

MASTER'S THESIS

Developing intercultural competence through fiction

Teachers' experiences with using fiction as a tool to promote intercultural competence in junior high school

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Abstract

In an increasingly globalized and diverse world, the need to be able to interact successfully with people who are different from ourselves is crucial. Developing students' intercultural competence is therefore considered very important in English language teaching. This thesis explores to what extent junior high school teachers use fiction to promote intercultural competence in the English foreign language classroom, and their experiences with doing so. What criteria they use as a basis for literary choices, what works of fiction they have used in teaching and what they tend to focus on in fictional works are of interest.

Moreover, this thesis discusses the practical experiences the teachers have gained with fiction as a tool to promote intercultural competence in relation to relevant theories and previous research on the field. This research is based on qualitative interviews of six EFL teachers, where they share thoughts, reflections and experiences from the classroom, based on the use of fiction to develop students' intercultural competence. The results reflect the six teachers' experiences and provide an insight into the practices. The relatively small size of participants limits the possibility of generalization.

The teachers have not based their fictional choices with the specific aim of promoting intercultural competence, although they believe fiction is a suitable tool for doing so. A rich variety of focus areas using fiction and criteria for choosing fiction were presented by the teachers. They also address disadvantages and issues based on their experience regarding the use of fiction in the EFL classroom in junior high school. The challenge of motivating the students due to the lack of desire to read and to some extent poor reading skills are influencing the results. Hence, a need to supplement the teaching with digital tools, such as movies and audio files are discussed. On the other hand, the teachers value fiction for all its benefits in language learning, and desire to include fiction more often in the English teaching.

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1. Introduction

This thesis addresses the importance of the English subject in Norwegian schools and the implications and advantages of the trend for intercultural competence among Norwegian pupils. More specifically, it discusses six junior high school teachers' experiences regarding the use of fiction to promote intercultural competence in the English foreign language (EFL) classroom.

1.1 Background

Throughout the last centuries, the English language has spread around the globe, and it has become a global language. The spread of English is a consequence of both the colonization that began in the 15th century and the globalization, where cultures, economies and societies meet and interact through advanced technology (Galloway & Rose, 2015, p. 10). Nowadays, English can be heard in a diversity of cultures, such as in popular culture, in politics, in business, and in the everyday speech of many, despite people's linguistic backgrounds (ibid, p. 11). Hoff (2020) emphasizes that the world is changing at a faster pace than ever before, which makes it possible and necessary for individuals to communicate and interact with each other across national borders, with different backgrounds, cultures and ways of living.

This leads to a need to teach English as a foreign language, and just as importantly, to teach intercultural competence in the EFL classroom. The diversity in the world and the Norwegian society is reflected in the classroom, and the school therefore has an increase in cultural and ethnic diversity. Thus increases the importance of teaching intercultural competence in the English subject. To be an open, interested, curious, and tolerant person are some of the key characteristics to be a good intercultural communicator, which each individual needs to practice and develop. The Norwegian Directorate of Education (2020) states that the English subject should help develop the students' intercultural understanding of different communication patterns, mindsets and lifestyles. The term *intercultural competence* cover some of the complexities of communications, other than the linguistics, which will be discussed in detail in the theory part of this thesis.

The English curriculum in LK20 emphasizes in *Relevance and Central Values* that it is an important subject for both communication and cultural understanding, as well as identity development. English should provide students with a basis for communicating across cultural

and linguistic backgrounds both locally and globally (Ministry of Education and Research, 2020). The focus on interculturality is evident in the English subject curriculum, the core curriculum, and the interdisciplinary topics. There is a general tendency towards learning through exploration in LK20. The following competence aim in English after tenth grade stresses the importance of intercultural competence: "explore and describe ways of living, ways of thinking, communication patterns and diversity in the English-speaking world". Dypedahl and Lund (2020) emphasizes exploration and reflection as an approach to be able to relate to people who have different ways of experiencing the world than oneself.

Corbett addresses the development in English second language (ESL) learning, and states that students must no longer only learn the language, they must learn ways of looking at others, as well as ways of understanding themselves (Corbett, 2003, p. 18). He emphasises that there is no universal way of achieving this (ibid, p. 34). Knowledge of oneself and others are important elements in Michael Byram's model for intercultural competence (Byram, 2021). A recognized method for teaching intercultural competence in the EFL classroom is through literature, both factual and fictional. Fiction have the possibility to bring culture into the classroom and give the students the experience of connection to unfamiliar situations (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 86). In this thesis I will focus on *if*, and *how* teachers use fictional literature in ESL to promote intercultural competence.

For generations, teachers have traditionally read stories and asked questions about what one can learn from texts about life, and about ourselves (Skarðhamar, 2011, p. 56). I am interested, however, in finding out whether teachers in junior high school are focusing on fiction for the specific purpose of teaching intercultural competence, what criteria they use for selecting specific works of fiction and what experiences they have gained about the use of fictional literature as a tool for promoting intercultural competence, e.g. knowledge of a culture, or exposure to varieties of English. The method used for this research is qualitative interviews of six teachers, conducted individually.

1.2 Main aim and research question

The purpose of the present study is to, through semi structured interviews of junior high school English teachers, obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 6). For this thesis, the "life world" would be the teachers' thoughts,

reflections and experiences of using fiction to develop the students' intercultural competence. Through the interview analysis I will attempt to understand their perspectives, and their pedagogical practice regarding fiction and intercultural competence. I will compare the answers to see whether the answers can give a common perception of the teachers' use of fiction to promote intercultural competence, or whether there is great variation between the answers and the practices of these six teachers.

In order to address the main aim, the following research questions are central. Through these questions, I will investigate to what extent the six teachers use fiction to promote intercultural competence, and their experiences with using fiction as a tool to develop their students' intercultural competence. The two research questions are:

- 1. To what extent do teachers in junior high school use fiction to promote intercultural competence?**
- 2. What experience have teachers in junior high school of teaching intercultural competence through fiction?**

1.3 Outline of thesis

This thesis is divided into five parts: theoretical framework, method and material, results and analysis, discussion, and lastly, the conclusion. First, a theoretical framework is established, presenting relevant parts of the curriculum, including the core curriculum, the interdisciplinary topics and the subject specific competence aims for the English subject. Byram's intercultural competence model is thoroughly described, and further placed in context of EFL teaching and learning. Finally, in this section, theories and methods of how to use fiction to promote intercultural competence is discussed. Following the theoretical framework, a comprehensive description of the research method used is presented. In this chapter, aspects of the qualitative method and the teacher interviews will be discussed in detail.

After the theoretical framework and method are accounted for, the interview results will be presented and analyzed, question by question. Following the results, the findings are discussed in relation to the theory presented prior in this thesis. Based on the findings of the research, the thesis is summarized in the last section, the conclusion. The main aim and

research questions are answered, based on the collected data from the interviews of six EFL teachers. Finally, comments of possible further research and limitation of the current one is made.

2. Theoretical framework

In the following section, I will present and discuss main theories related to this research project. The theory works as a tool in determining the course of the different part of this thesis. The aim is to investigate how six English teachers in junior high school experience the use of fiction in the classroom to promote the students' intercultural competence. First, I will present the relevant elements of the curriculum because there are guidelines teachers must adhere to in teaching. Following, a discussion of Michael Byram's intercultural competence model and different aspects of how to teach and how to understand the implication of the elements of the intercultural competence model. The section finishes with a discussion of how fiction can be used as a tool to promote intercultural competence and the disadvantages and issues which may occur in the classroom.

2.1 Intercultural competence in the curriculum

The curriculum is the foundation of the Norwegian education system. It functions as a contract between the school as an institution and the students. All teaching is based on the curriculum, and it guides and governs the school and the teachers on what the education in general and the English subject must contain. Therefore, the pedagogical practices presented by the teachers in the interviews will be seen in the lights of the curriculum. In the following section parts from both the core curriculum, the interdisciplinary topics and the subject-specific learning aims relevant for the teaching and learning of intercultural competence will be presented.

The core curriculum represents values and principles for the Norwegian education. Elements of intercultural competence are very much present in this part of the curriculum. *Human dignity* is the first value and considered a foundation of the Norwegian education. It is stated that "all people are equal regardless of what makes us different" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). The school must take diversity into account, and everyone must be allowed to think, believe and express themselves freely. This is a valuable trait in the curriculum considering interculturality, and development of intercultural competence. In the section of *identity and cultural diversity*, the diversity in our society is emphasized as a resource, and

that we should be able to live together with different attitudes, perspectives and ways of life. This is the main aim of developing intercultural competence (Byram, 2021, p. 4). It is also emphasized that language skills give students the opportunity to communicate and create relationships with others, and that language promotes cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is an integral part of developing intercultural competence (ibid). It is also stated in this section that knowledge of language and culture is becoming increasingly important.

The section on *critical thinking and ethical awareness* establishes the importance of understanding one's own experiences and convictions, but also to be aware of the possibility that they can be incomplete or erroneous. To develop an attitude where one is aware that one's perception of the world does not necessarily correspond to other people's perception is important to be able to interact interculturally. Critical thinking requires scrutinizing and criticizing established ideas using theories, arguments, evidence and experience. Ethical awareness includes balancing different considerations, which is necessary to be reflective and responsible.

The joy of creating, engagement, and the urge to explore encourage young people to be curious, ask questions and experiment. To be open and curious is main elements of Byram's (2021) model of intercultural competence. The school should nurture the differences of each individual in the process of creating and exploring. *Respect for nature and environmental awareness* emphasizes the importance of protecting our world. This is a very important topic, even if it is not relevant in this thesis. *Democracy and Participation* as the sixth core value of Norwegian education, clearly states that the school has the responsibility to promote values and attitudes to counteract discrimination and prejudice and to nurture diversity. Democratic values must be promoted and create space for cooperation and dialogue. The entirety of the core curriculum promotes a number of values, as presented above, that are important in the development of intercultural competence.

The interdisciplinary topics shall be present in all subjects and provide the students with knowledge of societal challenges and dilemmas, and knowledge of where and how the solutions can be found. The topics should help the students to connect the different subjects. They include *health and life skills, democracy and citizenship* and *sustainable development*. The first two emphasize the importance of respect for others, the right to disagree, the importance of solving conflicts peacefully and dealing with thoughts, feelings and

relationships in a healthy way. Interpretation, reflection and analysis are considered important activities across all the different subject curricula, and important elements in the development of intercultural competence. The last interdisciplinary topic, sustainable development, is considered important, but is not relevant in this thesis.

The core curriculum applies and incorporates all interdisciplinary topics as well as separate subjects. These values should be a focus for principals, teachers, assistants, etc. regardless of what role they have, and what subjects they teach. Later in this section, I will go into more detail on intercultural competence and how it can be linked to these values that are the basis for teachers' pedagogical practice. First, we will take a closer look at the subject-specific goals for English, as this thesis addresses the experience and practice of English teachers.

The English subject learning aims (after 10th grade), as specified in LK20, include language learning, communication, oral skills, writing, reading, literature and culture. The competence aims that include reading, literature and culture are central to the present thesis. After 10th grade, students should be able to “read, discuss and present content from various types of texts, including self-chosen texts” and “read, interpret and reflect on English-language fiction, including young people’s literature” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). The competence aims do not specify any specific works of literature for use in the English classroom, but it is stated that there must be a variety of English texts and fiction for young people. The students should be able to interpret, reflect and discuss the texts. This precision will be important in the later discussion of teachers' criteria for choosing literature.

The competence aims regarding culture specify that the students should be able to “describe and reflect on the role played by the English language in Norway and the rest of the world”, “explore and reflect on the situation of indigenous people in the English-speaking world and in Norway”, “explore and describe ways of living, ways of thinking, communication patterns and diversity in the English-speaking world” and “explore and present the content of cultural forms of expression from various media in the English-speaking world that are related to one’s own interests”. Ways of living, ways of thinking, communication patterns and diversity are important elements to have knowledge of, in order to interact interculturally. It is emphasized that it applies in the English-speaking world, which is open to interpretation. Large parts of the world have other languages than English as their first language, and English as their second or foreign language. To what extent these aims facilitate the focus on

intercultural competence in an adequate and effective way for both teachers and students, will be further investigated in the discussion of Banks' four levels of integration of multicultural content.

The curriculum contains many elements aimed at intercultural competence, particularly in the core curriculum. Elements of intercultural competence are also included in the interdisciplinary topics and in the English subject curriculum. This shows that the Ministry of Education and Research considers intercultural competence to be important in a diverse Norway and the globalized world. As a steering document, the teachers' practice must be in line with the presented values of the curriculum, as well as the other areas that are not mentioned in this thesis.

2.2 Intercultural competence

Due to the focus of the present study, which is, to what extent and how EFL teachers use fiction to promote intercultural competence, the following section briefly addresses the development and importance of culture as part of language learning. Byram's intercultural competence model, and theories about how intercultural competence is taught and learnt will be discussed in detail.

The tradition of teaching culture in foreign language education can be traced back to the teaching of the classical languages Latin and Greek. The purpose of including this in foreign language teaching has developed from being an entrance to the educated elite, to focusing on cultures with a target culture approach. The cultural diversity within a nation and cultural issues has been given less attention. It was not until the 1980's, when the communicative approach developed, that the aim of foreign language teaching included development of the students' ability to use the language in culturally appropriate ways. (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 13). This entails being aware of your own culture, as well as reflecting on whether you expect others to act in line with your perceptions of, for example, how the world should be and how people should act in specific situations. Differences in the understanding of, for example, the way humor is used, how to save face to avoid undue embarrassment and the perception of time can cause misunderstandings and unsuccessful intercultural encounters.

Knowledge of different cultures is considered a skill in language learning, as seen in the competence aims in LK20, which is why defining the term *culture* is important for this thesis.

Culture, according to Driscoll and Simpson (2015), are seen as all-encompassing and complex concept including art, everyday behaviors, rituals and routines, deeds, beliefs, ways of life, and the perception of heritage and the vision of future. To understand ourselves, others, and the communities in which we live it is necessary to develop awareness of the forces of culture (Driscoll & Simpson, 2015, p. 169). Traditionally, *cultural competence* has been defined as knowledge about a target culture's "life and institutions" (Corbett, 2003, p. 31).

The term *intercultural* first appeared in the 1950's as a response to the increasing globalization, as well as a variety of related terms, e.g. multicultural and cross-cultural (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 19). In a diverse society, the ability to tolerate each other and communicate successfully, despite differences in world views, beliefs, political engagement, family backgrounds etc., can be defined as intercultural competence (Byram, 2021). The Common European Framework, which is an international standard for describing language ability, emphasizes the importance of intercultural knowledge and skills to achieve effective communication (Council of Europe, 2001). English is therefore considered, by both the Ministry of Education and Research and The Common European Framework as an important subject to develop students' communication skills and cultural awareness.

2.2.1 Byram's model of intercultural competence

Michael Byram, an influential voice in foreign language didactics (Fenner & Skulstad, 2020, p.73) is known for his Intercultural Communicative Competence model. A summary of his model includes *attitudes* (positive, tolerant, open and curious), *knowledge* (of self and others, and of processes of interaction), *education* (political, critical cultural awareness) and *skills* (relating, interpreting, interaction and discovery). His model includes both spoken and non-verbal language. From a foreign language teaching perspective with intercultural competence as a learning aim, both the verbal and non-verbal competence will be important elements in the learning process. Gestures, posture, facial expressions, proxemics (personal intimate distance) and visual appearance are dimensions of non-verbal communication (Byram, 2021, p. 19). His intercultural competence model will be the basis for discussion about how intercultural competence can be included in English teaching, with fiction as a tool to promote development of the different elements.

As previously discussed, the core curriculum, the interdisciplinary topics and the English subject curriculum contains aims related to intercultural competence. The development of

intercultural competence can therefore be seen as highly relevant as part of the English subject in junior high school and the education in general. The teachers are thus responsible for developing the students' intercultural competence with an aim for successful interaction and communication with people who are different in ways of life and ways of thinking, and any other form of cultural diversity.

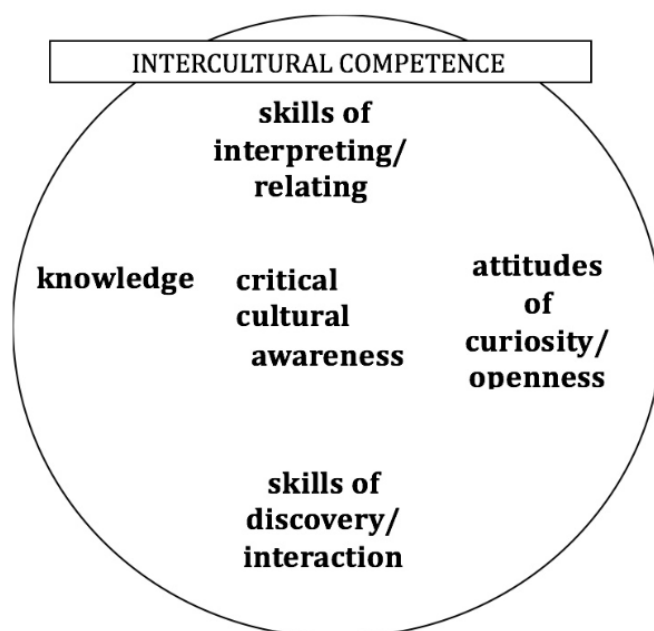


Figure 1 - Byram's Intercultural Competence Model (Byram, 2021, p. 62).

Curiosity and openness and the ability to 'decenter' from one's own values, behaviors and beliefs are attitudes required to achieve successful intercultural interaction. To be open and curious, one must acquire knowledge about what stereotypes and prejudices are, and how these are formed because of complex social forces. The ability to identify one's own prejudices and stereotypes is also an important skill (Byram, 2021, p. 45-46), which one can learn by understanding oneself and others. These elements of intercultural competence is closely linked to the content of the core curriculum.

Byram (2021) has divided the knowledge required to develop and achieve intercultural competence into the following two categories:

1. Knowledge about one's own culture and similar knowledge about the interlocutor's culture.
2. Knowledge of the process of interaction at both an individual and at a societal level.

These two categories are presented in relation to how the students can acquire intercultural competence through fiction. The first category includes knowledge which both consciously

and unconsciously are a natural part of socialization. Growing up, with family, in kindergarten/school and by taking part in other social activities, we develop an understanding of interaction precisely in these social groups. Group affiliation in various forms, such as nationality, ethnicity, social class, as well as the individual identity carries values and ways of being that one naturally feels as part of one's own culture (Byram, 2021, p. 46).. This can be portrayed through characters in fiction, and the reader can acquire an understanding of how people are affected by the culture we grow up in. In addition, through education, knowledge about other cultures, often in the form of a national culture, is acquired (ibid, p. 46).

Representation of a national culture can be portrayed through the characters' ways of living, actions, thoughts and feelings in a work of fiction. With a discussion about this in the classroom, students can see how the socialization process helps to shape who we are and how we act. This in turn, can lead the students to understand that different people with different backgrounds also act differently.

English textbooks in primary schools in Norway, focuses on national cultures in the English-speaking countries Australia, Great Britain, and the USA. Dypedahl and Lund argues that textbooks often limit perspectives to those countries, and including, for example, capitals, attractions and national costumes, which often represents the surface of a culture (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 70). It can be discussed how representative the descriptions of a national culture really are in today's intercultural society, as well as whether it can create the perception of a stereotypical e.g., American or British. Stereotypes and prejudices might affect the relationship and interaction with interlocutors from a culture different from one's own. This leads on to the second category, knowledge of interaction, which will be important in the result section of the teachers' definitions on intercultural competence. Everyday interactions, such as turn-taking, how to greet, language use based on who you are talking to, etc., can and will vary from culture to culture, also within the same country. Students should be made aware of the nuances of culture within a country, and not just the "national culture" that is often portrayed in English textbooks. This knowledge is linked with skills of interpreting and relating, and it is important to learn and experience how to act in specific circumstances (Byram, 2021, p. 48), in order to interact successfully with people from other cultures.

Skills of interpreting and relating is the ability to identify ethnocentric perspectives (e.g. in a document or event) and identify areas of misunderstanding. This is stated as an important

value in the core curriculum - *critical thinking and ethical awareness*, as discussed in the curriculum section. Interpreting and relating also involves mediating between different interpretations and explain differences in understanding due to different cultural systems. The ability to, under real time communication, acquire and use knowledge of cultural practices are what Byram calls skills of discovery and interaction. To use the different elements of his model to appropriately interact with someone who differs from yourself is a skill of an intercultural person (Byram, 2021, p. 65). The skills and knowledge required consist not only of recognizing elements of other cultures, but also in being able to use that knowledge in intercultural situations.

The characteristics of Byram's model can be acquired through personal development, such as experience and reflection. Reflection, along with interpretation and analysis, is established as an important activity in the curriculum, and a necessity for developing intercultural competence. According to the Ministry of Education and Research, "Competence is the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills to master challenges and solve tasks in familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations. Competence includes understanding and the ability to reflect and think critically." (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019, p.13).

It should also be mentioned that Byram emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between intercultural competence in a situation where everyone involved is native speakers of the same language, and situations where one or more of the communicators involves a foreign language. Either way, an intercultural encounter requires, as his model points out, skills, knowledge, education and attitudes (Byram, 2021, p. 5). In this thesis, the theoretical focus will be on situations where the learners speak English as a foreign language. The majority of students in Norwegian junior high schools do not have English as their first language; in this thesis, it is thus important to focus on intercultural competence in relation to foreign language acquisition. Although intercultural competence will be a useful tool in other areas of life as well, in the globalized and diverse world of the 21st century.

The diversity in Norwegian society in general is also reflected in the classroom. As a teacher, you must therefore be prepared, as well as prepare students for these situations that may cause tension based on differences. Knowledge of the concept and how to develop intercultural competence are therefore important for teachers, students and for further discussions in this thesis. All forms of communication are based on assumptions of how people see themselves

and others (Parmenter, 2003, p. 124). With knowledge of oneself and one's own culture, as well as knowledge of cultures that are different from one's own, it can be easier to accept the differences and meet other people with an open mind. This, in turn, will lead to interaction with other people in ordinary, as well as in extraordinary, situations and will be perceived as natural and less problematic for those involved. To understand that one's own familiar ways of life is not necessarily familiar to people who are part of another culture, is a part of becoming more interculturally competent (Tarasheva & Davcheva, 2001, p. 47). With knowledge of what intercultural competence entails, it will be possible for teachers to focus on the various elements of Byram's model in teaching. The elements (attitudes, knowledge, education and skills) of Byram's model will be central in the following discussions.

2.2.2 A recognized gap between intercultural competence theory and practice

Although there are several theories related to intercultural competence and elements are included in the curriculum, it is not entirely problem-free to sit in a classroom and learn about cultures from other parts of the world. Early conceptions of intercultural competence have in recent years been criticized for a simplified and naïve view in today's dynamic and complex world (Fenner & Skulstad, 2020, p. 75). Catherine Matosu has practical experience from foreign language teaching, and she emphasizes a gap between theory and practice. The responsibility for integrating the elements of interculturality in the different approaches in the EFL classroom, e.g., what literature to use, how literature is presented, how the literature understands other cultures and what activities promote intercultural competence, lies with the teachers (Matosu, 2012). Byram, Nichols and Stevens also address the issue of teaching the cultural dimension in a foreign language classroom. The task is not to bring a foreign culture into the classroom for the learners to experience, but rather to facilitate interaction with a society or culture, for the purpose to encourage the learners to develop understanding of themselves and others (Byram, Nichols, & Stevens, 2001, p. 3). The presented gap between theory and practice was borne out in my interviews, and it will be discussed further in relation to the teacher interviews in the discussion part of this thesis.

As the curriculum is what governs the school, it is also necessary investigate how intercultural competence is represented within the steering document. Previously in this thesis, elements of intercultural competence in different parts of the curriculum were highlighted. Nevertheless, curricular issues in LK20, among the issues is that intercultural competence is not as present as they would have hoped for, have been addressed by Fenner and Skulstad (Fenner &

Skulstad, 2020, p. 249). Aspects of interculturality are present in the Core Curriculum and the Interdisciplinary Topics, as previously discussed. Through the discussion of intercultural competence previously, the complexity of the concept has been exposed, and the challenges of including it in both the curriculum and the teaching are present. The responsibility for choosing the method, procedure and planning of the teaching is placed on the teachers.

Banks (2003) states that a curriculum with a mainstream-centric focus ignores cultures, history and experiences of the diversity within a country. His research is based on the American society and curricula, but it has transfer value to the Norwegian curriculum and school system. He believes that such a curriculum (mainstream-centric) helps reinforce racism and ethnocentrism in society as well as in school. According to Banks, the curriculum should present cultural aspects from several different perspectives in order to give the students the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge about their own culture as well as others. He addresses an issue with the integration of multicultural content in the English subject. He therefore presents a model with four levels of integration of multicultural content (see figure 2), which can provide knowledge on how to include this in the curriculum, as well as how to use the different levels of intercultural competence to develop the multiculturalism in the EFL classroom:

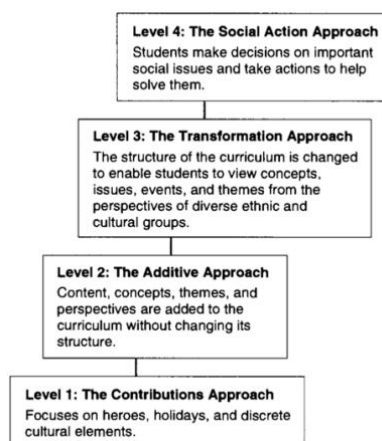


Figure 2 - Banks' Four Levels of Integration of Multicultural Content

A brief summary of Banks' four levels of integration of multicultural content:

Level 1; The Contributions Approach includes basic knowledge about the society, such as heroes, holidays, food and art. Little or no attention is given to the meaning and importance of the cultural elements. Important historical people who challenged values, ideologies etc. are seldomly included.

Level 2; The Additive Approach includes content, concepts, themes and perspectives but there are presented from the view of the mainstream writers, historians, artists etc. For this approach to be effective, the teachers are required to give the students background for the content as well as attitudinal maturity to understand the complexities of a diverse society. This means, that the teachers also need to have a deeper knowledge about the cultural history and development they are teaching.

Level 3; The Transformation Approach differs from level 1 and 2. The goal for this approach is to enable the students to view cultural issues and concepts from more than one perspective, (as he addresses as a problem leading to this model), desirable from the active cultural groups in the specific issue. If concepts, themes, issues and events are to be presented from diverse ethnic and cultural groups, it will extend the students' understanding of the complex society.

Level 4; The Social Action Approach include all the elements of level 3, but it also adds a component of decision-making and action. The goal is to educate the students to be able to identify and act upon social issues.

The four levels explain how different aspects of intercultural competence is integrated in EFL teaching, either in the curriculum or by EFL teachers in English lessons. The teachers' perception and knowledge of the concept of intercultural competence can determine to what degree intercultural competence that is taught. The most comprehensive integration of intercultural competence is the fourth level. In the result and analysis section, the teachers' definitions will be seen in context with these levels and the representation of intercultural competence in the curriculum.

2.2.3 Teaching Intercultural Competence

It is necessary to know what intercultural competence entails, to know how to teach it, and which methods enable students to develop this competence. Intercultural competence is evident in the curriculum. On the other hand, the curriculum does not suggest method suggestions for how it should be taught. Dypedahl suggests three aims of a culture-specific approach in EFL classroom (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 64).

First, he emphasizes the importance of exposing the students to *diversity*. This means to differ between an outsider's view (e.g. a tourist) on a culture, which often can be one-dimensional, and the viewpoint of an insider. The main goal should be for the students to be able to decenter and view a culture in the light of values, beliefs, norms, etc. of the insider. To be able

to accept and understand diversity, one must acquire *cultural empathy*. Cultural empathy requires knowledge of culture, and the ability “to put oneself in another social context”. (ibid, p. 64). Finally, he addresses the value of *in-depth studies* of a cultural group or community (e.g., indigenous people). Interpretation, reflection and analysis are contributing to in-depth learning, which is heavily stressed in the Core Curriculum (Fenner & Skulstad, p. 249). To engage with the people who live there, and how to function in the actual community would help develop intercultural competence (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 65). According to Dypedahl, these three focus areas should be important elements for developing students' intercultural competence. These three aims can be a tool for teachers to implement and include elements of intercultural competence in EFL teaching.

To facilitate interaction with a culture in the classroom could be done by asking the learner to recognize what may engage, frustrate, confuse or in other ways affect them emotionally in a work of fiction. This is acknowledged as a form of cultural contact (Bruns, 2011, p. 125).

Analyzing and reflecting upon culture has the potential to promote a sense of global identity and to create curiosity about the world (Driscoll & Simpson, 2015, p.170). How the teachers tend to address cultural aspects in the EFL classroom will be further discussed in the discussion section.

2.2.4 Learning intercultural competence

Students must be aware that their culture influences their interpretations of other people. We are not necessarily aware of the knowledge and skills we acquire through our upbringing, such as beliefs, values and norms and how to adapt our language and behavior to different situations. We may perceive our perspectives as the normal and natural, and to change those thoughts we need to know how to relate to people who have other ways of experiencing the world (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 15). Therefore, the students should be encouraged to explore and reflect on new contexts, as well as trying to relate new insights to familiar situations. And, to know that as they go into interpersonal situations with one perspective, the others do the same thing (ibid, 2020, p. 16).

According to The Council of Europe (2018, Volume 1), everyone is influenced by various dynamic cultures, such as family, work, social life, etc. Any interpersonal situation is therefore potentially intercultural (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 31). This leads to a wide understanding of the term intercultural competence, thus also a greater need for this to be

taught in the EFL classroom. The Ministry of Education and Research (2017) states in the Core Values of Norwegian Education the following:

In a time when the population is more diversified than ever before, and where the world is coming closer together, language skills and cultural understanding are growing in importance. School shall support the development of each person's identity, make the pupils confident in who they are, and also present common values that are needed to participate in this diverse society and to open doors to the world and the future.

It is undoubtedly a complex task to teach students at the junior high school to accept each other's differences, when the students' prerequisites are based on different values from home, different ethnic origins, different religions and worldviews, etc. It is also important to point out that a teacher's work is characterized by great variation and discretionary assessments which in few cases mean that a theory will be able to work in practice on all students. A "one size fits all" approach is rarely successful in a pedagogical practice, precisely because of the great individual differences we want to teach students to accept. Nevertheless, it is important to have a basic understanding of how to develop intercultural competence. In the result and analysis section, the teachers' perception of the concept and how to teach elements of intercultural competence will be investigated based on the interview findings.

The process of intercultural learning can be explained in four steps: (1) noticing, (2) comparing, (3) reflection and (4) interaction. First, the learner needs to notice and make sense of new information, and second, compare the information to what they already know. The first two steps, with guidance from the teacher, lay the foundation for reflection, which is seen as a core element of intercultural learning. Reflection leads to understanding, and if successful, understanding of other's perspectives (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 27). The approaches to teach intercultural competence used by the teachers will be discussed in relation to this process.

The desirable outcome is for language learners to be aware of and manage their own behavior, beliefs and values in order to interact successfully with others (Byram, 2021, p. 17). Based on the four steps to develop intercultural competence, one might say that the main key is to teach the students how to put different situations and encounters in perspective through reflection.

In context with Byram's intercultural competence model, these steps are one method to achieve open and tolerant attitudes, knowledge about oneself, others and interaction, critical cultural awareness and skills of interpreting, relating, discovery and interaction.

2.3 Fiction as a tool to promote intercultural competence

Reading is one of the five basic skills in the Norwegian Curriculum, and a widely used activity in English teaching. There are many benefits of reading literature, such as improved reading and writing proficiency and exposure to authentic language is proven to increase the learner's vocabulary (Brevik & Rindal, 2020, p. 166). Reading can also, according to Dypedahl and Lund, develop a "dynamic and multifaceted repertoire of knowledge" of both the language and the world (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 72). As previously established, knowledge of other cultures is required to achieve intercultural competence (Byram, 2021). Texts can promote different responses in the reader based on the content, for example, reflection related to identity, culture or existence, which can be used by the teachers to facilitate reflection (Birkeland & Mjør, 2012, p. 176).

2.3.1 Advantages of using fiction as a tool to promote intercultural competence

In relation to the three aims of Dypedahl's (2020) culture-specific approach in the EFL classroom the advantages of using fiction as a tool to promote intercultural competence will be presented. Byram's model of intercultural competence will also be discussed in relation to the advantages.

Diversity

Reading fiction can be a tool for students to develop their world knowledge, to help them connect to a "different world" and to better understand themselves and others as well as improving their language skills. (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 86). As previously discussed, Byram emphasizes the two categories of knowledge required to develop intercultural competence as (1) knowledge about one's own culture and similar knowledge about the interlocutor's culture and (2) knowledge of the process of interaction at both an individual and at a societal level. As the teacher focuses on diversity through fiction, students will be able to develop this knowledge.

The teaching of literature in a foreign language has the experience of otherness (the quality or fact of being different) at the center of its concern. The discussion above addresses the gap between intercultural competence theory and practice. The aim of this thesis is to investigate to what extent and how teachers use fiction to promote interculture, and previous research on this field show that fiction is an opportunity to include culture in the EFL classroom. Fiction provides an opportunity to promote students' intercultural competence (Byram, 2021, p. 5). Through literature in foreign language teaching, the learners are then required to engage with familiar and unfamiliar experiences in another language (ibid, p. 5). Fiction has the possibility to portray diversity to the reader and view a culture in the light of the insider's perspectives. "We can exercise the central intercultural competence of changing perspective." One way to do so, is by entering different storyworlds through literature. (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 71). Through reading fiction, the students can practice the ability to decenter from their own values, beliefs and norms and experience the world through a character which differs from themselves.

Cultural empathy

Culture is a comprehensive concept, which is often divided into *big C* culture and *small c* culture (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 16). The cultural iceberg is a widely used image to illustrate the difference between Culture and culture. The big C culture is the most visible parts of culture, such as food, holidays, art, literature and so forth. These elements are often a starting point when teaching and learning about a new culture. One might say that this part of the culture is more concrete, and that it is thus easier to both teach and learn. It is natural to focus on aspects of a culture that the country or people promotes as part of their cultural heritage. Culture is often underlying and "taken-for-granted" rules of social behavior (ibid, p. 17). Small c culture, on the other hand, is more invincible, such as patterns of communication, norms, beliefs and values. These elements of a culture are less tangible and more dynamic, and in many ways, elements of this are closely linked to development of intercultural competence.

Culture can be incorporated into the EFL classroom through interaction with others and through resources, such as fictional literature (Driscoll & Simpson, 2015, p. 170). Fiction is suitable for developing intercultural competence for students in all ages (Burwitz-Melzer, 2001). By portraying specific values, prejudices and stereotypes (small c culture), fictional texts can invite the reader to subjectively view a nation or an ethnic group. At the same time,

it also allows the reader to both change and exchange their views on life and the world together with the protagonist and/or narrative of the text (ibid, p. 29). A work of fiction represents “a cultural expression of a personal voice from a specific period of time” (Fenner & Skulstad, 2020, p. 245), which is important to address in the EFL classroom. Written texts are based on the author’s identity and culture, which both are dynamic and constantly developing elements, and only one representation of the culture.

Encounters with culture in literature are influencing the reader’s experiences of people who differ from themselves and patterns of relating to cultures different from their own. This was borne out in the interviews, as the teachers believe fiction can promote intercultural competence. Literary reading can affect other situations of cultural contact by blurring the lines between the text and the reality of the reader. Therefore, the text can leave an imprint on the reader that will affect their way of relating to others (Bruns, 2011, p. 35). This function of reading literature tends to be unconscious, therefore difficult to identify and describe. Nevertheless, Bruns states that as hidden parts of the reader’s self become available for change through reading, a more responsive behavior to a changing environment is likely (ibid, p. 33).

Through fiction, students can develop their language skills as well as wider educational goals, such as those presented in the core curriculum related to intercultural competence. Empathy can be understood as the ability to imagine what life is like for another person, even in unfamiliar situations, according to the World Health Organization. Empathy, a characteristic that is valued in the Core Curriculum, is also linked to a term Nussbaum (1997) uses; *narrative imagination*; she argues that through literature the reader can develop other people’s internal world, such as emotions and thoughts. The narrative imagination can lead to understanding of why people act as they do under the described circumstances. In a way, one could say that literature gives the reader an opportunity to live and experience others’ realities. As my results show, the teachers interviewed for this thesis also have this perception.

In-depth studies

Wolf uses the terms *uptake* and *engaging* about interaction between the reader and the text. Uptake concerns how the reader connects with the text and learns from it, which differs from who the reader is, how he/she thinks and communicates – the engaging (Wolf, 2004, p. 11). The extent to which students connect with the text has an impact on the motivation, and thus

also the ability to experience cultures that are presented in depth. As my results show, this is an issue related to teaching intercultural competence through fiction.

Literature provides ethical points of views and rules of moral and these can be experienced through reading. When the readers create a relation to characters of a fictional text, they have the opportunity to engage with the characters's culture, and how the characters function in the depicted community. Burwitz-Melzer states that fictional texts are suitable for learner's (of all ages) intercultural competence development. A fictional text does not only focus on characters and actions, it also gives a more or less subjective view of an ethnic group or nation by portraying culturally restricted points of views, values and prejudices (Burwitz-Melzer, 2001, p. 29). Encounters with text that represents a distant culture evoke a negotiation of otherness. It should be emphasized that this happens when the reader is trained to see it at such (Bruns, 2011, p. 123). EFL teachers therefore need to teach the students how to find cultural elements in fictional texts.

While reading or listening we can imagine and simulate the characters' actions and situations being described. Nikolajeva states that the social knowledge that might be acquired through fiction is more complex and challenging than factual knowledge, thus it requires attention, memory and imagination (Nikolajeva, 2014, p. 40). This is often a more difficult encounter in a second or foreign language. As difficulties with using fiction in the EFL classroom is addressed in the teacher interviews, Nikolajeva's research is relevant in the discussion section. If the language proficiency is not sufficient, our ability to generate mental images of what we read is weakened by the need to decode each word in the text (Tomlinson, 2011). The relevance and central values of the English curriculum determine the subject to consist of personal and identity development, communication and cultural understanding. Literary text can be used for developing these characteristics in-depth (Fenner & Skulstad, 2020, p. 250). By connecting this to the four-step process of how intercultural competence is developed, as presented above, in-depth encounters with culture can be facilitated.

2.3.2 Disadvantages with fiction as a tool to promote intercultural competence

Ortells' (2014) conducted research in Spain, where teachers responded to questions about their attitudes regarding the use of literature in the EFL classroom. Out of 20 teachers, 18 English teachers used literature occasionally in the EFL classroom and considered it as a complementary tool in English teaching. The remaining two rejected the inclusion of literature

based on the following arguments: (1) the students' English proficiency is not sufficient, (2) it is time consuming, and (3) the curriculum must be covered (Reyes-Torres, Villacañas-de-Castro, & Soler-Pardo, 2014, p. 99). These arguments for not including literature in the EFL classroom in Orellis' study will be further discussed in the result and discussion section of this thesis.

Teachers face the challenge of motivating the students to read and further experience the gains of reading (Fenner & Skulstad, 2020, p. 160). A large number of students find reading challenging, e.g., due to dyslexia (ibid, p. 159), and they may have experienced poor reading experiences because they have had difficulty concentrating or decoding the text into meaning (Birkeland & Mjør, 2012, p. 163). Attitudes, knowledge, education and skills of Byram's intercultural competence model can be acquired through experience provided from reading and reflecting. Students who struggle with reading are still capable of reflecting and discussing the themes, once they are familiar with the text and understand it (Fenner & Skulstad, 2020 p. 160). For many students, the school is the only area they come across literature (ibid, p. 249). The task of reading, interpreting, reflecting and discussing fiction can then be overwhelming and seem almost impossible. Teachers must thus know how to present literature, and how to motivate students to read and help them understand the content. It will be the mainstay for reflection and discussion to develop intercultural competence.

Knowledge of the content of the texts they are to read are important for motivating the students. The teacher therefore does an important job by activating the students' pre-understanding of the text (Birkeland & Mjør, 2012, p. 169). This correlates with Dypedahl and Lund's second step of developing intercultural competence, as presented in the sub-chapter above. One tool to activate their pre-understanding and make reading more enjoyable is to supplement with movies. Visual representation is worth a lot for students who struggle with reading comprehension because it will provide information on which the students can build their own internal images (Hibbing & Rankin- Erickson, 2003, p. 769). Digital equipment can *compensate* for a lack of reading skills and work as a connector to the written text. This is considered beneficial to all students, as it activates different senses and motivates to further reading (Fenner & Skulstad, 2020, p. 159). This will be discussed in depth in relation to the findings of the EFL interviews.

On the other hand, John McRae argues that reading is more individual than digital equipment frequently used by children and young adults, such as computers and TV, because it develops language and culture awareness, as well as empathy and imagination. Lundahl suggests using movies in relation to literature. There is not necessary to use whole movies but chosen parts can be used to highlight specific situations, characters or cultures (Lundahl, 2009, p. 380). McRae states: “There can be no more important part of education than developing in young children the enjoyment of reading.” (John McRae, in Reyes-Torres et al, 2014). The combination of written fiction and movies can therefore be motivational for developing reading engagement among the students, which is considered an important part of education itself, according to McRae.

2.3.3 Criteria for choosing fiction for the EFL classroom

Previous research (Skaug & Blikstad-Balas, 2019, Henriksson, 2016, Jipson & Paley 1991), shows that there is great variety in which literature teachers choose to use in the classroom, both in English and in the Norwegian subject. Krashen (1982) states that the only requirement to facilitate effective learning of the English language through literature is that it must be comprehensible and include a topic the students are genuinely interested in, something they would read in their first language. The two criteria presented by Krashen can be perceived as incomplete if one is to choose and read a book together in the classroom to develop students' intercultural competence. Alemi (2011) has complemented Krashen's criteria, and recommends a list of five criteria for EFL teachers to use for choosing literature:

1. Language proficiency: The choice should be based on the students' language proficiency, in order to motivate and engage to further reading.
2. Time availability: The time available should be considered before choosing a work of literature. What activities to include in English lessons, eventual homework and necessary background information needed prior to reading should be regarded.
3. Cultural competence: The texts should be within the cultural competence of the teachers and the students. They should also be able to compare to some degree to a familiar culture and include access to new cultural experiences.
4. Short story: Short stories appear feasible to read, understand and complete in English to the students. The aim with short stories is to motivate and encourage the use of prior knowledge.

5. Personal involvement: The choice of literature should stimulate personal engagement and interests. Relevance to the students' life situation and experience are a motivating factor for reading.

With an aim to investigate how teachers use fiction, their criterion for choosing fiction is highly relevant. The findings of this research will be seen in context of these theories in the discussion section.

Krashen and Alemi's criteria have in common that they include the need for the text to be comprehensible and personal. Alemi adds a cultural aspect, which is important if the teachers aim is to develop the students' intercultural competence. She has also included short stories, as a motivating factor. The lack of reading motivation among the students is a challenge which is stressed in the previous sub-chapter. The time the teachers have available must also be considered when choosing literature, she argues (Alemi, 2011, p. 178). As my results show, different criteria are used by the teachers to choose fictional literature to include in the English lessons. In the discussion section, this will be further elaborated.

3. Method and material

A research interview can be considered a production site for knowledge, which is actively created through the questions and answers from both the interviewer and the interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 63). Due to the complexity of the teaching profession, a qualitative approach provides the opportunity to explore and understand teachers' individual perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 4). Semi-structured interviews are particularly appropriate for the present investigation because this method allows for possible variations, experiences and attitudes among the teachers in terms of the various themes.

3.1 EFL-Teacher Interviews

The research carried out and described in the present thesis is based on questions, which define the framework of the research, and incorporate the main issues to be discussed. As Williams (2007) emphasizes, the researcher makes assumptions about the phenomenon/phenomena under investigation and carries out empirical research. For this thesis, a qualitative method consisting of interviews with EFL-teachers was selected with the aim of acquiring an in-depth insight into the teachers' pedagogical and didactic practices and their experiences of using fiction to promote intercultural competence.

Open-ended questions provide many opportunities for thoughts, reflections and experiences which can provide additional information over and above the set questions. With the aid of the interviews, the aim is to retrieve information from teachers' explicit descriptions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, p. 48). For this research, information about what fiction English teachers use in the classroom and what purpose they use it for, how they believe the students perceive the chosen fiction or to what extent they use fiction as a tool for developing intercultural competence will be interesting descriptions to answer the research questions. This is an important advantage of this method. Access to the teachers' reflections and choices made prior to, during and after English lessons where fiction has been part of the pedagogical plan is relevant to this research.

An important element to be aware of with qualitative interviews as a method is the possibility of ambiguity in the interviewees' answers or the researcher's interpretation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, p. 48). Through the interviews, teachers can discover situations or become more aware of what they have done without necessarily thinking about why they do it, and they also have to put into words things they do many times a day that almost happen automatically after many years of experience. As qualitative interviews are sensitive to nuances of meaning and interpretation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, s. 64), this method has been chosen for the present thesis, which aims to find, interpret, illuminate and analyze such nuances in relation to the research questions:

- 1. To what extent do teachers in junior high school use fiction to promote intercultural competence?**
- 2. What experience have teachers in junior high school of teaching intercultural competence through fiction?**

3.2 Interviewees

The research must be approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NCRD) before conducting the interviews. Audio recordings were made during the interviews. These were both registered and approved. In order to make the interviewees feel comfortable in answering the questions honestly, all interviewees remain anonymous in this thesis (Dalen, 2011, p. 101). The teachers' anonymity was specified in the application to NCRD and to the teachers to assure them that they cannot be identified. This is important for them to know because it can feel intrusive to be interviewed about personal experiences such as those discussed in the

present thesis. In this thesis, the teachers are being referred to as “Teacher A” up to “Teacher F”, in order to ensure anonymity.

To answer the research questions, I needed to interview English teachers. I contacted teachers at different junior high schools, who have been teaching English for at least two years. The search for informants was limited to two years of EFL teaching experience because the teachers should have sufficient teaching experience on different teaching programs, methods and projects in the EFL classroom. To only contact junior high school teachers was a choice based on the assumption that these levels focused on intercultural competence in the form and depth described in the theory section, due to the many learning aims that deal with culture in LK20.

The process of finding volunteers was challenging, as some teachers did not respond to my invitation to participate in this research, and others politely declined. This is highly understandable since schools and teachers have been affected by a lot of absenteeism and an even greater workload than usual due to the covid-19 pandemic. The number of teachers who participated is still an appropriate number, in terms of gaining an insight into how they work with fiction and intercultural competence, and in terms of the time restrictions of this thesis. Five or six teachers have been recommended as a sufficient number of interviewees for a student project, according to Smith and Osborn (2007).

The teaching experience of the six English teachers who volunteered covers a wide range of experience, from two to thirty years. They teach at four different schools, in different municipalities and different areas of Norway. Teacher A and B belong to one school, teacher C and D belong to another school, and teacher E and F each belong to two different schools. The reason for choosing English teachers from different schools is because teachers who collaborate often have similar experiences with projects and what literature they use due to the school's resources. Teachers from different schools will be able to give diverse perspectives to answer how they use and experience the use of fiction to promote students' intercultural competence.

3.3 Data Collection

The first step in the research process was to prepare an interview guide (Appendix 1). The interview questions were based on the general interview approach (Valenzuela & Shrivastava) where the intention is to ensure that the same areas of information are collected from *all* interviewees. It provides a focus to the interview, but at the same time allows adaptability and freedom to let the teachers explain themselves, and through their associations give sufficient information about the elements they consider important. I could not foresee what the teachers would consider important as I did not know the teachers well. Using semi-structured interviews thus made it possible to obtain a reasonable amount of information from the teachers. This structure of the interviews was chosen also because I wanted the teachers to be able to explain and reflect upon their experiences with using literature in the EFL classroom to promote intercultural competence.

Dalen emphasizes the importance of well-planned questions to make the interviews as rich in content as possible. The questions were prepared with the intention that the teachers should share experiences about the choice of literature in the classroom related to intercultural competence, personal experiences from EFL teaching, what literature they have had memorable experiences with and their perception of fiction as a tool to promote intercultural competence. It is important to ask questions in a way that makes the interviewees to want to open up and talk about their knowledge and personal experiences (Dalen, 2011, p. 27). This is also the reason why I conducted individual interviews, giving each participant the opportunity to reflect and respond on the basis of their personal knowledge and individual experiences.

The first four interviews were carried out within the two first weeks of January 2022. The last two interviews were conducted in March 2022, in order to provide a greater basis for answering the research questions and reach the recommended number of participants. All interviewees were informed about the research topic in advance via e-mail. The teachers did not know the questions in advance, meaning that they were not able to prepare their answers. This was done to prevent staged and refined answers. A well-known phenomenon during interviews is that participants adapt the answers to what they think the researcher wishes to hear, which it will not be possible for the interviewer to control (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 225). This may also have its drawbacks, as it did not give the teachers the opportunity to prepare and reflect before the interview.

The interviews were held in Norwegian because language should not hinder knowledge sharing or create any kind of misunderstandings. The interviews were based on nine questions from the interview guide (Appendix 1). Elton Mayo's interview method was followed (Mayo, 1933, p. 65). Follow-up questions were asked along the way to follow up on answers which could potentially lead to more concrete answers and to avoid misunderstandings. As stated previously, the aim of the interviews was to obtain a realistic picture of how the teachers use fiction in the EFL classroom to promote intercultural competence. The interviewees were asked to answer in as much detail as possible why they act as they do in their pedagogical practice, how they believe the pupils engage with fiction and what they learn from the current pedagogical and didactic choices the teacher makes.

The interviews, which lasted approximately 30 minutes were recorded. According to Postholm and Jacobsen, it is essential that the researcher makes immediate analyses during the interview (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 140). During the interviews, I also noted elements that could not be included in the audio recording, such as whether the interviewees used gestures in their explanations, and other body language that provided information about their attitudes or thoughts related to the statements.

Within a week after the interviews, the recordings were transcribed (in Norwegian) so that I had all the data in writing and could get a comprehensive overview of the answers. I decided to transcribe the interviews verbatim in order to ensure that the meaning of their statements became clear also in written format (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 208). This included pauses, laughter and sighs. As soon as the interviews were transcribed, they can be considered as empirical data in the research project (ibid, p. 204). The transcriptions gave the opportunity to create an overview of the similarities and differences in the teachers' answers.

3.4 Material and analysis

With a relatively comprehensive data material of a total 60 pages of transcriptions, a plan for how to structure and analyze the material was needed. Categorization, which is the most common form of data analysis according to Kvale and Brinkmann, was used as the analysis method. "The goal is to develop categories that fully capture the structured experiences and actions." (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 226). This method of analysis is appropriate to compare and search for similarities and differences in the teachers interview answers. First,

the answers were compared and analyzed question by question. This gave an overview of the different criteria, methods and experiences presented by the English teachers. The common features were again examined in the entirety of the interviews, interview by interview, to see if they had talked about the topics from the questions at an earlier or later time in the interviews, which could thus provide even more information for comparison. By systematically comparing and analyzing the responses to each question, some patterns emerged. These patterns will be further discussed later in this thesis. Regarding some of the questions, there were no obvious similarities or patterns. This is still relevant, to not exclude aspects of the phenomenon being investigated (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 272).

An interview discussed in relation to relevant theory might add new contexts regarding the interview themes and bring forth new dimensions of the phenomena being researched. In the current research, the experiences of English teachers regarding the use of fiction to promote intercultural competence is the phenomena being researched. It follows with this method that, as a researcher, one must reflect carefully on one's own interpretations of the answers (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 272). In order to avoid biased interpretations, one must therefore try to create a distance to one's own interpretations (ibid, p. 272). A descriptive analysis aims to make the collected data understandable by sorting the answers from the interviews, and it can be said that it creates the basis for the further analysis (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 139).

3.5 Reliability

The number of interviewees is not sufficient to generalize regarding all Norwegian schools and/or teachers, but the interviews nonetheless provide insight into how a group of teachers addresses the use of literature to promote intercultural competence in their pedagogical practice.

While the aim with a thesis of this kind is often to allow for replication, it is important to note that the subject as well the situation will never be completely identical. Qualitative studies, such as the one discussed here, are indeed generally rather difficult to replicate, according to Postholm and Jacobsen, because the meeting between researcher and participants is unique, precisely because people and situations are constantly evolving (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 225). Grønmo (2004) supports this view, as phenomena such as the one investigated in this thesis, are ever changing or too complex to determine the reliability with a replicated study.

Another notable aspect of qualitative interviews as a research method is a known phenomenon during interviews; the participants adapt the answers to what they think the researcher wishes to hear, which it will not be possible for the interviewer to control. The relationship between researcher and participant can also be affected by gender, age, voice, etc. In qualitative research, the data collection must therefore be described clearly, so that the reader can reflect on this (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 225).

3.6 Validity

Validity refers to how suitable the chosen research method is to answer the research question(s). Grønmo (2004) states that high validity of the research result in relevant data to the aim of the research objectives. Qualitative methods can be challenging to validate. Therefore, the overall impression of the research process is considered and the degree to which it is credible is assessed (ibid). As the findings of this qualitative research is based on a limited sample size, the transferability is limited. One may assume that similar finding is possible with the same conditions, which, on the other hand would be difficult to carry out, as each teacher has individual experiences based on who they are, where they teach and who they teach.

4. Results and Analysis

In the following chapter, the results from the quantitative teacher interviews are presented. The responses will be presented chronologically from the interview guide, from question 1 to question 9. The most prominent findings will be given the most attention. The teachers' answers will be discussed in relation to the presented theory related to teaching and learning intercultural competence, and how to do so through fiction.

Question 1 - *What do you think are the primary uses of fiction in the classroom?*

There are considerable variety in the answers received by the teachers of their thought about the primary uses of fiction in the English classroom. Seen in context of the benefits of reading this is understandable. Reading has numerous benefits and therefor it is also possible to use literature for many purposes. On the other hand, they also present issues experienced with using fiction in EFL learning, such as lack of reading interest among the students. Following, the different focus areas presented by the teachers in the interviews will be discussed.

| PRIMARY USES OF FICTION | A | B | C | D | E | F |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Create reading engagement | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Developing reading skills | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Curriculum | X | | | | | X |
| Linguistic elements | X | | X | X | X | X |
| Theme-based approach | | X | X | X | | |

Table 1 – Primary uses of fiction in the EFL classroom, presented by the teachers

Teacher A and F mention the ability to link the literature to the curriculum and the interdisciplinary topics as an important criterion for the choice of fiction to use in the EFL classroom. The competence aims related to reading fiction in the English subject (presented in the theory chapter) are open in the sense that they do not specify more than that the students are expected to be able to *read, discuss, present, interpret* and *reflect* on English-language fiction and various types of texts. Teachers in junior high school are therefore not bound by the curriculum to use fiction for specific purposes to teach e.g., grammar or vocabulary training. The curriculum gives teachers autonomy over which texts to use in EFL teaching and how the texts are to be used. This autonomy also leads to many ways and opportunities when using fiction in the classroom.

Five teachers mention fiction as a tool to teach linguistic elements. Teacher A have used *The Color Purple* written by Alice Walker, which is written in oral style. She used it to make the students aware of different ways of using language. Teacher C and E work on specific elements of the language. They used examples of contractions, adjectives, adverbs and concord. Teacher D and F utters that they have focused on expanding the students' vocabulary. They present a method they use, where they ask the students to choose a word they find difficult, funny, a word they like, a word they have never heard or read before, etc. Thereafter the class work with the different words chosen by the students with the aim to expand their vocabulary. Teacher C also mentioned that through literature written by English

speaking authors, the students are exposed to authentic English. As discussed in the theory, authentic language is proven to increase the reader's vocabulary (Brevik & Rindal, 2020).

Three teachers claim that they use a theme-based approach when including fiction in the EFL classroom. They focus on themes, actions, characters, the plot and the dramaturgy of the text. The teachers perceive literature as a conversation starter, focusing on different topics and themes. This fits in with the presented learning aims that deal with reading. Through a theme-based approach, the teachers facilitate discussions of the content from various text. Different activities, such as oral presentations and review of texts in plenary provide the opportunity to interpret and present their reflections about the texts. A work of fiction does not only focus on characters and actions, as Burwitz-Melzer (2001) points out. She argues that fiction also portrays a subjective view of culture, values and prejudices, as previously discussed. Encounters with a text who represents a foreign culture provides the reader with an opportunity to reflect and negotiate with otherness (Bruns, 2011, Skarðhamar, 2011). This is more challenging in a foreign language, Bruns argues.

This may affect the uptake and engaging between the reader and the text (Wolf, 2004). The teachers utter that the language is sometimes a barrier for the students, in order to identify cultural aspects in a fictional text and engage with the text. As teacher B stated: "It is difficult for many students to understand the themes and the big pictures." (My translation). The teachers who expressed that they focused on themes, characters, etc. explain that they must often help the students to understand the text. They have to explain that it is about more than the words that are written in black and white, that there is a meaning behind the words, thoughts and actions. This can be a barrier that prevents teachers from being able to focus on intercultural competence through fiction. Bruns (2011) argues that the ability to see e.g. a culture or otherness portrayed through a fictional characters happens only when the students are trained to see it. Three teachers also explicitly state that it is not *one* primary reason to read literature in English teaching, and they emphasize that literature has many uses. Teacher D states the following: "I do not think there is a primary reason to read, I think one should read for many different reasons." (My translation).

The various answers to this question are interesting in terms of this research, and a possible explanation for why there is a lot of variation in the answers to the remaining questions. All six teachers consider fiction to be a useful tool in English teaching. This tallies with Brevik

and Rindal's (2020) view on the benefits of reading, as discussed in the theory section. The teachers want to improve their students' reading skills and create a commitment to reading. The teachers are also aiming to create engagement and meaningful reading experiences for the students. McRae (2014) argues the development of young people's enjoyment of reading to be among the most important parts of education. The teachers states that they have a commitment to reading and to fiction, and that they want their enthusiasm to wash off on the students. Creating engagement for students' reading will be further discussed in the discussion chapter.

Question 2 - *Can you define intercultural competence?*

The answers to this question show that five out of six teachers *can* provide a definition of the term. The teachers who defined intercultural competence during the interviews included important elements of the term, such as knowledge about other cultures, which is previously discussed in the theory chapter as a requirement to develop and achieve intercultural competence. The five teachers who defined intercultural competence also mentioned the importance of the knowledge about the interlocutor's culture in interaction, which is Byram's (2021) second category of knowledge. Following, a visual presentation of which elements of intercultural competence the teachers mentioned in the interviews, when asked to define intercultural competence:

| ELEMENTS OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE | A | B | C | D | F |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowledge and understanding of one's own culture | X | X | X | X | X |
| Knowledge of the world | | X | | | X |
| Knowledge and understanding of other cultures | | | X | | |
| How to behave in an intercultural situation | X | | X | X | X |

Table 2 – Elements of intercultural competence addressed by the teachers

To sum up the above, the teachers' definition about the term includes competence and knowledge of their own and others' culture, lifestyles and traditions. Seen in the context of

Banks' Four Levels of Integration of Multicultural Content one might say that the teachers' definitions include a basic knowledge of the term (level 1 and 2). They did not mention the importance of including perspectives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups, which would categorize as level 3, 'The Transformation Approach' of Banks' model. Neither did any of the teachers mention attitudes of curiosity and openness, cultural awareness or skills of discovery and interaction, which is all elements included in Byram's intercultural competence model. The teachers' answers did not show a comprehensive understanding of the term. There may be several reasons for this, whether it is that they have not learned about the concept, or that, what they focus on in the school regarding intercultural competence is not as comprehensive as the model discussed. Their first associations to the term might be a simplified version, which they use in the EFL classroom. In fairness to the teachers, *one* interview may not have detected all their knowledge about intercultural competence.

Teacher E who was not familiar with the term was introduced to it during the interview, which was based primarily on Byram's (2021) intercultural competence model. Afterwards, teacher E stated:

"These are things that you more or less focus on when you have these types of topics [...] Like now, we have just had about The UK in English, for example, and then we talk about how they behave in England, right, so there is a big difference in how you address people, that they say "please" and "excuse me" a lot, they are, in a way, more polite there." (My translation).

This statement also applies the first two levels of Banks' levels, similar to the other teachers' answers. The further discussions are thus based on the same level of understanding among the teachers of the term intercultural competence.

Question 3 - Do you believe fiction promotes intercultural competence? If so, how do you think it does? If not, why?

All six teachers believe fiction could promote intercultural competence. There is complete agreement in the answers among all the teachers that through reading a fictional text, the students experience different and unfamiliar situations from the perspective of another person. Comparing the new information, perspectives and experiences to what is familiar to the individual student helps to promote students' intercultural competence. To conclude, the

teachers agree with Driscoll and Simpson (2015), who believes that literature is one way to incorporate culture in the language learning classroom.

“Yes, I would definitely say that hearing other people's stories, from other people's perspectives and life situations, definitely helps to shape your own understanding of other people. And it does not only have to be a different culture, but it also applies across age and gender and... everything! Anyone who is not exactly like you, then, or in exactly your situation. So yes, absolutely.” (Teacher E, my translation).

As already established, the use of fiction in a foreign language has otherness at the center of its concern (Byram, 2021, p. 5). Fiction can affect the way the reader relates to others (Bruns, 2011), who differs from themselves and appear unfamiliar, strange or different. One of the teachers also strongly believes that fiction can help the students to develop empathy, which is an important element of intercultural competence. As discussed in the theory section, Nassbaum (1997) links empathy to the term *narrative imagination*. Narrative imagination can lead to a broader understanding of other people's internal world, and why people act as they do under the given circumstances presented in the literature.

Teacher C, D, E and F also express a need to supplement fiction (in written form) with either a movie or an audiobook for the students to be able to recognize otherness to a greater extent. The visual or verbal impression can, according to the teachers, minimize the gaps in the learning process caused by weaker language proficiency in the second or foreign language and the lack of reading interest. Their experience is supported by Fenner and Skulstad (2020), Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson (2003) and Lundahl (2009), which consider digital supplements to benefit all students as it activates different senses and those who struggle with reading. Teacher A also mentions movies as a tool to promote intercultural competence, but states that: “Movies can promote intercultural competence, but I feel that books might do it on a slightly deeper level.” (Teacher A, My translation). According to Nikolajeva (2014), attention, imagination and memory is required to acquire knowledge through fiction.

Question 4 - *What criteria do you use for choosing fiction in the classroom, considering development of intercultural competence?*

The answers show that the teachers use different criteria to choose fiction for the EFL classroom. The teachers base their literary choices on different criteria and have different

ways of approaching this challenge. It varies between the teachers from two to four criteria of those presented in the table below:

| CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING FICTION | A | B | C | D | E | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| YA literature/Relatable to the students | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Relevant for the exams | X | | | | X | |
| Relatable to the curriculum | X | | | | X | X |
| Varying difficulty | X | X | | | | |
| Suitability for comparison | | | | X | | X |
| Visual or audiovisual supplement | | | | X | | X |

Table 3 – The teachers' criteria for choosing fiction in the EFL classroom

Common for all the teachers was the need for the chosen fictional work to be appropriate and relatable for young adults. They considered this an important element in creating engagement for reading among the students. This correlates with both Krashen (1982) and Alemi (2011), that a personal involvement is important. The teachers want the fiction to engage the students, so that they can relate to the themes and characters.

Relevance to the curriculum is mentioned by three teachers, and associated relevance to the exam by two of them. Variation in degree of language difficulty and the length of the text was another criterion mentioned by the teachers. Due to the experiences low reading interest, the teachers thought that there had to be manageable texts for the students, or that they could be adapted to the different levels of English language proficiency. This, as well as the criteria of relatability, is recommended criteria to use for choosing literature in the EFL classroom, both by Krashen and Alemi.

Suitability for comparative purposes (e.g., native people in America and the Sami people in Norway) is mentioned by two teachers, which is the second step of Dypedahl and Lund's (2020) intercultural learning process. Availability to audiobook or movie of the work of fiction is mentioned by two teachers as a criterion for choosing fiction. Four teachers expressed the need for digital supplements in relation to the previous question in order to promote intercultural competence to a greater extent.

The teachers also express that they have not explicitly focused on promoting intercultural competence when choosing literature for the EFL classroom. Challenges regarding the students' reading engagement, or the lack of it, are evident in all the teacher interviews. As discussed in the previous question, the need for supplementing the fictional literature with audio files or movies can be explained by the students' lack of reading interest. The interviews also gave an impression of the challenge some of the teachers experience when choosing literature. Four teachers use different online sources to help navigate in the large selection of fiction. Pages such as www.esl-bits.net and www.goodreads.com were mentioned. A concern about the lack of access to physical books is also mentioned by teacher D, E and F.

Question 5 - Which texts have you used in the EFL classroom, and how do you think the texts promoted intercultural competence? Did the pupils enjoy the texts, why or why not?

Teachers can select their own literature, based on personal criteria, but they must also see to it that the chosen literature complies with the specification outlined in the curriculum, i.e., English language fiction and young adult literature. They experience that the literature they choose engages the students, but that it is important that they themselves know the literature well enough to use examples and guide the students towards the relevant pedagogical aim. Previous research (Skaug & Blikstad-Balas, 2019, Henriksson, 2016, Jipson & Paley 1991) show that teachers tend to use a large variation in literary works, which corresponds to these results.

Through entering different story worlds, the students meet unfamiliar perspectives and situations and further discuss it in groups or in class, which according to Dypedahl and Lund (2020) promote the elements of Byram's intercultural competence model, including 'knowledge and attitudes' (open and tolerant). The teachers express that they use fiction for this purpose. To get the students to explore, reflect on and discuss the different topics and messages presented in the literature. These elements are stressed in the curriculum. Through different methods, such as a reading circle or a story line project, they facilitate situations where the students can reflect and discuss. Following, a list of the literary works mentioned by the teachers in the interviews are presented:

| TEACHER | WORKS OF LITERATURE |
|----------|--|
| A | <i>The Hate U Give</i> – Angie Thomas <i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> – Sherman Alexie <i>Rosa Parks</i> – Lisbeth Kaiser <i>Anne Frank</i> – Maria Isabel Sanchez Vegara <i>The Color Purple</i> – Alice Walker <i>(Un)arranged Marriage</i> – Bali Rai |
| B | <i>Funny In Farsi</i> – Firoozeh Dumas <i>Letters From the Inside</i> – John Mardsen |
| C | <i>Does My Head Look Big in This?</i> – Randa Abdel-Fattah <i>The Boy in The Striped Pajamas</i> – John Boyne <i>The Witches</i> – Roald Dahl <i>Divergent</i> – Veronica Roth |
| D | <i>Does My Head Look Big in This?</i> – Randa Abdel-Fattah Native American Legends (Not specified) <i>Romeo And Juliet</i> – William Shakespeare (Will Volley) <i>Lamb To the Slaughter</i> – Roald Dahl |
| E | <i>Wonder</i> – R. J. Palacio <i>Harry Potter</i> – J. K. Rowling <i>Ready Player One</i> – Ernest Cline |
| F | <i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> – Sherman Alexie <i>The Boy in The Striped Pajamas</i> – John Boyne <i>The Curious Incident of The Dog in The Nighttime</i> – Mark Haddon <i>The House on Mango Street</i> – Sandra Cisneros |

Table 4 – List of literary works presented by the teachers

As already established, the teachers utter that they have not focused specifically on promoting intercultural competence when choosing literature. During the interviews they conclude to have focused on intercultural elements when using fiction, such as native people, arranged marriage and racism. There are several works of fiction on the list presented above, such as *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, *(Un)arranged Marriage*, *Funny in Farsi*, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* and *The House on Mango Street* which portray cultures and cultural issues. Therefore, it can be claimed that they have not consciously found a work of

fiction, created lessons plans and carried them out with the specific aim of promoting intercultural competence. Nevertheless, they may have developed students' intercultural competence through the fiction used and content they have focused on. What they tend to focus on will be discussed further in the following question.

Question 6 - *What content of the texts do you tend to focus on, and why?*

As with the previous question, the answers vary regarding the chosen focus while using fiction in the EFL classroom. The recurring content the teachers state that they are focusing on are categorized into *characters*, *theme*, *environment* and *language*.

| FOCUS AREAS | A | B | C | D | E | F |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Theme/message | X | X | | X | X | |
| Language/grammar | X | | X | | X | X |
| Characters | | X | X | | | X |
| Environment | | | X | | | X |

Table 5 – The teachers' focus areas when using texts in the EFL classroom

By focusing on the characters, the reader can be influenced by the experiences of people who differ from themselves, as Bruns (2011) emphasizes. As discussed in the theory section, Bruns states that fiction can leave an imprint on the reader when relating to characters or cultures different from their own, which can further affect the readers way of relating to others. As discussed under question 4, the teachers often aim to find elements which the students find relevant and relatable in the search for fiction to use in the EFL classroom. If the main character in a work of fiction is the same age as the students, there will often be addressed recognizable issues and themes from a teenager's life. Nevertheless, the themes may have a new angle or other elements (e.g., cultural) that differs from the students' own experiences.

The second step of the process of intercultural learning by Dypedahl and Lund (2020) (described in the theory section) is, for example, to compare "Why does he/she act like that, and how would I act in a similar situation?". This would be an appropriate question to ask in order to identify the similarities and differences between a character and themselves. When these differences and/or similarities in the text have been pointed out there is a basis for

discussion and reflection when focusing on characters. To be able to change perspectives is a skill that can be practiced (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020). As an EFL teacher one can guide the students to see the perspectives, values etc. that are portrayed through a fictional character, which can help students to broaden their understanding of people who differ from themselves (Driscoll & Simpson, 2015).

As previously discussed, Burwitz-Melzer (2001) points out that fiction also presents a particular perspective on the ethnic groups, nations or cultures that is portrayed in the text through the subjective view of the protagonist and/or characters. A theme and/or environment focus on fictional literature creates an opportunity to integrate intercultural learning into the EFL classroom (Driscoll & Simpson, 2015). Novels mentioned by the teachers, such as *The Absolutely True Diary of A Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas and *Does My Head Look Big In This?* by Randa Abdel-Fattah would be suitable for such a focus. These novels include issues with conflicting cultures and how the main character encounter these issues.

Although none of the teacher specifically mention culture as a focus area, the focus areas presented by the teachers are, according to previous research, suitable for developing intercultural competence. Focusing on themes and characters is a gateway to reflection on differences and similarities between cultures the students know and new cultures they are introduced to through fiction. Nevertheless, the teacher interviews give the impression that the challenge of engaging the students comes prior to any other focus areas. The following statement teacher D represents the impression from the interviews about the teachers' perception of using fiction to promote intercultural competence: "Previous to anything regarding intercultural competence... first and foremost it is about being able to get them to think that it is ok to read a book." (My translation.)

Question 7 – *Do you have a favorite work of fiction for this age group? If so why, or if not, why not?*

Probably due to the different methods for choosing literature to the EFL classroom, the differences in the texts used, as presented in question 5, and their differences in age, gender and experience etc. is important in this question as well. That is, because literature is perceived by the reader based on his/her individual story, experiences, personality, etc. (Parmenter, 2003). Three teachers have a favorite work of fiction, which they talk about with

great commitment. The three books mentioned are *Anne Frank* by Maria Isabel Sanchez Vegara, *The Curious Incident of The Dog in The Nighttime* by Mark Haddon and the Harry Potter book series by J.K. Rowling.

Anne Frank is a picture book that portrays the life of Anne Frank during WW2 with illustrations and text, which in many ways can promote reflection on important topics such as war and racism. A 15-year-old boy with Asperger syndrome is the protagonist and main character of *The Curious Incident of The Dog in The Nighttime*, which tells of his experiences with a strict father and a mother who has reportedly died. Thus, the reader gets an insight into the life of a boy who is in some ways ‘different’ and therefore might experience life events with an unfamiliar perspective. The Harry Potter series is known worldwide. Harry is special in many ways and stands out from his family. He experiences what it feels like to not fit in.

The remaining three teachers were not able to pick a favorite work of literature. Two of the teachers with the longest experience could not choose one among the large selection of fiction they have used. They saw advantages and disadvantages with all the literature they had used in the EFL classroom. One of the youngest teachers did not feel he had enough experience with the use of fiction to choose a favorite.

Question 8 – *Do you see any disadvantages in using fiction in the classroom to promote intercultural competence?*

The three disadvantages mentioned by the teachers are similar to those in Ortells’ (2014) research of Spanish teachers’ attitudes regarding the use of literature in the EFL classroom. Following, a visual representation of the teachers’ answers regarding the disadvantages of using fiction as a tool to promote intercultural competence:

| DISADVANTAGES OF USING FICTION TO PROMOTE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE | A | B | C | D | E | F |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The challenge of motivating the students | | X | | X | | |
| Lack of reading skills | | X | X | | | |
| Time consuming | | | X | X | | X |

Table 6 – Disadvantages of using fiction as a tool to promote intercultural competence

The first disadvantage addressed by the teachers during the interviews were that longer literary works required time. Time issues is a well-known topic of discussion among teachers. The teachers present two different views on the time challenge: (1) The time to cover (and assess) all the aims of the curriculum and (2) the time it takes to prepare lessons based on a literary work. The teachers experience the curriculum as too comprehensive to take the time needed to read a novel or longer work of fiction in class. Time is one of the five criteria mentioned by Alemi (2011) for determining the choice of literature to the EFL classroom.

“Just reading and working with a text over time... It is something I have spent many years on, finding out that you just have to be willing to, or not be willing to, but to actually take the time needed. And not just rush through... that has been done very often, like “It is two weeks until the next topic, so we need to finish this.”. (Teacher F, my translation).

Another reoccurring issue is the students’ lack of reading motivation and skills. It is discussed in the theory section, that motivating students, both those who struggle with reading skills and those who are unmotivated to read is a challenge the teachers face. Nevertheless, as Fenner and Skulstad (2020) emphasize, those students are no less capable of participating in discussions about the topics and reflections if they understand the content of the text. The teachers still see the lack of reading motivation and reading skills as a disadvantage.

Another aspect mentioned three of the teachers is the fact that the literature is the authors perspective. What is presented in fiction of cultural phenomena or aspects is written by an author with his or her individual cultural preconception. These assumptions of how people see themselves and others characterize all forms of communication, as it does with fiction (Parmenter, 2003). Teacher A experienced this as a disadvantage with using fiction as a tool to promote intercultural competence:

“If one is not critical in the choice of literature, or... we may have chosen a lot of literature about the US that is not... that does not put the US in a particularly good light”. (My translation).

These reflections reach level 3 of Banks’ levels of integration of multicultural content, if also the students are made aware of this aspect of the cultural portrayal. On the other hand, teacher

C argues the authors perspective to be an advantage, when she answers if there are any disadvantages of using fiction to promote students' intercultural competence:

“Absolutely not! On the contrary, especially if there are authentic authors who write from their point of view, then you see the world from their view. And there is no other way to really do it, I think.” (My translation).

The theory presented in this thesis considered, both perspectives are important to be aware of when using fiction that presents cultural aspects.

Question 9 – Have you had any particularly memorable positive or negative experiences when using literary texts in the classroom?

Four teachers presented positive and memorable experiences and talked about it with great commitment in the interviews. Their experiences will be presented briefly. Teacher B and D did not have any particularly positive nor negative memorable experiences.

Teacher A experienced “very engaged teenagers” during the work with the relatively long novel *The Hate U Give*. The narrative is based on a police shooting of the main character's best friend in a poor neighborhood. The students were surprised and overwhelmed and asking questions like “Is this even true?” and “Could this really happen?”. This was a positive experience for the teacher, as the students were interested in learning more about the Black Lives Matters movement (for more information about BLM movement: <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>), and motivated to read the novel.

Teacher C has used a reading method where the students are divided into groups, and each group read a different book or work of fiction. It varies whether the students can choose a book themselves, or whether the teacher decides for them what to read. Within the group, the students are assigned different roles for each lesson. The roles used are *informer*, *director*, *connector*, *word searcher* and *illustrator*. The students really enjoyed this method and reading the different books. Teacher C also emphasized that the students felt responsibility to do the work they had agreed upon. The teacher had a positive experience with this, as the students were engaged, they read and had fruitful discussions about the books. Teacher C stated: “It was a very positive experience. And I have received feedback from students, asking to do it more!” (My translation).

Teacher E carried out a Harry Potter project, similar to a story line project, which took place over several weeks. The teachers and students dress up as characters from the Harry Potter-world. They also played boardgames related to the story, and they had creative assignments where students could use what they had read as inspiration. All these activities contributed to the students' engagement in the Harry Potter books. The themes, such as friendship and enemies, how hard it can be to stand up against a friend or someone you care about created interesting discussions, according to the teacher. Teacher E stated that even those students who initially had a negative attitude towards the project were carried away in the world of Harry Potter.

Teacher F really appreciated the student engagement when ending a reading project with a book café. Each student got to present their self-chosen book by talking about the content and characters, what they liked or did not like, and so forth. This method was possible to adapt to all students, regardless of their level of English skills and reading interest.

“We like to have tea and something to eat. Further, there will be a nice conversation between them. The content is like a book review, really, where they have to argue why they liked or did not like the book and retell what it was about.” (Teacher F, my translation).

The similarities in these positive experiences the teachers have had all include engaged students. In various ways, the teachers have planned and implemented projects that engage the students. They talk about their experiences with great enthusiasm. The student's lack of reading interest is one of the problems with using fiction in the EFL teaching the teachers have addressed. An interesting statement from teacher E, regarding this was:

“And it also makes me think that what if we had somehow spent as much time on all planning, as one does on such types of projects. We should! Maybe it was, that we made a little more ambitious plan, then, for this project.” (My translation).

This brings up the issue of time, again. Both the issue of low reading interest and the time pressure these teachers experience will be further discussed in the next chapter.

5. Discussion

The findings presented in the result and analysis chapter gained insights into six EFL teachers' experiences regarding the use of fiction, criteria for choosing literature, their focus

areas when using literature, what texts they have used and their knowledge about intercultural competence. In the following chapter, the most prominent findings of the qualitative interviews are discussed in the light of the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2. The findings illustrate the experiences and issues addressed by the teachers, and the research questions are central to the discussion:

- 1. To what extent do teachers in junior high school use fiction to promote intercultural competence?**
- 2. What experience have teachers in junior high school of teaching intercultural competence through fiction?**

Insight into the teachers' experiences of using fiction to promote intercultural competence in the EFL classroom is provided, but due to the somewhat limited size of participants, no absolute conclusion or generalization can be done. In connection with the use of fiction in the EFL classroom, the teachers addressed various challenges they encounter. These challenges influenced the interviews and will be discussed in depth.

5.1 Choosing fiction for the purpose of promoting students' intercultural competence

All six teachers respond that they believe fiction can promote students' intercultural competence. When being asked the question of whether they believe fiction can be a tool for promoting intercultural competence, teacher B emphasizes elements of intercultural competence that can be promoted through fiction:

“By reading fiction, you can develop knowledge about other people, lifestyles, socialization processes, and maybe you even get more knowledge about your own culture as well, by learning about differences and similarities” (My translation).

Birkeland and Mjør (2012) points out identity and culture related reader responses to fiction, similar to the ones presented by teacher B, as something that can be used by the teacher to facilitate reflection. The other teachers also point out relevant aspects of intercultural competence which can be developed through fiction. The teachers stated that fiction can promote empathy, shape one's understanding of other people through characters experiences and introduce the students to other cultures.

On the other hand, neither of the teachers stated to have based their choice of fiction with an aim to promote intercultural competence. The interview analysis also shows that none of the teachers mention culture as an area they tend to focus on in the texts used in the EFL classroom.

“I have probably never chosen anything with a conscious thought that this should promote students' intercultural competence. But maybe, after this interview, I'll think about doing it more.” (Teacher E, my translation).

The interview findings thus show that the teachers have not had a specific aim in English teaching to promote the concept of intercultural competence and what it entails. It also appears that they have not been aware of all the benefits and possibilities of using fiction as a tool for teaching aspects of intercultural competence. Nevertheless, several of the teachers mention literary works they have used in the classroom that deal with culture and cultural issues, as presented in a full list in question 5 in the result section.

Teacher A have used *(Un)arranged Marriage* by Bali Rai. The novel highlights different perspectives on arranged marriages and how different opinions can lead to complicated social relationships. Teacher B presents *Funny in Farsi* by Firoozeh Dumas, which addresses the need for adjusting to cultural differences when moving to another country, as a novel they have used parts of in class. Teacher C and D state that some of their students have read *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdel-Fattah as a self-chosen book, but they have not used it in class. This novel addresses reactions from friends and family to the main character when she decides to start wearing a hijab. Teacher E have used *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio in combination with the movie, which addresses the feeling of being different. Teacher F have used *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie, focusing on the native people in the U.S. These are only a selection of the texts, to exemplify, but the full list of literary works presented by the teachers during the interviews can be seen in the result section above. Although the teachers present several different works of fiction that deal with cultural aspects, they still do not experience that they have had a focus on culture when using fiction in English teaching.

As previously discussed, Dypedahl (2020) suggest exposing the students to diversity for the students to be able to decenter and view unfamiliar cultural aspects, such as values, beliefs and norms, from the perspective of an insider. With the fictional works presented above, the teachers have the opportunity to reach the aim of exposing the students to diversity. Cultural

empathy is the second aim of Dypedahl's culture-specific approach, which requires knowledge of a culture. Several of the novels mentioned portrays different cultures. The teachers present theme, language, characters and environment as focus areas when using fiction in the EFL classroom. These focus areas could provide an opportunity for in-depth learning, which is the third aim presented by Dypedahl. The teachers' answers are perceived as somewhat ambiguous, as they present fiction that deals with cultural elements, at the same time as they themselves say that they do not focus on culture through the literature.

The teachers express a desire to be able to use fiction for several purposes in teaching, including to promote intercultural competence. In the following four sub-chapters, issues regarding the use of fiction in the English classroom, which seems to hinder the teachers to in some degree to use fiction for all its advantages.

5.2 Lack of reading motivation and interest

The basic skills section of the core curriculum states the following: "All teachers in all subjects must support the pupils in their work with the basic skills." (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). The competence aims for the English subject after 10th grade states that the students should be able to read various types of texts, including self-chosen literature and English language fiction (ibid), as previously discussed. Neither teachers nor students can avoid reading activities in school context, and the many benefits of reading is discussed in the theory section. Reading is something they must do, but the teachers interviewed for this thesis expressed a strong desire that this should be characterized by engagement from the students.

One of the findings that was most conspicuous in the teacher interviews was that all the teachers experienced that the majority of their students did not like or enjoy reading in general. The teachers found engaging the students in various reading activities in the EFL classroom as an extensive challenge. Fenner and Skulstad (2020) addresses this issue, and it is no new discovery in this thesis. Nevertheless, it was a recurring topic in all the interviews, therefore it is important to address and discuss in relation to using fiction as a tool to promote intercultural competence.

The teachers experienced that the students (most of them) did not like to read for their own pleasure, nor in any school context. A statement from teacher D has similarities with several of the teachers' experiences:

“They (the students) are getting worse and worse readers. Or... yes, they do, but they also read less and less. These students I have, I have never had a class... I think there is only one person in the class I have now who reads books just because she wants to. And who likes to read books! The others do not do it anymore. They stream, and they watch movies, and they watch series, and they play videogames. You can learn English through those activities as well, but it is very, very few students who read because they like to read.” (My translation).

If the students do not enjoy reading, the challenge starts with creating engagement. To get them motivated to read is the first aim, before the teachers can start focusing on the content, such as intercultural aspects of the text. An understanding emerges in the result analysis, that the teachers' main aim is to create engagement and give the students good reading experiences. It comes prior to any focus, in the hope that the students will want to read and develop their knowledge and language proficiency through all the benefits of reading. The benefits of reading are discussed in the theory section. Teacher F stated: “I am one who had good reading experiences very late myself. So, I tend to tell the students that I treat them to it, to have good reading experiences as early as possible.” (My translation). This desire is addressed by all teachers, but they experience a lack of suitable methods to create reading engagement.

Birkeland and Mjør (2012) emphasize pre-understanding as an important motivating factor. It is, as already established, the teachers' job to activate the students' pre-understanding by introduction the literature by giving some information about the content of the text and what to focus on. Alemi (2011) includes *cultural competence* as one of the five criteria for choosing fiction. The students should be able to compare elements of a new culture to a familiar culture. In the classroom, there is a high probability that there are students with different nationalities, cultures and/or religions who can be helpful in the process of bringing out this pre-understanding before starting a reading activity. The students are useful resources, to create a familiarity, or portray elements of culture to something recognizable. None of the teachers mention using the diversity present in the classroom as a resource. It must be mentioned, that in order to do so in a pedagogical way, the teacher *must* know the students

well and tread carefully not to humiliate or hurt the student, as culture often is a part of his or her identity.

An intercultural focus on fiction can seem overwhelming if the students initially struggle with reading. The elements of Byram's intercultural competence model can be acquired through encounters with culture in literature and through reflection (Byram, 2021). Fenner and Skulstad (2020) argues that students who struggle with reading are not necessarily hindered to such an extent that being able to participate in discussions and reflections are not achievable. In order to develop students' intercultural competence, teachers must be able to engage the students in reading, reflection and discussion (Birkeland & Mjør, 2012, Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, Fenner & Skulstad, 2020 and Byram, 2021). The teachers should adapt their teaching so all students can reflect on what has been read and participate in discussions to develop their intercultural competence.

Following, s statement from teacher C, to re-emphasize how much the issue of poor reading motivation characterized the interviews:

“Literature in school, it is decreasing. There are fewer and fewer who read, and more and more who only watch movies. So... yes, I need to set aside more time. Simply. And find methods that make it possible.”. (My translation).

Teacher C has many years of experience, but still does not feel that she has found a method to motivate reading that works very well. The teachers present methods they have used to adapt the teaching to different levels. The methods are to a large extent linked to Alemi's (2011) first and fourth criteria for choosing literature for EFL teaching. The first criterion is to base literary choices on the students' language proficiency, and the fourth is to use short stories which appears feasible to read. Teacher A has used several picture books, which contain a relatively small amount of text, but which still deal with important topics used a basis for conversation, reflection and discussion. Smaller amount of text meant, according to the teacher, that more students had the opportunity to participate in the discussions. Teacher C have presented a practical rule to the students for self-chosen books, where one page should not include more than five words they do not understand. She also emphasized to the students that some difficult or new words will increase their motivation. These are important adaptations that give the students better conditions to be able to decode the text, which in turn leads to understanding and further motivation (Tomlinson, 2011). Either way, the teachers want to find more useful methods to engage students.

Since the teaching profession is complex and dynamic, it is not always possible to point to only one reason causing the challenges they experience. Further, two possible causes, without ruling out that there may be other elements that also come into play, causing these challenges will be discussed. First, a focus on the parts of the curriculum presented in the theory section. The teachers' literary choices are first and foremost based on creating engagement for reading among the students. Other criteria presented, as shown in the analysis section, are variation in difficulty, suitability for comparison, available digital supplements and relevance to the curriculum. There are many elements in the core curriculum that clearly point to intercultural competence, such as respect and tolerance for different lifestyles, thoughts and beliefs, cultural insights and to take into account the diversity of our society. In the English curriculum, these values are less visible, as emphasized by Fenner and Skulstad. English teachers have a responsibility to follow both parts of the curriculum, but they must only assess and grade students in the subject-specific aims. In addition, teachers experience time pressure, which will be further discussed in the next sub-chapter. The time pressure in combination of how "visible", possibly "invisible" intercultural competence is in the subject-specific competence aim can make them choose to have the greatest focus on the aims they have to assess and grade.

Secondly, the need for teaching intercultural competence increases in line with globalization of the world and diversity in the Norwegian society as previously discussed, as emphasized by Hoff (2020). Students must learn to understand themselves and ways of looking at others with intercultural values (Corbett, 2003). The question of whether teachers have received adequate training, in both how intercultural competence is acquired and taught in their education, needs to be asked. The teachers' definitions of intercultural competence, seen in the light of Banks' four levels of integration of multicultural content (2003), are missing elements from level 3 and 4. He addresses the issue of not including perspectives from different cultural groups, in relation to issues that concern specific groups in the society. It can lead to ethnocentric attitudes. Five out of the six teachers had a definition of the term, but still, several elements of Byram's model for intercultural competence were missing, such as attitudes of curiosity and openness and knowledge about stereotypes and prejudices, which is considered as important for the development of intercultural competence. In relation to Banks' (2003) levels of integration of multicultural content they are missing elements from the two upper levels in their definitions.

5.3 There is not enough time

In the 8th question in the interview, “Do you see any disadvantages in using fiction in the classroom to promote ICC?”, four teachers stated that the time is the biggest drawback. Time is an important resource for learning, and especially in a diverse classroom where students learn at different paces and in different ways. The teachers uttered different issues regarding time during the interviews.

The first issue concerns the time it takes to finish a reading project, such as reading a novel common in class. Alemi (2011) addresses time availability as a criterion for EFL teachers to use for choosing literature. Within this criterion she includes consideration of the time it takes to prepare the students with background information and what activities to include in class and eventual homework. Alemi has not included the time it takes for the teacher to find the work of fiction and get well acquainted with it themselves, or the time it takes to read the text in the EFL classroom. The time available should be considered before choosing a work of literature, according to Alemi. This, seen in connection with the teachers' experienced lack of engagement to reading among the students makes the process even more time-consuming.

During junior high school, the curriculum has allocated the English subject 222 hours (Ministry of Education and Research). This corresponds to 74 hours of English per school year. The curriculum, seen in the light of these figures, is perceived comprehensive by the teachers. There is a lot the students should be able to do, according to the English curriculum, after they finish junior high school. The curriculum is previously discussed in the theory section, but with a focus on the parts that include reading and intercultural competence. Of course, there are other aims in the curriculum that the students must go through in addition to those presented in this thesis. Four teachers express that they experience a time pressure, and that they find it difficult to prioritize many weeks of the school year, for example, to reading a joint novel. In addition to all the competence aims to be reviewed, they should also be assessed, which is another factor causing time pressure.

“It is... to find the time to just, just sit and read. I feel, especially in tenth grade perhaps, that everything one does must always end up in some form of assessment. Because we are going to set term grades in 3.5 months, sort of.” (Teacher D, my translation).

“I have not used so many books. It has to do with time, right. It is very rare that we have time to read an entire book, so that is a challenge in itself.” (Teacher C, my translation). This is an interesting perspective, considering that the teachers themselves have expressed that reading can be applied to many areas of English teaching. Theme, characters, conversation, language and grammar are mentioned as primary uses and focus areas of fiction in the EFL classroom. In addition, the teachers have specifically stated that literature has many uses and benefits. The time pressure, in addition to the students' lack of desire to read, may possibly prevent teachers from using literature for all its benefits, including developing intercultural competence in the classroom.

Teacher F, one of the most experienced teachers in terms of years in the field, stated:

“To read and work with a text over time, it's something I've spent many years on ... finding out that you just have to be willing to, or not be willing, but to actually take the time required. And... not just hurry on. I have done that a lot. Like, "now it's only two weeks until the next topic, so now we have to finish this". It quickly became a thing I did.” (Teacher F, my translation).

The teachers feel pressured by the time, and it prevents them from spending a lot of time reading longer literary works.

The preparation time is another challenge. Teacher E states: “You have to do the job. You have to prioritize time to get familiar with it (the literary work), and many teachers think that time is the biggest challenge that applies to all things.” (My translation). To become well acquainted with a literary work requires time, and it is necessary, as previously mentioned, to activate students' pre-understanding. The teachers want the literature to be relatable and suitable for the students. To know this, they must also know the work themselves. “The preparation, I think, may be the most challenging.” (Teacher F, my translation). Teacher F uses an example with the novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. In order to read, understand and be able to reflect upon and discuss the book, the students should have pre-understanding about the history and current situation of native people in the United States.

5.4 Access to fiction in physical format

As stressed in the previous sub-chapters, lack of motivation and time challenges are the main issues addressed by the teachers during the qualitative interviews. In addition, the teachers experience the choice of literature for use in the EFL classroom as challenging. This is previously presented in the result section. A part of the challenge of choosing fiction stems from the fact that they do not have enough access to books at their schools. Both teacher E and teacher F addresses this issue in the interviews:

“It is very rare that we get to read an entire book. We do not have available class sets for any book I want. Then I often have to choose what is available at school, which someone bought a number of years ago. Everyone has read the same books for the last five years, at least. So, it is a bit limited too, how free we are to choose literature.” (Teacher E, my translation).

“I wish we could have physical books, in the form of class sets from the school library. But it's not that easy to get it. And now it is... it is saving in abundance in the municipal sector, so it is not easy. If you are lucky, you have something that is relevant.” (Teacher F, my translation).

It is problematic that the municipality's or school's finances should limit teachers' choices of literature. The given criteria, both from the teachers themselves, and Alemi's (2011) criteria suggestions, in addition to a very limited selection means that teachers often have to find digital alternatives. Today, textbooks are often digitized, and digital alternatives will not necessarily be an obstacle, but teachers express a desire for access to physical books. Moreover, this can be related to students' low reading motivation and proficiency. Teacher D states digital works of fiction as an issue: “I do not know if ... I think it also helps to ruin a little, that reading becomes less and less. They read worse on screen. It's more difficult.” (My translation). The problems addressed by the teachers are connected in a complex way.

5.5 Adaptation with digital tools

The final issue to be discussed is the need for supplementing written works of fiction with digital tools. As emphasized, all the presented challenges are somewhat connected. This is one of the elements the teachers have used to motivate students and “save” time. By using

movies and audio files, more students can contribute to discussions, and the time it takes to get through, for example, a novel is reduced.

“We may have to capitulate... and realize that one may have to enter the world of series and film a little more if we are to continue to teach the same things. And then you might hope that if you show a movie, which they hear is based on a book, then maybe they want to read the sequel.” (Teacher D, my translation).

Due to all the issues previously presented in this chapter, the teachers have found different ways of teaching literature in combination with movies. To use movies in relation to literature is suggested by Lundahl (2009). Their method of adapting is discussed in previous research and theories. It is timesaving, it is more easily accessible, and it can motivate students who for various reasons do not like to read. According to Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson (2003), the visual images are worth a lot for students who struggle with reading comprehension. Fenner and Skulstad (2020) emphasizes that this is beneficial to all students as it increases motivation and stimulate different senses, which leads to a better learning outcome.

Teacher D states that they often watch the movie at the end of a reading project. Teacher X combines reading and movies. They read a chapter, and then they watch a "chapter" in the movie, then read again. This way of doing it is supported by Lundahl (2009) who emphasizes that one does not necessarily have to use the whole film, but preferably parts of it. Teacher E addresses the value of digital supplements:

“You meet many students who will never read a book in their lives. But they may be able to watch series or movies, or even play games that follow a certain storyline. You can understand stories and themes through other ways than just reading. Via audiobook, for example.” (My translation).

The availability of audiobooks is one of the criteria for choosing fiction for teacher F, to be able to differentiate and adapt the lessons to different levels of language and reading proficiency. The teachers address the use of movies and audio files as a useful supplement to fiction, to be able to focus on the relevant topics without time running out and to prevent the students missing out of the text due to lack of motivation or low reading proficiency.

6. Conclusion

In the globalized society of the 21st century, the world is increasingly diverse (Hoff, 2020). Cultural, ethnic, religious, and social differences are present in the everyday lives of children and young people. The ability to adapt, respect, reflect and successfully interact with people who differs from oneself is highly important. Therefore, including development of the students' intercultural competence in the English subject is crucial. Elements of intercultural competence is stressed in several parts of the curriculum. Language learning no longer includes only development of language proficiency, but also the acquisition of knowledge about one's own and others' cultures.

The present thesis has explored English language teachers' use of fiction in the EFL classroom to promote intercultural competence. The research investigated to what extent teachers in junior high school use fiction to promote intercultural competence and what experience English teachers have of teaching intercultural competence through fiction. A qualitative method, interviewing English foreign language teachers, was used to collect the data for this thesis. The choice of method was relatively suitable for the purpose of this research, although it has its limitations. The number of participants was relatively small, even if a number of 5 to 6 is recommended (Smith & Osborn, 2007). While findings in this thesis cannot draw final conclusions and generalize, the findings provide insight into the practices and experiences of teachers in junior high school regarding fiction as a tool to promote intercultural competence.

The research findings show that the teachers use fiction for various purposes, among them, to get the students to reflect and discuss about the themes in the chosen fictional works. In the interviews, the teachers presented a number of literary works that they have used in their EFL teaching. The teachers use different methods to motivate the students to read, and they want to create an engagement to reading. The reason for this is that teachers see many benefits of reading in general. Fiction is considered as a useful tool to improve language proficiency, reading and writing skills, and to learn about the different topics the texts present. On the other hand, the teachers have not chosen fiction with a specific aim to promote their students' intercultural competence. Yet, they see the possibilities and believe that fiction is a suitable tool for doing so. The possibilities they present correlates with the previous research of, among others, Dypedahl and Lund (2020), Brevik and Rindal (2020) and Burwitz-Melzer

(2001), as presented in the theory section. As a result, the teachers tend to focus on creating good reading experiences for students, rather than focusing on intercultural competence.

None of the teachers mention the core curriculum in the interviews, where many intercultural elements are included. Whether intercultural competence is sufficiently included in the curriculum is discussed in relation to Byram's intercultural competence model and Banks' four levels of integration of multicultural content. In this thesis, six competence aims from the English subject curriculum is presented as relevant for teaching intercultural competence through fiction, the remaining thirteen competence aims is not mentioned, but they are just as important. The time pressure the teachers feel is related to time-consuming work with fiction in addition to a comprehensive curriculum. Teachers find it difficult to give priority to reading of a longer fictional work.

Challenges the teachers face regarding the themes of this research are addressed in the findings, and they characterized large parts of the interviews. One of the most prominent issues is the lack of student motivation in regard to reading fiction and struggling readers in the diverse classroom. This mirror previous research on the field. Methods to encourage the students to read have been discussed in the theory section and addressed by the teachers in the interviews. To activate the students' pre-understanding is one approach to increase motivation (Birkeland & Mjør, 2012) and to combine fiction with movies or audio files is another suitable approach (Fenner & Skulstad, 2020, Lundahl, 2009 and Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003). The criteria for choosing fiction is also important for engaging students in different reading activities in the EFL classroom. Alemi (2011) and Krashen (1982) both emphasizes the importance of comprehensibility and personal interest. Due to the fact that a majority of students are not motivated to read, it requires a lot of the teachers, in both the planning process and the actual implementation in the classroom.

Caused by the lack of reading motivation among the student and time pressure, the teachers find digital supplements as useful. They experience movies and audio files as tools to motivate the students and as a support for the weaker readers. Previous research has suggested to use movies, in order to activate different senses (Fenner & Skulstad, 2020). Visual representation is proven to build a bridge between written fiction and the readers internal images (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003). The teachers combine movies and fiction in different ways and find it more feasible than just reading.

Finally, the findings of this research are complex, and several of the challenges are intertwined. The time pressure is related to the curriculum, which governs the teachers' work in the English classroom. Also, the time-consuming work of preparing and carry out reading projects leads to time pressure. The curriculum controls how much time they have available to develop students' intercultural competence. In addition, there are several competence aims to assess, and the core curriculum is not a separate subject where students get graded based on their achievements. The teachers have experienced that the use of fiction is challenging, due to a lack of motivation and low reading skills. This leads to the need for finding differentiation methods when using fiction in the classroom. Combining fiction with movies or audio files are examples of how they engage a larger number of students. Digital supplements are also more accessible than physical books for most of the teachers. They have thus found ways to use fiction based on their experience. At the same time, they see many more opportunities and benefits of using fiction in the EFL classroom.

6.1 Educational implications and further research

Matosu (2012) and Byram, Nichols and Stevens (2001) address the issue of a gap between the theories of how to include intercultural competence in language acquisition, which is also evident in this research. To improve the teachers' knowledge about how to include cultural elements in the English subject in the future, they must receive guidance in the teacher education. First, knowledge of didactic methods of how to engage reluctant readers, second, what criteria is needed to choose relevant literature in order to promote intercultural competence, and third, how to facilitate reflection and discussion about the chosen elements of intercultural competence.

If I were to repeat this study, with the experience of doing this once already, I would have complimented with a quantitative survey, so that the data had a greater basis for generalizing how teachers use fiction to promote students' intercultural competence. Another alternative would be to conduct a student questionnaire, where the students could tell how they experience the use of fiction in the English subject, and whether they feel they are learning about other cultures through reading and discussing stories based on characters who differ from themselves.

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Appendix 1

The Interview Guide

1. **What do you think are the primary uses of fiction in the classroom?**
Hva mener du er de primære bruksområdene for skjønnlitterære tekster i klasserommet?
2. **Can you define intercultural competence?**
Kan du definere interkulturell kompetanse?
3. **Do you believe fiction promotes intercultural competence? If so, how do you think it does? If not, why?**
Tror du litteratur fremmer interkulturell kompetanse? Hvis ja, hvorfor? Hvis nei, hvorfor ikke?
4. **What criteria do you use for choosing fiction in the classroom, considering development of intercultural competence?**
Hvilke kriterier bruker du for å velge skjønnlitteratur i klasserommet, med tanke på utvikling av interkulturell kompetanse?
5. **Which texts have you used in the EFL classroom, and how do you think the texts promoted intercultural competence? Did the pupils enjoy the texts, why or why not?**
Hvilke tekster har du brukt i EFL-klasserommet, og hvordan synes du tekstene fremmet interkulturell kompetanse? Likte elevene tekstene, hvorfor eller hvorfor ikke?
6. **What content of the texts do you tend to focus on, and why?**
Hvilket innhold i tekstene pleier du å fokusere på, og hvorfor?
7. **Do you have a favorite work of fiction for this age group? If so why, or if not, why not?**
Har du et favorittlitteraturverk for denne aldersgruppen? I så fall hvorfor, eller hvis ikke, hvorfor ikke?
8. **Do you see any disadvantages in using fiction in the classroom to promote intercultural competence?**
Ser du noen ulemper ved å bruke skjønnlitteratur i klasserommet for å fremme interkulturell kompetanse?
9. **Have you had any particularly memorable positive or negative experiences when using literary texts in the classroom?**
Har du hatt noen spesielt minneverdige positive eller negative opplevelser ved bruk av litterære tekster i klasserommet?