to develop. This is the same as Teacher 1 as she confirmed that she takes into consideration the pupils’ levels when she designs the tasks and questions. Teacher 4 added that this type of tasks and questions is the one that characterizes a good comprehension task. Teacher 5 stated that she only designs tasks when she works with fiction books because she mostly works with textbooks and relative tasks such as questions and exercises. Like the first respondent, when she works with fiction books, she designs special tasks during reading and after reading so her pupils can show that they comprehend what they read. Like the other respondents, teacher 5 is keen that her pupils read a lot and do varied tasks, answering different questions that are tailored to their different levels. She often designs tasks that can cover all levels of comprehension, so that the pupils can reflect on what they have read and relate it to themselves.

Teacher 4 said that she designs during-reading tasks, where her pupils get various questions to think of, in order to be ready for discussions. They present their books to each other through making summaries, ask questions to each other as well as answer other questions that she has prepared for them. She said that this promotes their reading comprehension, and the pupils are usually very enthusiastic and enjoy the reading and the discussion. They prepare themselves so they know what they are going to discuss. Likewise, Teacher 1 follows the same approach when she works with book discussions. Teacher 4 sometimes designs writing tasks for pupils after reading their books by writing book reviews.

5.4 The teachers’ promotion of reading strategies

Teachers 1 and 3 believe that the use of reading strategies mostly takes place unconsciously because pupils have already acquired their own reading strategies. Teacher 1 says that she does not give reading strategy instruction because she thinks that pupils get more strategy teaching in Swedish lessons. However, she usually gives tips and advice before the pupils start working on how they can perceive a text. In a similar view, teacher 3 takes into consideration using reading strategies but indirectly. She stated that working with reading strategies can be done explicitly by talking about how to grasp a text and
words in a text, where the words are new to the pupils. This means how to proceed to understand a word that you do not already know. On the other hand, teacher 2 works mostly with reading strategies in order to promote her pupils’ reading comprehension. However, the ones that come into play depend on the pupils’ language level. Relative beginners can start with a strategy of translating new words using dictionaries. Other strategies can be based on predicting what is going to happen next, or what previous knowledge pupils have, or reading between the lines. Different levels of texts are prepared according to the pupils’ level. Teacher 2 believes that it is very important to teach pupils many strategies and that strategies help pupils develop their reading comprehension. Therefore, she sometimes shows pupils films about different strategies on “studi.se”.

According to teacher 1, looking up words can be beneficial, but this strategy mostly works well with beginners or learners who are struggling. However, more proficient learners find it boring and may lose the desire to read. Hence, she prefers that pupils understand the context through the overview when they read, “for example, headings, that they understand the type of text and what it is about, or that they read questions before they start reading the text”. She points to the risk of pupils overusing dictionaries so that it takes too long to complete tasks. With a similar point of view, teacher 5 identifies that one of the valuable strategies that she uses is asking pupils to read headlines and look at the pictures. She also challenges her pupils to use different languages which they master and make a connection between the languages to be able to understand the content.

Four of the teachers believe that reading aloud can be a good strategy to test pupils’ reading comprehension orally especially for those pupils who have difficulty to read. Teacher 5 says that reading aloud is one of strategies because sometimes it is difficult to know if the pupils read. Therefore, she usually asks them to read in pairs or to read aloud to her. This strategy can be useful in two ways. First, pupils who do not have the strength to read much can take turns reading. Pupils have the opportunity to discuss with each other to understand the content.

Besides, four of the teachers claim that the most important strategy is to ask questions, give the pupils a brief overview and some facts about a text before they read it in order to grasp what it is about. Teacher 5 provided an example of when her pupils read a story
about Indians: “I started with a little introduction talking about India. After that, we watched a movie and talked about the author who is himself an Indian to gain pre-understanding and to arouse pupils’ interest”. The teacher added that it is a good strategy for pupils to ask themselves questions during reading. Asking themselves questions also occurs when they answer the questions of the text through thinking where to find the answer, whether at the beginning or at the end. She also believes that pupils must dare to guess the answer. “If you are uncertain about the answer, you can know something from your own daily life, for example, why the girl was sad? Did you remember something that happened with you or with your friend? It is important to teach pupils to connect what sounds reasonable or natural, in order to understand different events or situations in a text”. Teacher 4 has the same point of view regarding the importance of making pupils ask questions about the text before, during and after reading.

According to three of the teachers, it is a good strategy to use digital educational materials. Teacher 1 explained that digital educational materials invite pupils to listen to a text while they read, they can choose the speed or click on words and have them translated. Another effective strategy according to teacher 5 is to read the downloaded books from different digital teaching materials. “Pupils can switch between reading and listening. I think it is one effective strategy for pupils to have books in front of them and listen at the same time”.

Furthermore, teacher 3 claimed that it does not matter how many strategies the pupils have – but the importance is that they actually have some kind of strategy that they can use, “for example, that the pupils can use words from the question to search in the text for an answer that is related to the question. Or that pupils have strategies for understanding words that are foreign to them by looking at the context, what is before and after the word, if the word is similar to a word in another language the pupil knows, etc. Discussing a text before pupils read it, to provide pre-understanding, is also an effective way to get pupils to read more of the forthcoming text first”. Similarly, teacher 1 thinks that it is important when teachers give pupils a reading comprehension task to teach pupils to be responsible and to find their own strategy to read and understand the text. If they need to look up any word they can do or if they want to read questions before reading the text or vice versa it is up to them. There are both disadvantages and advantages to this, but it is important that the pupils discover this for themselves since they should
learn to decide which method suits them the best. Furthermore, the teachers believe that it is very important to encourage pupils to take responsibility for their learning. If a pupil is stuck because he does not understand a text, the teacher can sit next to the pupil and start asking questions about the text to help the pupils find the answers. Teachers need to give the pupil time to develop. This approach gives the pupils encouragement and the feeling that they can develop their ability to understand texts.

Teachers 4 and 5 mentioned that an effective strategy to work with factual texts is to write down difficult words and make a concept list with all facts or technical words and explain what they mean to be able to understand the text. When it comes to fiction texts, teacher 5 has another strategy. She usually divides the book into several parts and gives pupils a reading log. “Pupils will read, for example, for a quarter of an hour, then they should answer some questions, for example, what is the beginning about? Which person do you know the most out of these three people and explain why?”. Teachers 4 and 5 believe that pupils need to pause reading and try to retell the passage in their own words or discuss it together with the teacher to make sure that they understand the theme of the text. Otherwise, they may read too much before they understand what the text is about.
6. Discussion

This chapter is divided into two parts, discussion of results and discussion of method.

6.1 Discussion of results

The aim of this study was to investigate what views some English teachers have of reading comprehension and what teaching practises they consider regarding their use of texts, including the selection or design of tasks, and their promotion of reading strategies. Accordingly, our research questions focused on English teachers’ views of reading comprehension, and on how the teachers choose texts and choose or design tasks to promote their pupils’ reading comprehension. Moreover, we were interested in exploring how the participating teachers encourage the pupils to use reading strategies. In discussing the results, we make connections to studies mentioned in the background.

The results showed that four of the teachers stated that reading comprehension requires that pupils need to understand the texts they encounter as well as to be able to answer the related questions, whether in writing or orally, to show that they understand what they read. This corresponds with the syllabus for English 7–9 which indicates that pupils need to comprehend and interpret the content in the various types of texts the pupils read. Moreover, it is clear in the knowledge-requirement section of the syllabus for English 7–9 that pupils in years 7–9, in order to achieve the lowest grade E, should be able to understand the main content and details in English spoken and in English basic texts in various genres (Skolverket, 2018). However, teacher 1 indicated that this depends on what the teacher requires whether she needs the pupils to show that they understand the whole text or the details. In other words, the comprehension must be related to the texts used and the reasons for reading them. However, over time, and as a basis for final reading, comprehension tasks must include both aspects. Teacher 1 and 3 added that reading between the lines is central in reading comprehension, thus the pupils need to show that they can read between the lines and draw conclusions of things that were not mentioned in the text, to express their understanding. This is in line with one of the core elements in reading comprehension defined by Gray (1960) who mentioned reading between the lines as a part of three crucial elements in reading comprehension. Hence,
reading between the lines is an important aspect for being able to interpret a text’s meaning. Accordingly, the pupils are not only required to read but also need to interpret and add a meaning to what they read (Bråten, 2008).

Furthermore, we noticed from our interviews that all teachers work with various types of texts (fiction, non-fiction, etc.) and they prefer to make a combination of using textbooks as well as other online materials. According to the teachers, reading different texts can foster the pupils’ reading comprehension because it gives them the opportunity to get a variety of vocabulary and knowledge. This is aligned with the syllabus for English 7–9 which recommends introducing various types of texts from several media in order to support pupils’ overall language development (Skolverket, 2018). This can also be connected with Lundahl (2022) who confirms that providing different types of texts from different sources, other than textbooks, is considered an essential part of the teachers’ work to facilitate developing pupils’ reading comprehension (Lundahl, 2021). At the same time, most of the results revealed that promoting pupils’ reading comprehension begins when teachers choose texts and tasks based on their pupils’ interest and different levels. This can be linked to Reichenberg’s (2014) research that emphasises that texts need to stimulate the pupils’ attention and interest. Previous research also demonstrated that choosing appealing texts is one of the essential elements that teachers should consider in order to increase their pupils’ engagement and motivation for reading (Skolforskningsinstitutet, 2021). Besides, Felski (2008) claims that readers can relate to texts they already know about and are interested in, so they have a good understanding of the texts. This corresponds with the results we got from the interviews that reading texts, pupils are interested in, stimulates their prior knowledge and thus makes them relate their experience to the texts they read. A similar approach is suggested by Skolverket (2016), that it is preferable to present attractive and challenging texts to the pupils. The viewpoints of teachers, that took into consideration the different levels of pupils in choosing the texts and in choosing/designing their own tasks, are also closely related to Skolverket’s advice that teachers need to tailor their instruction according to their pupils’ levels (Skolverket, 2011). Moreover, this is consistent with Vygotsky’s proximal development zone and scaffolding theories which signify that pupils have the possibility to progress to a greater degree of development based on their current level in a particular area. Therefore, teachers’ instruction must be organised based on each pupil's
developmental stage (Säljö, 2014). When it comes to choosing literature books, our results showed two different points of view. Some of the teachers said that they usually let their pupils choose books by themselves with the help of the librarian. However, teacher 4 stated that she sometimes guides her pupils and chooses books for them because she is already aware of their level and which books that can suit and motivate them. This is in line with Lundahl (2022) who argues that when the teachers choose texts they should take into consideration reader-related factors which depend, for example, on pupils’ competence and their language proficiency in order to motivate them and achieve the goal of reading.

From some teachers’ points of view, we got the result that varying working methods in classrooms can help pupils to develop their reading comprehension. According to teachers, it is beneficial to give the pupils the possibility to read and discuss the texts in pairs, or in groups and even with their teachers. The teachers’ statements correlate with the previous research that confirmed that such varied methods, which allows the pupils to interact with each other or with the teacher and to have such social activities together, support pupils’ comprehension of the texts (Eckerholm, 2018). Discussing, asking questions and coming out with suitable solutions and interpretations are considered a key role in reading comprehension development (Reichenberg, 2014). Another finding revealed that teachers 1 and 4 incite their pupils to discuss the novels they read with each other in groups. They considered that such conversations enhance their pupils’ reading comprehension since they give them the chance to ask questions to each other and share their ideas. Naturally, this is associated with some researchers who argue that through structured text conversation, pupils can develop their reading comprehension since they can converse and solve comprehension problems together (Molloy, 2008; Reichenberg & Lundberg, 2011; Reichenberg, 2014). Besides, Reichenberg (2014) claims that such conversations, with teachers’ guidance during and after reading, enhance pupils’ reading comprehension.

Our findings also revealed that all teachers are keen to offer pupils a variation of questions that could give opportunities to cover different levels of understanding; on the lines, between the lines and beyond the lines, that allow pupils to draw conclusions and make predictions for what will happen next. Most of the research, mentioned in the literature review, emphasized the fact that good questions and tasks are those which cover all
essential levels of comprehension (Bråten, 2008; Lundahl, 2022), and fulfil different dimensions of basic literal comprehension as well as critical comprehension (Lundahl, 2022). Such tasks and questions focus on pupils’ understanding, interpretation for the meaning in the text as well as reflecting and connecting to their experiences and opinions (Bråten, 2008; Gray, 1960; Lundahl, 2022). At the same time, all teachers stated that they prefer to formulate varied questions that could match the different levels of their pupils starting from E questions to A questions. When they work with fiction, they usually formulate their own questions taking into consideration questions that could show that the pupils have understood the context, the details as well as interpreted what they had read. This correlates with the syllabus for English 7–9 which indicates that teachers need to adapt their teaching to the different levels of their pupils (Skolverket, 2011). To have different types of questions according to various levels of pupils can be considered a type of scaffolding for low-performing pupils which is a complementary part for the zone of proximal development (Säljö, 2014).

The result also showed that all teachers emphasised the importance of using reading strategies even though they differ in the way of using them. According to the teachers, pupils need to use different strategies to help them in understanding various types of texts and to express themselves to others. This corresponds with the English syllabus 7–9 and the comments to the syllabus 7–9 that refer to using strategies as a good instrument to solve different problems that readers face during reading. Pupils need to be equipped with a collection of strategies to show that they understand the meaning of the texts. (Skolverket, 2017; Skolverket, 2018).

Although some studies and previous research prove the importance of teaching strategies explicitly in the classroom, and the syllabus for English 7–9 states that reading strategy teaching is essential for English language development (Lundahl, 2022), we discovered that four of the teachers who participated in the interviews do not teach strategies in an explicit way. They only draw their pupils’ attention to using strategies when they observe that any of them faces difficulties in understanding or in answering the questions. Only teacher 2 stated that she teaches reading strategies explicitly and argued that it is important to remind the pupils of using different strategies for several purposes. It is essential that teachers teach reading strategies explicitly and to teach their pupils when and how to use diverse types of strategies for different purposes intentionally and appropriately. This is significant for
enhancing pupils’ reading comprehension (Dymock & Nicholson, 2010; Jönsson, 2007; Skolforskningsinstitutet, 2021). Furthermore, Lundahl (2019) states that pupils should be aware of strategies that help them navigate texts and understand the meaning of the text. As for teacher 1, she thinks that pupils have already promoted their own strategies, therefore, they use them spontaneously, whereas teacher 2 refers to the importance of updating the pupils' knowledge of the new reading strategies in order to be a good reader. She clarified that pupils should use the strategies consciously in order to choose and adapt the appropriate strategy to different texts they read.

Other teachers in our study claimed that sometimes strategies are not important for pupils because they want them to be independent and to understand the text from the context by doing some guessing of the words’ meaning from the context and by finding clues in the text. This corresponds partly with Lundahl (2021) who says that this strategy could work most with high-competent readers, while it is ineffective with weak readers because they cannot predict the meaning of the text if there are many difficult words. Hence, there is a demand for using strategies that can support them in comprehending the meaning of the text. Anyway, most teachers believed that a very effective strategy is to overview the text in order to let pupils predict what the text is about. This can happen by looking at the pictures and trying to ask questions about the text before pupils start reading which enables them to get more understanding of the content of the texts. This aligns with Hajer (2020) who believes that this is a useful strategy that enriches pupils’ repertoire and enhances their reading comprehension. Such types of strategies are considered by Lundahl (2021) as a kind of scaffolding where teachers support their pupils in their learning and comprehension in order to be motivated to start reading and to have a previous idea about what they will read.

Moreover, one of the findings indicated that a good strategy that teachers can use to facilitate the understanding of long texts is to make pauses during reading, break the texts into small parts, and ask pupils to answer some questions about the part they read. The teacher’s objective is to make sure that the pupils comprehend what they have read before continuing reading. On one hand, Westlund (2015) claims that teachers should ask their pupils questions that challenge them to understand and think. This may give teachers the opportunity to check what answers that pupils already know. On the other hand, Bråten (2008) affirms that improving reading comprehension is linked to asking effective
questions when confronted with new texts in order to make inferences and drive responses, as well as to asking control questions by teachers to check the pupils’ understanding of the texts. In addition, other good strategies that pupils should use before, during and after reading according to some teachers is to ask questions about the text and make a summary. This aligns with Lundahl (2022) affirming that reading strategies are considered important elements for promoting pupils’ good reading comprehension. Such strategies can be summarizing texts as well as asking questions about the texts.

One another important finding in this study is that four of the teachers emphasized that reading aloud is one of the significant strategies they use when they introduce new texts that are difficult to the pupils. Stensson (2006) believes that when the teachers read aloud they become models to their pupils and help them to create meaning of the text. This is also connected with Gibbons (2002) who claims that reading aloud is considered as scaffolding because the teacher helps the pupils to understand what the text is about before they work independently (Lundahl, 2022). Four of the teachers said that reading aloud enables them to introduce new vocabulary, phrases, idioms and ask questions about the text in order to stimulate a prior understanding for the meaning of the text and motivate the pupils to read it. This is associated with the findings of previous research that confirmed that recalling the pupils’ prior knowledge gives them the chance to talk about their own experience, to think deeply and to better understand the texts (Eckerholm, 2018). This is in agreement with Pinnell (2002) hypothesis that the language awareness, vocabulary, and prior comprehension are significant factors for enhancing reading comprehension.

Moreover, Skolverket (2018, 2017) declares using various aids such as dictionaries and digital tools is considered a type of strategy that supports pupils in increasing their reading comprehension ability. This was affirmed by some interviewed teachers who claimed that pupils’ translation of new words into other languages they master can help them better understand the text. However, teacher 1 had a different point of view since she noticed that translating words can sometimes be a bad strategy because there is a risk the pupils will lose much time on translating the words instead of focusing on reading. This coincides with Lundahl (2021) when he describes that the reader should distinguish between positive and negative strategies since the aim of reading strategies is to promote pupils’ reading comprehension. Besides, another type of negative strategies according to one of the
previous studies is memorization strategies because they do not stimulate the pupils’ comprehension of the text since the pupils repeat the same information (Skolforskningsinstitutet, 2021).

6.2 Discussion of method

We chose to do our research with the help of qualitative interviews. During the interviews, we followed our interview guide with open questions and follow-up questions adapted to the respondents’ answers. The questions were asked clearly, and the respondents were allowed to try to clarify their answers and also exemplify their views, so that we could minimize the risk of misunderstanding when interpreting the answers. This allows informants to shape the interview’s content while making the interviewers active in their listening and formulation of follow-up questions (Alvehus, 2019). The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes per respondent, which we felt was sufficient to be able to get clear and exhaustive answers. At the end of each interview, we checked if we had understood their answers correctly, but we also asked if there was anything they wanted to add about their way of working with reading comprehension. According to Alvehus (2019), the interview is considered a significant process that provides an access to the respondents’ experiences and perspectives. Since we were able to record the interviews, we were able to focus on the respondents’ responses and follow up on them. We were both present in all interviews and this helped us to make a full understanding of the conversation, and we were able to ask various follow-up questions. In this way, we received descriptions of their way of teaching based on their experiences. Although we wrote varied questions that were categorized into four themes, we faced difficulties in categorizing the respondents’ answers according to our questions because some of the questions were similar and some of the questions had been answered earlier. However, in the end, after listening to recordings several times, we were able to formulate the answers according to the aim and research questions of our study.

Furthermore, we think we would have acquired better results if we had been able to include observations in our study. Observations would have given us a better idea of the teachers’ actual teaching practices, including their ways of promoting reading comprehension. However, time did not make this possible. Moreover, if we had
interviewed some pupils in focus groups, we would have gained a different viewpoint on our subject (Kvale, 2007).
7. Conclusion and further research

This qualitative study provides an insight into some of the key factors that enhance pupils' reading comprehension and provides awareness of how teachers can teach so that pupils can achieve good reading comprehension. The study highlights the importance of a competent English teacher who can guide pupils to develop their reading ability, including developing their reading comprehension and meeting the knowledge requirements for years 7–9. We believe that reading comprehension instruction is significant since there are texts everywhere in our society. In order to give pupils better conditions to meet society's demands, it is vital that schools and teachers promote reading and understanding of texts, as well as allow pupils to use reading strategies deliberately and appropriately. All pupils should receive the same teaching conditions that create an understanding of different types of texts. We believe that this research has helped us understand how teachers work to develop pupils' reading comprehension, and therefore we will take into account the results of this study when we begin to teach English. In conclusion, although this study showed that teachers work hard to enhance their pupils’ reading comprehension skills, they still need more knowledge and awareness of new research and studies that indicate the importance of teaching reading strategies to develop pupils’ understanding of various texts. Considering that there are some pupils who do not have any awareness of strategies, of their importance and how to use them.

When we started writing this study, we thought of combining motivation with reading comprehension, but then we chose to focus and immerse ourselves only in reading comprehension because we were advised by our supervisor that it is better for us to focus on one topic since both of them are broad topics to discuss and that time would not allow us to include learners as well as teachers. Furthermore, since motivation is a changeable construct, it is complex to investigate. However, we still believe that motivation has a key role in promoting pupils’ reading comprehension, since pupils have a hard time reading or understanding texts unless they are motivated. Therefore, we suggest that further research could be to investigate how teachers motivate their pupils to read and what factors can positively or negatively affect pupils’ reading motivation. We think that our work also touches on this topic when teachers say that they usually choose texts based on the pupils’ interests.
References


Skolforskningsinstitutet. (2021). Published systematic review on Reading comprehension and reading strategy instruction.


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## Appendix

### Interview Guide / Intervjuguide

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions in English</th>
<th>Question in Swedish</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading Comprehension – Läsförståelse</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How would you describe “reading Comprehension”?</td>
<td>Hur skulle du vilja beskriva ”läsförståelse”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Could you please describe how you promote reading comprehension for your pupils?</td>
<td>Kan du beskriva hur arbetar du för att eleverna ska utveckla sin läsförståelse?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Can you give a concrete example of something that you do in your work on texts to promote reading comprehension in years 7–9?</td>
<td>Kan du ge ett konkret exempel på något som du gör i arbetet med texter för att främja läsförståelse i år 7–9?</td>
</tr>
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### Tasks – Uppgifter

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tasks – Uppgifter</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Do you mostly or often choose reading tasks from textbooks and other learner materials or do you design your own reading comprehension tasks?</td>
<td>Väljer du ofta läsuppgifter från läroböcker och andra läromedel eller utformar du dina egna läsförståelseuppgifter?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How would you describe a good reading comprehension task?</td>
<td>Hur skulle du beskriva en bra läsförståelseuppgift?</td>
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</table>

### Reading Strategies – Lässtrategier
1. **Do you work with different reading strategies in your teaching? How? Which ones? Why?**

   **Arbetar du med olika lässtrategier i din undervisning? Hur? Vilka? Varför?**

2. **What strategies / support structures (Scaffolding) do you think help pupils understand the content / meaning of texts?**

   **Vilka strategier/stödstrukturer anser du hjälper elever att förstå texters innehåll/innebörd?**

3. **How can reading comprehension teaching be adapted to the needs of individual pupils?**

   **Hur kan läsförståelseundervisning anpassas till enskilda elevers behov?**

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**Texts – Texter**

1. **Can you please describe how you work with reading comprehension when it comes to different types of texts such as non-fiction texts and fiction, etc.**

   **Kan du beskriva hur du arbetar med läsförståelse när det gäller olika typer av texter liksom faktatexter och skönlitteratur, mm.**

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**Questions at the beginning and at the end – Frågor i början och i slutet**

1. **How long have you been active as a teacher?**  
   2. **What subjects do you teach?**  
   3. **What education do you have?**  
   4. **Graduation year?**  
   5. **Finally, is there anything that you would like to add that you think is particularly important to emphasize about the teaching of reading comprehension in English?**

   **1. Hur länge har du varit verksam som lärare?**  
   2. **Vilka ämnen undervisar du i?**  
   3. **Vilken grundutbildning har du?**  
   4. **Examensår?**  
   5. **Avslutningsvis, finns det något som du skulle vilja tillägga eller tycker är särskilt viktigt att framhålla gällande läsförståelseundervisning i engelskämnet?**