

# MASTER'S THESIS

Teachers' Attitudes toward and Experiences of Teaching  
Intercultural Competence

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## Abstract

The Swedish curriculum stipulates the need to prepare students to live in their communities and open up to other cultures. Still, the concept of intercultural competence is not explicitly mentioned in the Swedish curriculum. This study examines whether the lack of explicit mention of intercultural competence in the curriculum affects the content and methods of teaching English. Thirty-two teachers working in secondary schools in different regions of Sweden participated in this study and answered a questionnaire of thirty-one questions. The questionnaire helped collect information about teachers' knowledge, attitudes, teaching methods and experiences concerning intercultural competence.

The results showed that teachers take positive attitudes toward teaching intercultural competence in English language classes. The results also showed that teachers base their lessons on the curriculum. Therefore, teachers' positive attitudes may reflect their awareness of the importance of intercultural competence in the curriculum. Furthermore, the participating teachers use various methods to develop students' intercultural competence. For example, the teachers indicated that they work to diversify the activities that contribute to increasing students' intercultural knowledge and skills. However, the teachers regard time constraints as challenging in teaching all aspects of intercultural competence.

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Background**

The movement of people between different countries has grown in recent years, and the emigration of people to Sweden and other countries has increased. This mobility has led to increased contact between people of different cultures and different languages. According to the Swedish Central Bureau of Statistics research in 2018, more than 17% of the population was born outside Sweden, equating to more than 1.5 million people (The Swedish Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Moreover, with the development of technology, the possibility of international communication is increasing in various sectors of society. Therefore, people with intercultural competence and skills in intercultural communication are needed.

Teachers prepare their students for living in their communities and face the continuing changes in them. Many societies in Europe have become multicultural societies. This change has evidently been, accompanied by changes in the classroom and an increased understanding of the growing importance of learning about other cultures. As a result of the multiculturalism in Swedish society, the need for the Swedish education system to encourage students to open up to different cultures has increased (Skolverket, 2017). The Swedish National Agency for Education has worked to clarify the importance of intercultural competence in educational curricula and materials. It is the responsibility of teachers, especially language teachers, to enhance their students' intercultural competence. The commentary on the English language curriculum illustrates the importance of intercultural competence as one of the communication skills where one needs to know about the cultural aspects when adapting the language to different audiences and different situations: "Communicative ability includes social as well as intercultural and linguistic aspects. The social and intercultural aspects mean that you can adapt your language to different situations, purposes, and recipients". (Skolverket, 2012).

My thesis is primarily based on the opinions and attitudes of Swedish English teachers towards working with intercultural competence in English language classes. Debates continue about language teachers' attitudes toward intercultural competence. Already in 2009 Kramersch stated that teaching objectives based on aiming for a native speaker competence must change, particularly in language classes characterized by multiculturalism and diverse student backgrounds (Kramersch, 2009). The importance of intercultural competence is related to the fact that culture is an integral part of language teaching and that linking culture to language reveals

culture's dynamics (Baker, 2009). Gupta also claims that the connection of language to culture increases the duty of teachers to find appropriate ways to teach cultural topics (Gupta, 2003). Moreover, Afriani (2019) argues that teaching of English cannot be separated from teaching English-speaking culture, so English teachers must include cultural elements in language lessons. Teaching materials should reflect the cultural and natural context of different situations where English is used.

However, the concept of intercultural competence is not explicitly mentioned in the Swedish curricula. Still, the Supplementary Appendix to the Curriculum (Skolverket, 2012) hints about working with this concept. The lack of clarity on this topic in the curriculum is causing confusion and misunderstandings among teachers about what should be covered in their lessons, and teachers feel unsure about how to teach intercultural competence in their classes (Bodin, 2021)

## **1.2 Research questions**

This study aims to investigate the extent to which intercultural competence is introduced in English language classes in upper secondary schools in Sweden. It is hypothesized that the lack of explicit mentioning of intercultural competence in the curriculum may affect the content and methods of teaching English. In their teaching, teachers may follow an old model which concentrates on the factual knowledge of English-speaking countries, that is, knowledge about the politics and history of these countries. Research on intercultural competence in English teaching (see e.g., Zheng & Gao, 2019) refers to a new approach in which teaching English does not only focus on the factual knowledge of English-speaking countries. However, such a new approach may not have affected teaching content in Swedish schools to any large extent. Thus, this study examines the link between English teaching and intercultural competence by discussing research in the field, and through conducting a survey in which teachers from several upper secondary schools in different regions of Sweden participate. The participants in the study have answered a questionnaire of thirty-one questions. The questionnaire aims to collect information about teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and teaching experiences related to intercultural competence. The research questions in this study are formulated as follows:

- What are the attitudes and beliefs of English language teachers about teaching intercultural competence in the English language classroom?
- What methods do teachers use to develop students' intercultural competence?

### **1.3 Structure of thesis**

In the theoretical framework, chapter 2, the thesis provides definitions of important concepts and related theories, in addition to presenting selected previous research on intercultural competence. In the methods section, chapter 3, the methods used to collect the data and how the data were analyzed are explained and justified. In the results and discussion, chapter 4, the findings of the study are presented and discussed in light of the theory presented in chapter 2. In conclusion, chapter 5, the answers to the research questions, the limitations of the study, and a proposal for future studies are stated.

## **2.Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Culture**

Culture is a social system that includes shared meanings, concepts, and symbols that people express in their interactions with others (Stead, 2004). Culture can also be defined as knowledge as it includes an individual's knowledge of the history of a group, traditions, attitudes, values, and language. Individuals need this kind of knowledge to interact in various situations they may encounter (Riley, 2007). Riley categorizes individuals' cultural knowledge according to content; for example, knowledge of values and religion is knowledge of what members of a group believe to be true. The knowledge conveyed through television programs, books, sports, and news is classified as learning about other groups. Finally, there is the knowledge of how to act in innovative situations in one's social life (ibid). Lustig et al. (2013) and AbdAlgane Mohammed (2020) have identical definitions of culture where they define culture as what an individual acquires from shared interpretations of values and beliefs that typically influence the behavior of a group.

### **2.2 Interculturality**

Interculturality refers to the exchange and communication between people from different cultures without focusing on cultural differences (Granados-Beltrán, 2016) but on linguistic interaction and social relations. In this case, it is classified as relational interculturality (Hua, 2015). Granados-Beltrán (2016) explains that interculturality can also be defined as the process of building relationships between people from different cultures with an emphasis on cultural

differences and recognition of cultural diversity. Granados-Beltrán explains that interculturality seeks to integrate members of different groups and cultures into a single society based on dialogue and mutual respect. This definition corresponds to that of Dervin et al. (2011), who believe that interculturality focuses on the relationships that arise intentionally between people with different cultural backgrounds. These relationships are based on dialogue and members' mutual recognition of each other's values and the way of living with each other. Moreover, Dervin and Gross (2016) claim that interculturality includes different cultural identities that are not integrated into a single identity but are creatively enriched.

### **2.3 Intercultural Competence**

Societies are distinguished, from each other, by cultures and thus the attitudes and behaviors of individuals in these societies (Hofstede, 2001). When members of these different societies meet, this encounter is referred to as intercultural contact (Jandt, 2004). Spitzberg considers intercultural competence an essential factor when such a meeting occurs. Intercultural competence is defined as skills in behavior or the ability for skilled behavior. Still, intercultural competence is contextual, as it varies in importance from one context to another (Spitzberg, 1997). Intercultural competence exists when the individuals participating in an encounter understand each other's values and standards, resulting in appropriate interaction between the parties involved (Spitzberg, 1997). The performance of individuals with different backgrounds can be measured according to effectiveness, satisfaction, adaptability to situations in different cultural contexts and the ability to act appropriately (Gröschke & Bolten, 2012). Black et al. (1991) believe that intercultural competence results from the experience of individuals abroad as it is an educational process and is not related to the personal characteristics of the individuals.

There have been many attempts at defining intercultural competence, and the start of such research dates back to the seventeenth century (Arasaratnam, 2016). Several theories emerged about intercultural competence, expanding the concept from the interaction of two individuals from two different cultures to communication between people from different cultures in various contexts. Research has discussed the components of intercultural competence and whether this competence is innate or acquired (Arasaratnam, 2016). Many researchers agree on critical factors in this competence, such as knowledge, behavior, and emotion (Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2009). Deardorff (2006) proposed a model in which knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to internal or external outcomes are identified, including adaptability and empathy.

Arasaratnam et al. (2010) also identified factors associated with intercultural competence: positive attitude towards other cultures, motivation, active listening, experience, and empathy. Moreover, Byram et al. (2002) define intercultural competence as a person's understanding of and respect for other cultures and their not judging people according to the culture to which they belong. Byram et al. (2002) proposed a model for developing intercultural competence of individuals according to four components: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness.

The independent foundation Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Fondazione Cariplo (2008) define intercultural competence as the ability of individuals to successfully and effectively establish multicultural relations based on individuals' attitudes, skills, and knowledge between cultures. Bennett (2012) argues that interactions depend to a large extent on cultural contexts and that individuals' adaptation to these contexts is known as intercultural competence. Moreover, the Council for Cultural Co-operation Modern Languages Division Council of Europe (2001) mentions intercultural awareness, which Baker (2015) argues to be the basis of intercultural competence. Intercultural awareness means the realization that people belong to different social communities and that people may have different traditions and beliefs even if they share a national identity (Council for Cultural Co-operation Modern Languages Division Council of Europe, 2001). This way of thinking aims to move away from the stereotypes of individuals associated with their national identities. The Council for Cultural Co-operation Modern Languages Division Council of Europe (2001) put forward a definition of intercultural competence intending to increase the awareness of individuals between cultures to achieve conscious contact of individuals with people of other cultures.

### **2.3.1 Intercultural competence in foreign language teaching**

Many researchers have discussed the necessity of studying intercultural competence in language teaching classes (Alptekin, 2002; Cetinavci, 2012). Already 20 years ago Alptekin (2002) stressed the importance of intercultural competence in teaching English, especially with regard to knowledge and attitudes. Cetinavci (2012) also discusses the distinction between intercultural competence and communicative competence. Cetinavci explains that communicative competence is insufficient for successful interaction and requires cultural awareness that leads to acceptance among individuals with different backgrounds. Cetinavci (2012) also argues that intercultural competence includes personal attributes such as orientation



to knowledge, display of respect, and skills to interact successfully with individuals from different cultures.

Alptekin (2002) suggests treating English as a lingua franca and focusing more on intercultural competence. Alptekin (2002) and Trent et al. (2014) criticize the linking of English language teaching to the Native Standard that states that students use language in a Native manner. Kramer et al. (2014) show that the Native Speaker Standard includes a learner's detachment from his own culture in interaction with people from the culture of English-speaking countries. This paradigm hampers the development of intercultural competence of individuals by not being able to share their beliefs in conversation. Byram et al. (2001) assert the same idea, explaining that individuals involved in interaction do not need to ignore their own cultures and pretend to be native speakers when learning a language.

Godley (2012) claims that including intercultural competence in the English language classroom is essential. Still, some challenges make this difficult, such as teachers' need to have enough time and find appropriate strategies to develop students' learning efficiency and intercultural communication.

### **2.3.2 Intercultural competence in the Swedish curriculum**

The latest amendment to the Lgy 11 syllabus emphasizes the importance of students' knowledge of the cultures of English-speaking countries (Skolverket, 2017). The curriculum emphasizes developing students' knowledge about various cultural phenomena and living conditions in countries where English is spoken. Teaching English will also serve to stimulate students' curiosity about culture and language. However, the assessment criteria in the curriculum do not include clear expressions regarding culture and intercultural competence, as the criteria only assess the ability of students to discuss various cultural phenomena in countries that use English (Skolverket, 2017). It can be noted that the term intercultural competence is not included in the curriculum, but Lgy 11 emphasizes the importance of developing students' knowledge of and curiosity towards other cultures. Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006) list curiosity among the attitudes where both knowledge and attitudes constitute key factors in intercultural competence.

### 2.3.3 Byram's model of intercultural competence

Byram (1997) proposes a model for successful intercultural competence, and states that the intent of this model is to create an uncomplicated reference that teachers can return to. In his studies, Byram (1997) states that language classes provide learners with opportunities to develop their knowledge and acquire specific skills, so teachers should direct the students to appropriate class activities. Byram believes that language learning is successful when individuals can communicate with each other despite coming from different cultures (Byram et al., 2013). Moreover, Byram combines individuals' communicative competence with their ability to use their language in different cultural exchanges (Byram et al., 2002). Accordingly, the process of language learning can be described as a meaningful interactive and communicative process.

In his model, Byram (1997) identifies several factors or *savoirs* for developing intercultural competence that can be worked on within language learning classes (figure 1). These factors are presented in detail below.

	<b>Skills</b> interpret and relate ( <i>savoir comprendre</i> )	
<b>Knowledge</b> of self and other; of interaction: individual and societal ( <i>savoirs</i> )	<b>Education</b> political education critical cultural awareness ( <i>savoir s'engager</i> )	<b>Attitudes</b> relativising self valuing other ( <i>savoir être</i> )
	<b>Skills</b> discover and/ or interact ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )	

Figure 1. Five Factor Model by Byram (1997, p. 34)

#### Description of intercultural competence factors in Byram's model

**Knowledge (*savoirs*):** Byram (1997) defines the knowledge factor as a person's knowledge of his / her country and the culture of that country. It is also one's knowledge of the culture of

other countries. An individual's knowledge of his / her culture develops because of several factors, including socialization, as family and schools contribute to the development of individuals' knowledge about different social groups they might deal with. People sometimes acquire something akin to a national identity through the knowledge they gain in formal education. Individuals acquire other ethnic and social identities through their formal and informal socialization. Individuals form conscious knowledge that includes information about some of the common characteristics of groups. These characteristics may be symbolic such as the way they dress and other aspects that characterize this group, or they may be knowledge of the history and values of these groups.

An individual's knowledge of other cultures is influenced by how closely that individual's culture relates to these cultures. Proximity here does not mean the geographical factor and the positioning of these countries on the map, but rather it is linked to other factors such as politics and the media (Byram, 1997). Such knowledge can be relational. Relational here means that it may include understanding these cultures from the point of view of its members. It may also include some stereotypes affected by the perspective that the individual has on other cultures (Byram, 1997).

**Attitudes (savoir- être):** People's attitude toward those they feel are different is made up of the behaviors and beliefs they have. Attitudes are formed due to people building their interactions with others on differences in behavior and beliefs. Such attitudes can be described as stereotypes or prejudices, which are often negative and lead to unsuccessful interaction. However, positive prejudices are also considered a type of bias, and they hinder mutual understanding between group members. Successful interaction requires individuals to be open and curious and to be willing to refrain from judging others according to their beliefs and behaviors (Byram, 1997). In addition to the above, individuals should move away from sticking to beliefs in their meanings and behaviors and try to look at things from others' points of view, which Kohlberg et al. (1983, referred to in Byram 1997) define as an advanced stage of decentralization and which Melde (1987, referred to in Byram 1997) considers a key factor for understanding other cultures.

**Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre):** Individuals may sometimes encounter a document, and the term document is used here in its broadest sense. When this document is from another country, the individual tries to interpret it according to the general knowledge that he or she possesses. Whether this knowledge is acquired in schools or from other sources, it is often conscious knowledge and depends on interpretations related to the

individual's own environment, which may cause a deficiency in one's knowledge of connotations and cultural symbols present in the document, and this may cause a communication gap. Therefore, the ability to interpret documents relating to another country is related to one's knowledge of the other environment and the environment of the individual himself/herself. Thus, establishing relations with other cultures helps to find common grounds, including connotations that can be interpreted (Byram, 1997).

Individuals base their skills of interpreting and relating on their pre-existing knowledge. These skills differ from discovery and interaction skills as they are limited to the individual working with documents without conversing with other people. Thus, such skills make it easier for the individual to coordinate his /her schedule of interpretation and do not limit him/her to the principles or necessities of social interaction. In contrast, **skills of discovery (savoir apprendre/faire)** require social interaction. These skills can be practiced when individuals lack a prior knowledge framework or when their knowledge framework is partial. In skills of discovery, individuals acquire knowledge and understanding of certain behaviors and beliefs ingrained in specific phenomena (Byram, 1997).

To have successful interaction, individuals need to use their knowledge and appropriate attitudes toward people with different cultural backgrounds and use discovery and interpretation skills. Individuals' knowledge and skills help address any differences they might encounter during the interaction. Thus, individuals may establish social interaction with interlocutors of different origins and may also succeed in playing the role of mediators between people of diverse identities.

### **Political education and critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager):**

This factor relates to the ability of individuals to critically evaluate various cultural products and practices. Byram identifies several goals for this competence, which is the ability to identify and understand the implicit or explicit values in documents that pertain to one's own and other cultures. This competence also aims at the individual's ability to analyze and evaluate the documents and viewpoints contained in these documents according to specific criteria. In addition, the individual will be able to interact and mediate exchanges through the use of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to determine what is acceptable to the other interlocutor (Byram, 1997).

## **2.4 The relationship between culture and language**

The definition of culture is related to language in a very complex relationship, as language is considered part of a culture, but at the same time, it expresses culture (Larzén, 2005). Riley (2007) believes that people acquire information about the culture of a society through language, as the individual must know the language of the community to participate in the knowledge system of this particular society. Culture is changeable and not static, so people also need language to know the changes that occur in societies and the changing living conditions in them (Riley, 2007).

Researchers' definitions of the concept of culture and its relationship to language vary (see for example Lundgren, 2002; Wendt, 2010; Calleja, 2014). Alyasery (2018) argues that a language is a tool for communicating with individuals but, at the same time, a carrier of culture. Brown (1994) believes that culture and language are two intertwined aspects that cannot be separated and that trying to separate them may lead to the loss of the value of one of them, i.e., culture or language. When discussing the relationship between language and culture in relation to the core of teaching, Wang (2008) claims that English language education can be considered education for the cultures of English-speaking countries, and language teachers can be considered foreign culture teachers. Kramsch (1993) believes that as they learn, learners develop the ability to see things from multiple perspectives and the flexibility to think, thus developing new ways of interacting in their worlds. Gao (2006) agrees with this view and asserts that language teachers should be aware of the relationship between culture and language and endeavour to develop students' cultural awareness and intercultural competence.

The relationship of culture and language is often associated with nationality. This may cause a problem when English is the subject, as it has become a global language (Baker, 2011, 2016). About 20 years ago, Tornberg (2000) warned of the association between culture and nationality, especially in foreign language curricula. Researchers are still highlighting the same problem, explaining that English teaching often focuses on English-speaking countries such as the USA and the UK (Baker, 2016). Tosuncuoglu (2017) argues that the preference for English-speaking countries is also reflected in the choice of language teachers where the priority in teaching English is given to native language speaking teachers. There has also been a great deal of criticism for linking the English language with the culture of specific countries and for teachers to focus on specific countries and teach their cultures (Decke-Cornill, 2003). This is because people involved in intercultural communication should adopt, through their experiences, a mediating centre between their culture and the culture of people with whom they interact

(Crozet et al., 1999). Kramsch (1993) names this mediating centre the third centre where the learner views culture as a way of understanding other people. In this centre, learners understand people from different cultures and their own perspectives and values.

## **2.5 Previous research**

Apelgren (2001) investigated teachers' practices and methods of teaching English. Her study was based on interviews with fourteen English language teachers and a survey including 56 questionnaires in which language teachers from different Swedish schools participated. Teachers participating in Apelgren's study believed that teaching English should motivate students to learn the language, use it, and develop their knowledge of other cultures and social and literary topics. The teachers realized that the English language has become an international language, but they were not working on developing this aspect in their language classes. However, already 20 years ago most teachers believed that students need to practice English in different situations to enable them to communicate globally.

In her study, Apelgren (2001) explored teachers' opinions and their knowledge of different concepts such as cultural competence. The classification included teachers with high-level information and other teachers with low-level details. The rating scales used in the study measured teachers' literary knowledge and cultural knowledge of daily life. The study results showed that teachers' knowledge and awareness of the cultural part of language was low. None of the participating teachers rated cultural knowledge as an individuals' understanding of their own perspective and the perspective of others.

In another study, Gagnestam (2003) investigated the issue of intercultural competence and the benefits of teaching it, especially in English language classes. Interviews were made with working teachers and future teachers (i.e., teachers who were studying teaching programs). The results showed that future teachers were unsure how to teach intercultural competence. Working teachers positively linked language lessons with culture and intercultural competence, while future teachers did not find the subject necessary for education. Gagnestam (2003) attributed this to future teachers' lack of required tools and appropriate methods for teaching culture, especially if they did not have prior knowledge of the culture they teach. Gagnestam (2003) advocated a shift away from focusing on factual knowledge in language classes and where the focus should be on different values and attitudes. She also argued that students' different cultures should be used as a reference rather than focusing on the US and UK cultures. Gagnestam argued that English should be taught as a global, multicultural language.

In a similar study, Lundgren (2002) investigated the integration of cultural studies into English language education. Lundgren interviewed several English language teachers in Swedish lower secondary schools. The interviews mapped the teachers' perspectives on the link between cultural studies and language and the impact on improving learning. Lundgren explained that her study aimed to create a knowledge basis from which one could draw conclusions about how to develop the promotion of intercultural competence in English teaching. Lundgren (2002) clarified that teachers' attitude towards intercultural competence has been positive as they believed it is crucial to achieving their students' understanding of others. The teachers highlighted the importance of intercultural competence, especially with the increasing number of multicultural students in the classroom who can be resources in English language teaching. Lundgren has also identified some of the points that hinder the development of intercultural competence in English lessons in Swedish middle schools. Lundgren concluded that the curriculum's emphasis on factual knowledge and the absence of a theoretical basis for teaching intercultural competence made concepts ambiguous and made it challenging to define required standards. National tests focused on assessing students' language proficiency and did not assess intercultural competence. In addition, teachers needed more educational guidance to develop their knowledge as to intercultural competence, and they needed more time to work on it.

Within the scope of the International Studies Review, Guilherme (2002) studied the attitudes of teachers of Portuguese and English languages towards teaching the culture of English-speaking countries. A number of teachers divided into seven groups participated in this study by answering questionnaires. The study aimed to provide a critical explanation of the cultural content of the curriculum with the help of the participating teachers. According to the study results, the participating teachers were interested in the researcher's interpretation and curriculum discussion. The teachers believed in the importance of culture but did not discuss what might benefit teaching culture in language classes. Consequently, the teachers adopted theoretical information and did not apply it practically. Guilherme (2002) argued that the teachers' answers reflected their views on the culture of English-speaking countries and that their knowledge of critical cultural awareness was not based on theory. The teachers lacked understanding of the complexities encountered when people of different cultural backgrounds communicate with each other. Guilherme (2002) proposed a model for teacher training and education, and her model was built on the results of her study. Through this model, teachers develop their knowledge of democratic education and cultural analysis and the field of human

rights. The points included in the model are the areas that Guilherme focused on in her study of cultural studies, pedagogy, and intercultural communication.

In another study, Byram and Risager (1999) conducted a survey in which teachers in England and Denmark participated, and they interviewed a number of language teachers in England and Denmark. According to the results, teachers' understanding of the concept of culture is linked to textbooks. Moreover, participating teachers did not realize the importance of linking culture with English language teaching and often focused on students' linguistic competence with no focus on intercultural competence. The results of the same study showed that many teachers of Danish as a second language were more aware of the concept of intercultural competence and more flexible and open to other cultures than English teachers. Therefore, these teachers were more efficient and acted as mediators in teaching intercultural competence to students.

In a study conducted by Olson and Kroeger (2001), the researchers identified a model for measuring intercultural competence. The model takes Bennett's model of intercultural competence as a basis. Bennett's model includes six elements: denial, acceptance, reduction, defence, adaptation, and integration. The researchers added other factors to the model to expand the dimensions of the study globally, namely cognitive understanding, intrinsic knowledge, and intercultural communication. The two researchers' analysis discussed the results of a questionnaire in which university teachers participated. The questions of the questionnaire measured the answers using a five-point scale. According to the results, most participants rated themselves as highly interculturally competent as they have socialized with people from different cultures. However, nearly half of the participants thought they had a high degree of adaptation to other cultures. Only 18% rated themselves as highly inclusive as they participate in professional work with people from different cultures. Moreover, 22% of the respondents applied aspects from other cultures to how they do things, and 29% felt confident that they can act as cultural mediators.

### **3. Method**

Researchers tend to use questionnaires to determine the frequency of a phenomenon or to know the attitude of individuals on a topic. The results of the questionnaires help to compare the participants' answers and note the differences between them (Dimenäs, 2007). Questionnaires also ensure that there is no impact on the participants from the interlocutors or a difference in



the way questions are asked (Bryman, 2016). Questionnaires can be quantitative or qualitative. The difference is that qualitative questionnaires include open-ended questions, while quantitative questionnaires include highly structured questions (McKay, 2006).

### **3.1 Presentation of the study**

Teachers have different views of and attitudes about intercultural competence and how it is dealt with in language classes. Therefore, their methods of working with this topic differ. To map their views, attitudes and, hence, methods, a survey with a questionnaire was chosen as the research method for this study. Dimenäs (2007) explains that questionnaires are useful in studies where people's attitudes towards something are assessed. The questionnaire in this study was developed to cover the research questions in the best way possible. Further, a pre-test of the questionnaire was done to remove ambiguities and potential misunderstandings in the final wording.

Twenty upper secondary schools participated in this study. The schools were located in different regions in Sweden, covering a large geographical area. The researcher contacted the administrations of these schools by e-mail. After consenting to having their English teachers participate, they were also given time during working hours to answer the questionnaire. Subsequently, the teacher supervising the English language department in each school was contacted, and s/he agreed to take over the task of explaining the topic and background for the survey to the teachers working in their schools. Some of the questions that the researcher received about the study indicated that the participants were interested in the topic as it related to teaching English. For example, there were inquiries about the possibility of middle school teachers participating in the survey, but this study was limited to the participation of upper secondary school teachers.

Thirty-two teachers answered the questionnaire. An effort was made in advance to gain the participants' confidence where the respondents were informed about their participation being optional, and that, should they choose to participate, they were guaranteed anonymity.

### **3.2 Questionnaire**

The questionnaire in this study includes questions directed to upper secondary school teachers in Sweden and consists of thirty-one questions distributed in three sections. The questionnaire was created in Google forms. The researcher chose to divide the questionnaire into sections

according to the theme of questions to make it clearer to the participants. The first section includes questions about teachers' backgrounds, while the second section deals with questions about teachers' knowledge of intercultural competence. The third section of the questionnaire consists of questions about the ways in which teachers work with the topic of intercultural competence in the classroom. The researcher used the flow chart technique when planning the questionnaire and preparing the questions, as this technique helps in planning how the questions are to be sequenced. Flow chart technique also helps the researcher anticipate the range and type of the participants' responses (Cohen et al., 2018).

The second step was to identify the sub-topics related to the main topic (Cohen et al., 2018). Subtopics in this study include information about teachers, their knowledge and teaching methods. This step is followed by the stage of delving into the details of the sub-topics and thus defining the required information related to the specific topics (Cohen et al., 2018). At this step, the researcher determined the content of each section of the questionnaire to make it easier to formulate the questions to elicit the required information. Wilson and Mclean (1994) describe this step as a transition from general interest to an interest in a specific set of characteristics to collect data about them, so the researcher first defines the problem, clarifies the relevant concepts, and then defines the types of data required to gather evidence about these concepts. Semi-structured questionnaire is the kind of questionnaires chosen in this study. In this type, the researcher presents a series of questions, and the participants answer them in the way they prefer (Cohen et al., 2018).

### **3.2.1 Types of questions**

The questionnaire included both open and closed questions. Some questions were chosen to be closed, such as multiple-choice questions and percentage questions. The benefit of closed questions is that they respond subject to statistical analysis and enable the researcher to make comparisons (Oppenheim, 1992). The open questions help enrich the study with the participants' experiences and opinions. Bailey (1994) argues that open-ended questions are helpful when possible answers are unknown and allow for details and explanations rather than simple answers.

The questions in the questionnaire also vary between nominal, ordinal, and proportional questions.

- Nominal questions include dichotomous questions that need to be answered with yes or no (Cohen et al., 2018). For example, the sixth question in the questionnaire: *Do you communicate, using English, with people from other cultures?*
- Multiple choice questions where the researcher works on selecting options that can present the participants' views (Cohen et al., 2018). An example is question 27: *What teaching materials (related to intercultural competence) do you use in English lessons?* There are four options that participants can choose to answer the question.
- Rating scales help achieve differentiation in the responses of the participants. Likert scale provides a suitable model for this type of question, as the researcher offers a set of reactions for participants to choose from. An example is question 22: *Do you feel that you should include more "topics for intercultural competence" in your English classes?* The answers are scaled within the scale to cover the largest possible range of responses (*very much, a little bit, not really, I don't know*).
- In open-ended questions the participants answer points that need explanation or provide a more comprehensive picture. An example is question 28: *What criteria do you follow in choosing the teaching materials that you use?*

### 3.3 Validity and reliability

Researchers can confirm the reliability of the questionnaires by repeating them with the same participants and ensuring that the responses are similar. A measure is reliable when it is consistent, and questions are dependable when they are so clear that all participants interpret them similarly. The limited time of the study does not allow to repeat the questionnaire to the participants at different periods in time. Therefore, the researcher used unambiguous questions for the participants to make this study reliable. The researcher tried to make sure that the participants understood these questions in the same way by looking at and comparing their answers.

Reliability and validity are two related concepts, and the researcher must verify both (Patel & Davidson, 2019). Validity is confirmed when ensuring the appropriateness of the methods used for research and comparing them with previous research (Hammond et al., 2021). Several previous studies were referred to when preparing for this thesis, and the methods used in them were reviewed. Finally, the validity of a study is determined by whether its results are generalizable (Hammond et al., 2021). However, evidently, the results of this study cannot be generalized due to the limited number of participants.

### **3.4 Ethical issues**

Work must be done to respect people's independence, protect their privacy, minimize harm, ensure the accuracy of data and the correctness of their interpretation, and avoid deception (Patton, 2015). The points mentioned above must be identified and followed up from the beginning of the research (Piper & Simons, 2005). Daniels (2008) confirms the necessity of informing the participants of the study's primary purpose and their expected role in it, i.e., the purpose of their participation. The participants received information in an email sent to all school principals about the study's intention and the participants' involvement. In the email, the teachers were also informed that their participation was anonymous and voluntary, and that they could refuse to participate or ignore questions they did not wish to answer (see Christians, 2005).

When comparing the number of teachers working in the participating schools and the number of teachers who answered the questionnaire, it is clear that some teachers chose not to participate. It is important to inform the participants about how the results will be published (Piper & Simons, 2005). The participants were informed that the survey they were participating in is for a master's thesis at Ostfold University in Norway. Therefore, the results may be published on the Norwegian open research archive Brage. The researcher's email was shared with the participants for them to communicate if they wished to know results of the study. English is the language used in the questionnaire and in the instructions sent in the email because all the participants are teachers of English, and it was therefore considered the most appropriate language for communication. Participating schools were also informed that participants could send inquiries about the study to the researcher.

## **4. Results and discussion**

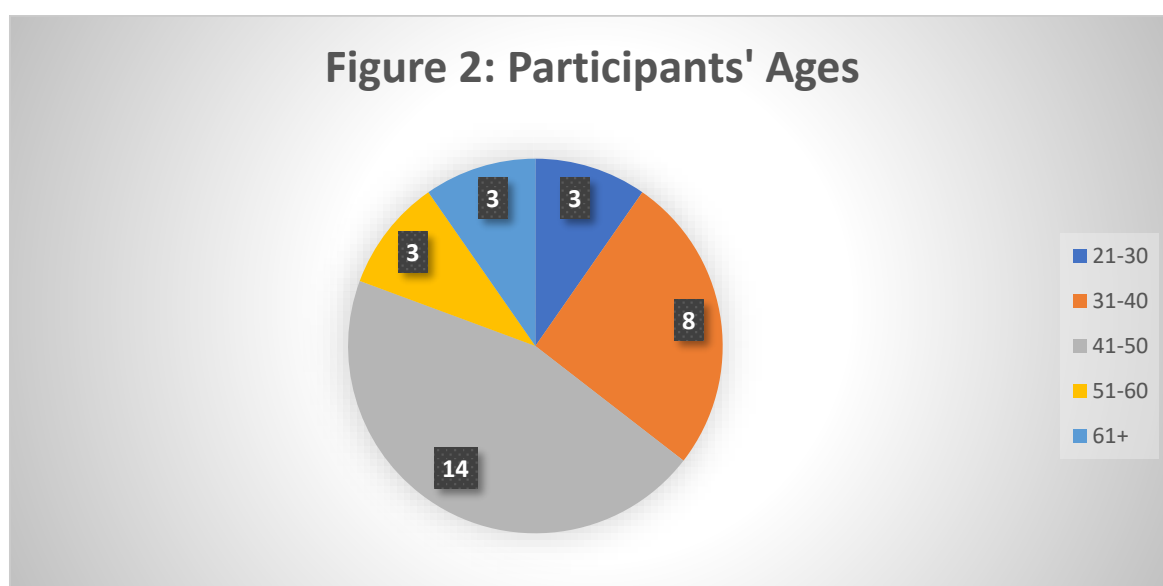
In this chapter, survey results are presented and discussed.

### **Part 1:**

The first section of the questionnaire addressed the participants' backgrounds and their knowledge of cultures of other countries that they had obtained through their daily experiences. Below are the questions and the percentage of the respondents' various answers:

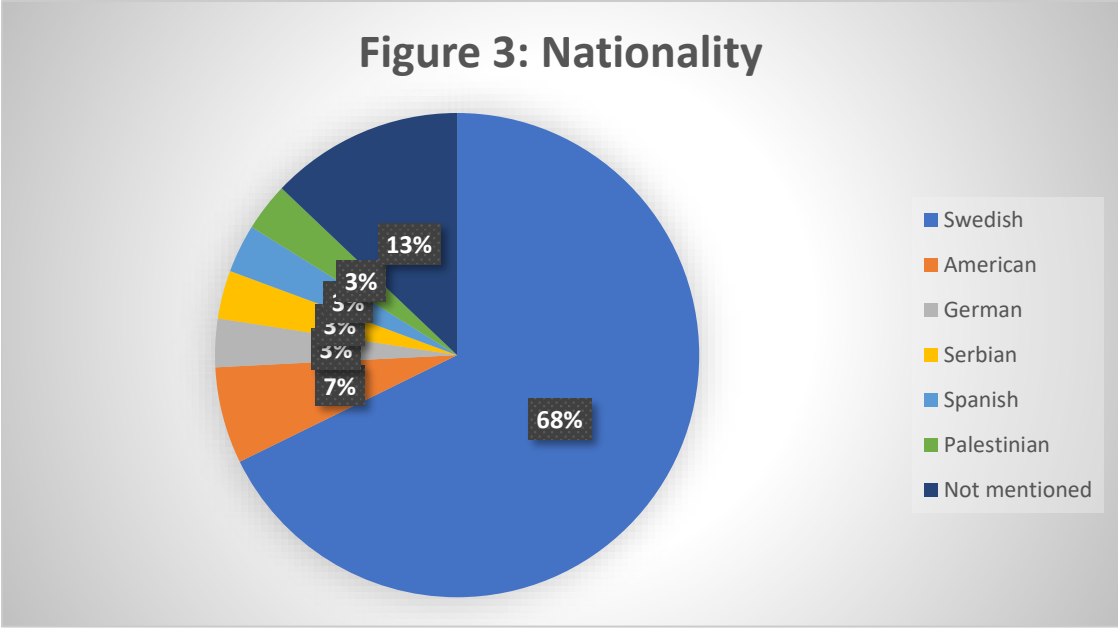
### Question 1: Which age range do you belong to?

Participants indicated their ages from a choice of five age groups, as indicated in the first question (see appendix 1). According to the answers, 14 teachers (45% of the participants) belonged to the age group 41-50, eight teachers (26%) belonged to the age group 31-40, while three teachers (10%) were in each of the following categories: 21 -30, 51-60, +61. The age distribution of the participants corresponds to and represents the age distribution of teachers in schools in Sweden according to Statistics Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2020).



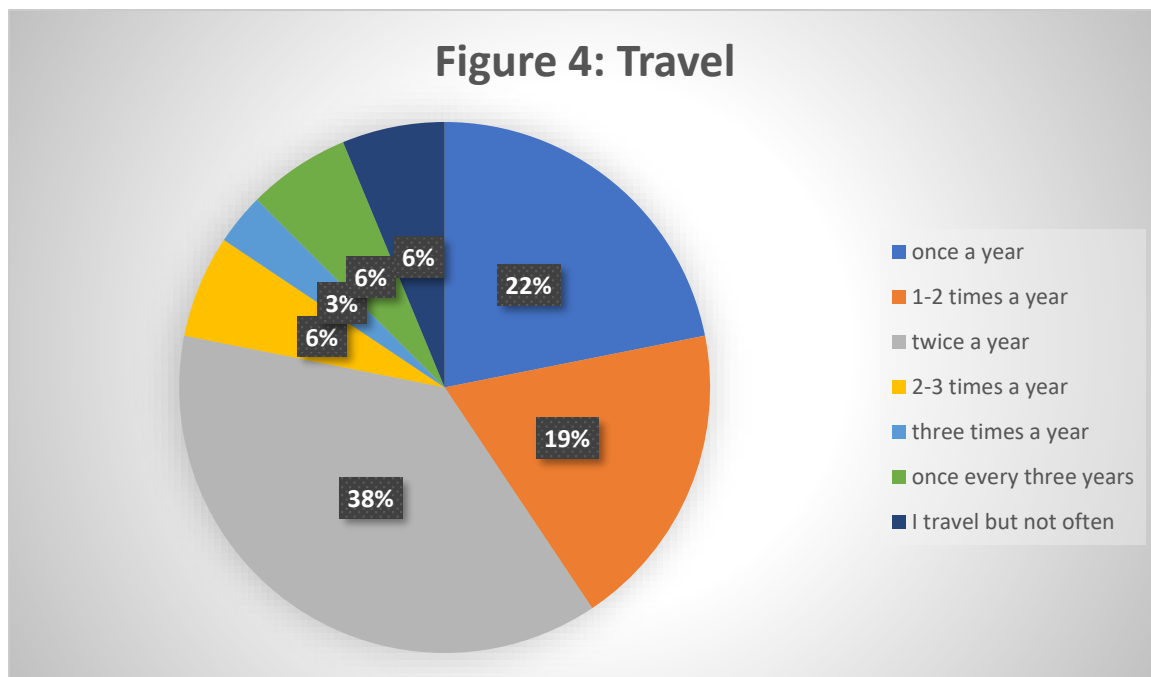
### Question 2: What is your nationality?

Most of the participants are of Swedish nationality, while the nationalities of the other participants varied to include other nationalities living and working in Sweden. Respondents from the following nationalities participated in the study: Swedish, German, American, Serbian, Spanish, and Palestinian, while some teachers did not answer this question. The following graph shows the percentages of the nationalities of the participants:



**Question 3: Did you usually travel abroad to other countries (before Covid-19)? How often?**

Participants were asked about their travels to other countries before the Covid-19 period, that is, before 2019, as travel restrictions during this period may affect the study results. This question aimed at mapping the extent to which the participants usually travel to other countries, and thus checking the possibility of their first-hand knowledge of the cultures of these countries. The participants' responses varied as follows: once a year, twice a year, three times a year, or once every three years. Some participants indicated that they travel but not often. The following graph shows the percentage of answers:



As can be seen from the graph, all participants frequently travelled outside Sweden; most of them travelled at least once a year. Continuous travel helps the participants learn about other cultures and may contribute to increasing their intercultural competence.

#### **Question 4: Name the countries that you have visited**

This question is related to the previous question. It aimed at verifying the extent to which the participants visited English-speaking countries and thus the possibility of their knowledge of the cultures of these countries. The participants' answers varied when naming the countries they visited. The results show that all the participants visited at least one English-speaking country. Most of the participants' trips were to the United States or the United Kingdom, 95% visited Britain and more than 50% visited the United States. The study suggests that a large percentage of visitors to the United Kingdom are due to the country's geographical proximity to Sweden. The participants also reported visiting many other countries, which varied between English-speaking countries such as Australia and Canada, non-English speaking countries such as Mexico, inside Europe such as Germany and the Netherlands, and outside Europe such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Thailand. The participants explained that communication in all countries was in English.

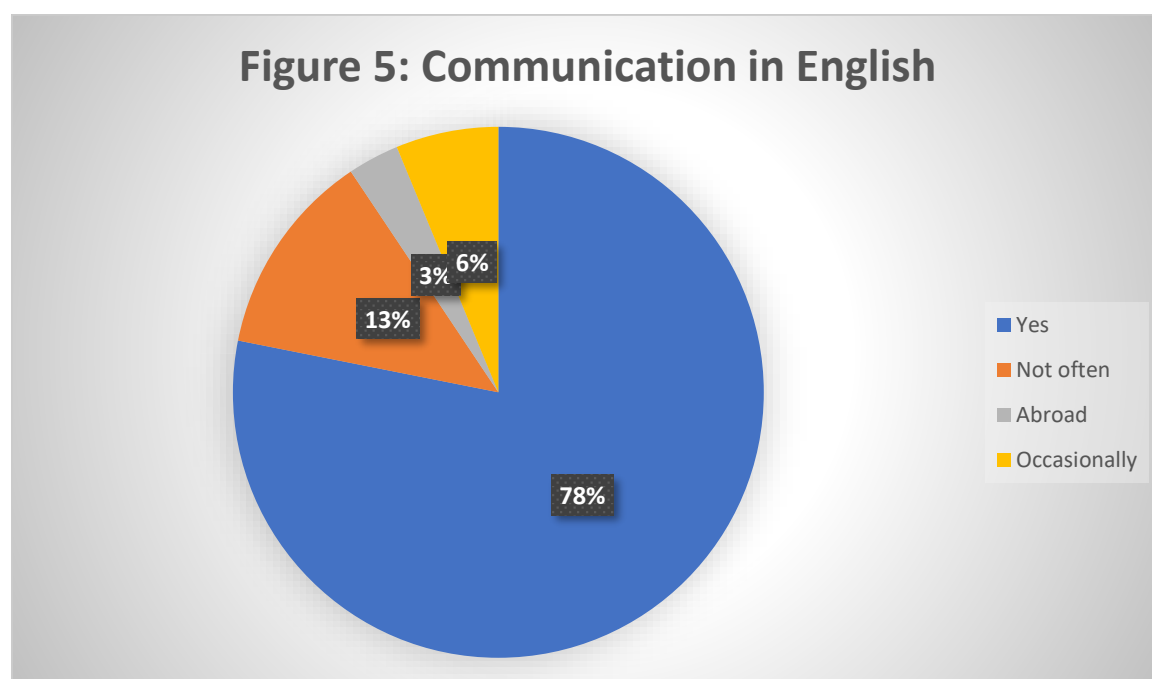
#### **Question 5: Have you ever lived (for a period of time) in another country? How long?**

According to the participants' answers, three participants had not stayed in any country outside Sweden for more than two weeks; therefore, their visits were mainly for tourism. Three of the

participants reported having lived for three to six months outside Sweden in Germany, England, Luxembourg, and the United States, respectively. The rest of the participants lived for no less than a year in different countries, including England, the Dominican Republic, the United States, Australia, and others. Two of the participants also reported staying in the USA for 35 years. Thus, the results show that most of the participants have resided for a period in English-speaking countries, which means that they have first-hand experience from the cultures of these countries.

**Question 6: Do you communicate, using English, with people from other cultures?**

Twenty-five participants that is 78% of the respondents answered *yes* to this question, and some of them explained that they use English almost daily in communicating with some people. The answers of the other seven respondents varied as follows: *Apart from teaching when I am abroad, if people do not know Swedish, Now and then, not often, occasionally*. The following graph shows the percentage of respondents' answers:

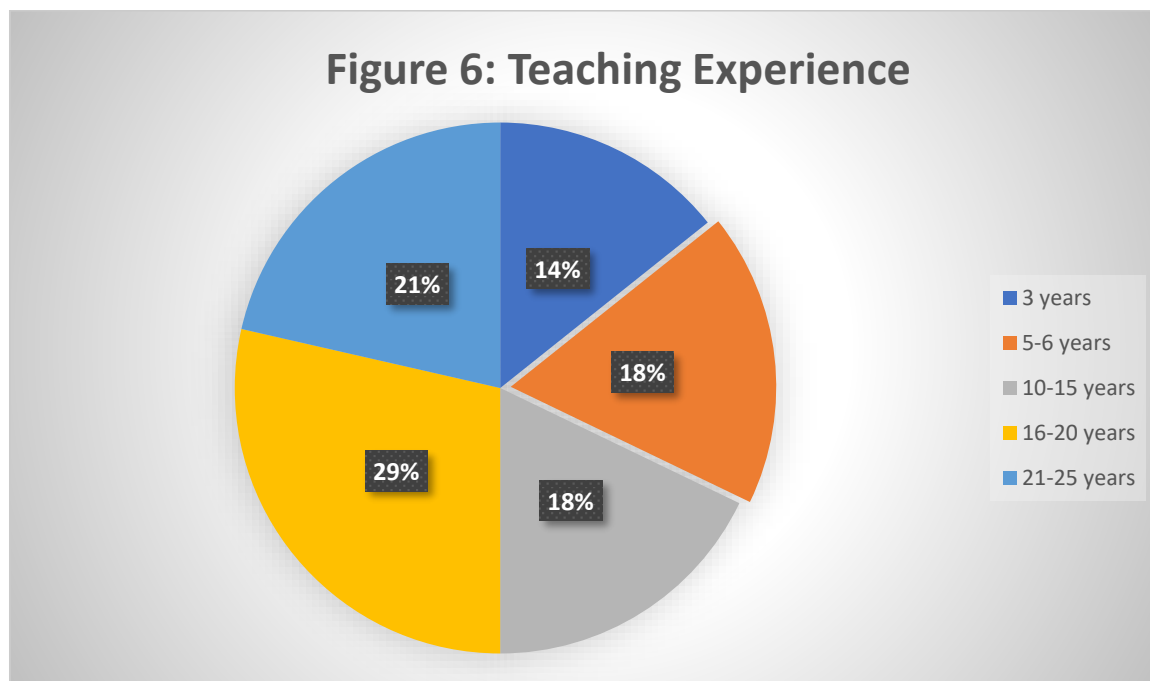


The results show that all participants came into contact with someone from another culture, meetings occurring from occasionally to daily. The answers of some participants indicated a daily communication which may include verbal, written or even social media communication.



### Question 7: How long have you been working/ have worked as an English teacher?

The participants' experiences of teaching English vary. Some answered that they have been working as teachers for only three years, while others had long years of experience exceeding twenty years.

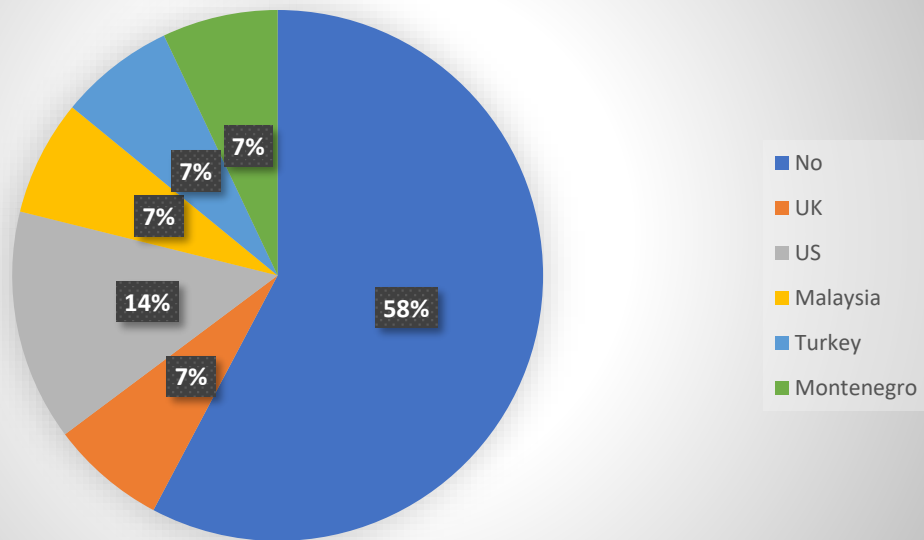


The graph shows that more than 60% of the participants have teaching experience for more than ten years, and some have experience of up to 25 years. The experience of teachers for more than ten years makes them proficient in their work (Hapsari, 2021). The answers show that the teachers indicated their views and perspectives based on many years of experience.

### Question 8: Have you ever worked in schools abroad? If yes, for how long and in which countries?

This question aims at mapping teachers' experiences in schools outside Sweden since different curricula may increase teachers' experiences and understanding of other societies. Many of the participating teachers answered no to this question. However, six of the participants indicated their work as temporary teachers in other countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Malaysia, Turkey, and Montenegro. The duration of the participants' work ranged from one to five years. The following graph shows the participants' answers with details of their experiences:

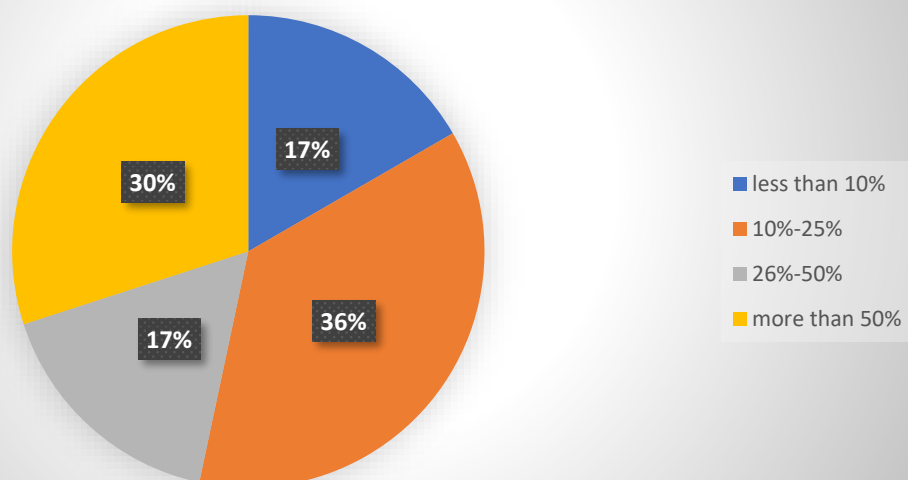
**Figure 7: Work Experience Abroad**



**Question 9: What is the percentage of students from backgrounds other than Swedish at your school?**

Some options for answering this question were suggested to obtain the percentage of students with different cultural backgrounds in the participants' classrooms. Participants chose one of the following options: *less than 10%*, *10%-25%*, *26% -50%*, *more than 50%*.

**Figure 8: Percentage of Students with Other Backgrounds**



The results show that all participants work with students from different cultural backgrounds in their language classes. These results are consistent with what Bouakaz (2007) suggested that Sweden's classroom had become multicultural. The results are also compatible with Senman's (2020) study on multicultural classes, which showed that this multiculturalism results from increased immigration and globalization.

*To sum up*, the first part of the questionnaire dealt with questions providing information about the teachers who participated in the study and their contact with other cultures through work or travel. All participating teachers have experience teaching English for several years. The teachers' experience ranged between three to 25 years (a majority of them had taught English for at least five years). Further, all participants reported working with students from different cultural backgrounds in their language classes. Gagnestam (2003) noted the importance of multiculturalism in the classroom as teachers can draw on students' diverse cultures as resources about cultures.

Moreover, all participants reported that they had travelled outside Sweden several times. Many of them travelled outside the country at least once a year (pre-pandemic, that is). The information provided by the participants shows that they are frequently exposed to other cultures in their daily lives and that they are in contact with people from different cultures. According to the respondents' answers, many of them had not worked outside the country, and therefore their teaching experience includes only teaching in Swedish schools. Byram (1997) explains that exposure to other cultures gives individuals more experiences. Still, it is not sufficient, as these experiences must be accompanied by the development of factors as knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness.

## **Part 2:**

The second section of the questionnaire concerned the participants' knowledge of some concepts related to intercultural competence and their knowledge of the cultures of some English-speaking countries.

### **Question 10: How would you define the word culture?**

Several teachers related culture and language to each other in their answers, as language is a shared factor for a group of people in a society. Some participants indicated that culture brings together individuals who might share different things. Culture as sharing comprises *sharing language, art, music, literature, or religion*. Other participants believed that culture as sharing

comprises lifestyle where it reflects *the ways of expressing oneself within a certain group, the way of life of some individuals, their actions, and reactions*. Some participants believed that the culture of a society is *linked to the geographical space in which it is located*. Most of the definitions agreed with the definition of Lustig et al. (2013) and AbdAlgane Mohammed (2020) who defined culture as resulting from shared beliefs and values that influence the behavior of individuals. Some participants described it *as the unwritten rules people share and create to make their lives richer*.

Moreover, some definitions were consistent with Riley's (2007) definition of culture relating it to knowledge and stating that culture *means knowing about the things that are unique in a specific country*, such as knowledge of traditions, actions, events within a group of people/area. Therefore, cultures may reflect *a way of looking at the world from different angles*. Some participants related culture to knowledge that can be learned or transmitted throughout history (Riley, 2007): *social behavior and ideas of a particular society that are passed from generation to generation*.

Moreover, many teachers agreed that formulating a comprehensive definition of culture was indeed difficult, and one participant only answered that it is impossible to define culture.

#### **Question 11: How would you define the term interculturality?**

Most participants' definitions were consistent with Dervin et al. (2011) and Granados-Beltrán (2016) definitions of interculturality. Some participants linked interculturality with the relationships between people of different cultural backgrounds, where interculturality is *an interaction between people from different cultures or a mix of cultures in an area, or era*. Granados-Beltrán (2016) and Dervin et al. (2011) believe interculturality denotes the exchange between cultures and the connection of individuals with different cultural backgrounds. Participants' answers show that some of them associate interculturality with belonging or knowledge of multiple cultures, where they define it as *mix of more than one culture in one person or group, and an awareness of different forms of culture*. However, some of the other participants had more comprehensive answers where they explained the importance of experience, knowledge, and acceptance in interactions between people from different cultures. Granados-Beltrán (2016) explains that interculturality seeks to integrate groups with different cultural backgrounds through dialogue and tolerance. Some participants linked interculturality to learning considering interculturality as *a cultural exchange or learning from the experiences of other cultures*. While others assured that the cultural exchange or interaction should be *in a*

*meaningful way where interacting people share a certain space together and use each other's differences and similarities to develop something, e.g., a business or community in a positive way. In addition, one participant stated that s/he did not know the meaning of interculturality.*

**Question 12: How would you define the term intercultural competence?**

Participants' answers indicate that they have defined intercultural competence in ways that may be related to one or more of the intercultural competence factors identified by Byram (1997), namely knowledge, attitudes, skills, and critical cultural awareness. The answers to this question were classified as related to the knowledge factor in the case of reference to knowledge and understanding of other cultures, such as *knowing about different cultures*, and *to be educated in difference between cultures, norms, and behavior types*. Participants' answers were classified as related to the attitude factor if they indicated acceptance or avoidance of other cultures such as *to be unprejudiced* and *to be able to relate to others no matter what the nationality*. Responses classified as related to the skill factor included people's understanding of other cultures, the ability to make comparisons and adaptation, such as *to think and behave appropriate in relation to other people's culture, knowledge about different cultures, similarities, and differences with one's own culture*, and people's ability to *live and function with more than one culture*.

Some answers could be related to a combination of the four factors identified by Byram (1997), where participants considered that intercultural competence means awareness of other cultures and one's own culture, whether in education or in the development of an individual's identity. The participants' answers were classified as related to critical cultural awareness when they referred to employing the awareness of other cultures in a practical way considering the different features between cultures *as resources, not problems and the ability to take these differences into consideration when existing around other people*. Some of the answers reflected Byram's belief that the components of intercultural competence are intertwined, where the answers included the four factors together, explaining the link between knowledge of differences between cultures and the ability to compare and communicate with people from other cultures effectively; *having knowledge and the "know-how" to navigate life in situations where you are in contact (in a meaningful and substantial way) with people from different cultures. Being aware of similarities, differences, being able to compromise and having some form of social sensitivity*.

### **Question 13: How would you describe the role of culture in language classes?**

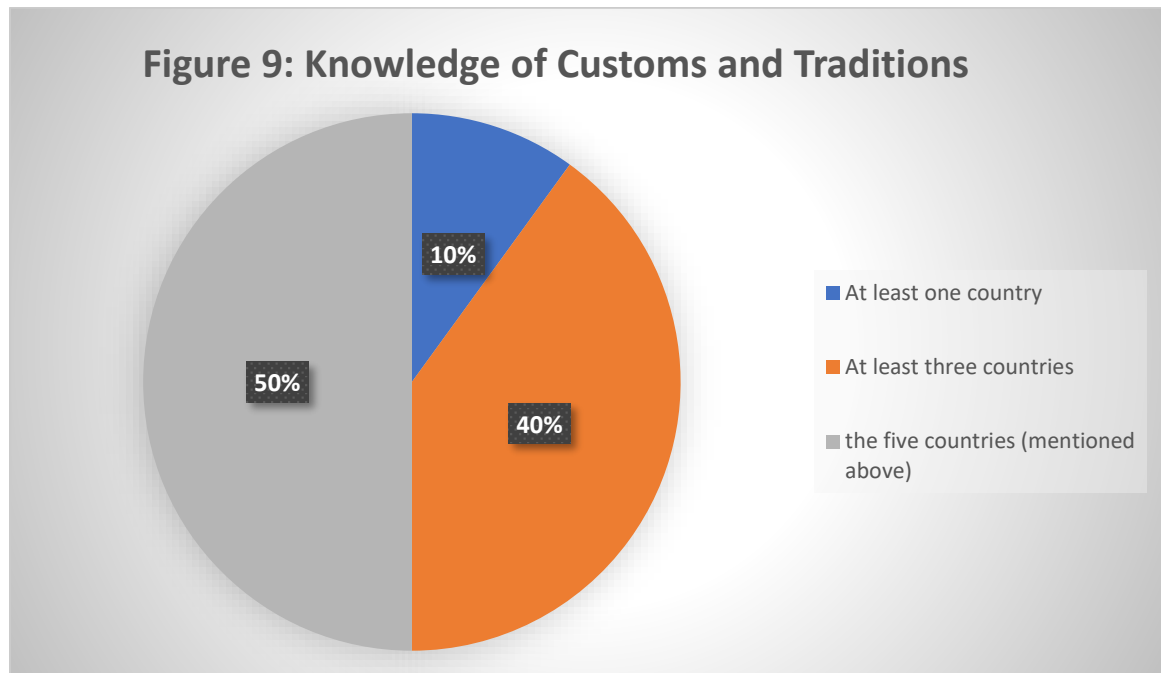
Most participants agreed that culture plays an essential role in language classes indicating that *it is very important! Language and culture go hand in hand*. Some of the answers were consistent with Riley's (2007) opinion, as the participants explained that culture helps language learners develop their knowledge of the culture of different societies. Some participants believed that culture *motivates language learners, facilitates communication, and enhances education*. Some of the answers were in accordance with Larzén (2005) as participants considered that it is not possible *to learn a language without learning about culture* as the knowledge of a country's culture helps *to fully grasp the language*. Some respondents had answers that were consistent with Wang's (2008) view where they linked English language education with English-speaking culture education. They also considered that it is challenging to teach culture in language classes because *teachers also have to know about the cultures of English-speaking countries, and it is sometimes hard to convey to the students*. Some teachers stated that the diversity of English-speaking cultures *makes it difficult to cover culture in different English-speaking countries*, so the focus is sometimes on *the United States' and Britain's cultures*. Baker (2016) has argued that teachers focus on some countries making it difficult to learn English as a global language.

However, all teachers participating in this thesis had similar views to those in Lundgren's study (2002). The participants considered teaching culture necessary in classrooms where students come from different backgrounds as *different cultures in language classes are sources to scoop from*. Teachers believed that culture *affects how a language is used*, so they argued that it is essential to base the choice of authentic material on it. Some participants pointed out how to benefit from linking culture with language in various activities and skills, where oral skills can be developed by discussing the different cultures of students and by *using the learned language to describe differences between and similarities in cultures; for example - listening to music and "translating" the words then using the learned language to talk about the singers*.

### **Question 14: If you know about the customs and traditions of the English-speaking country/countries (USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand.). Indicate if your knowledge is about at least one/ three/ or the five mentioned countries.**

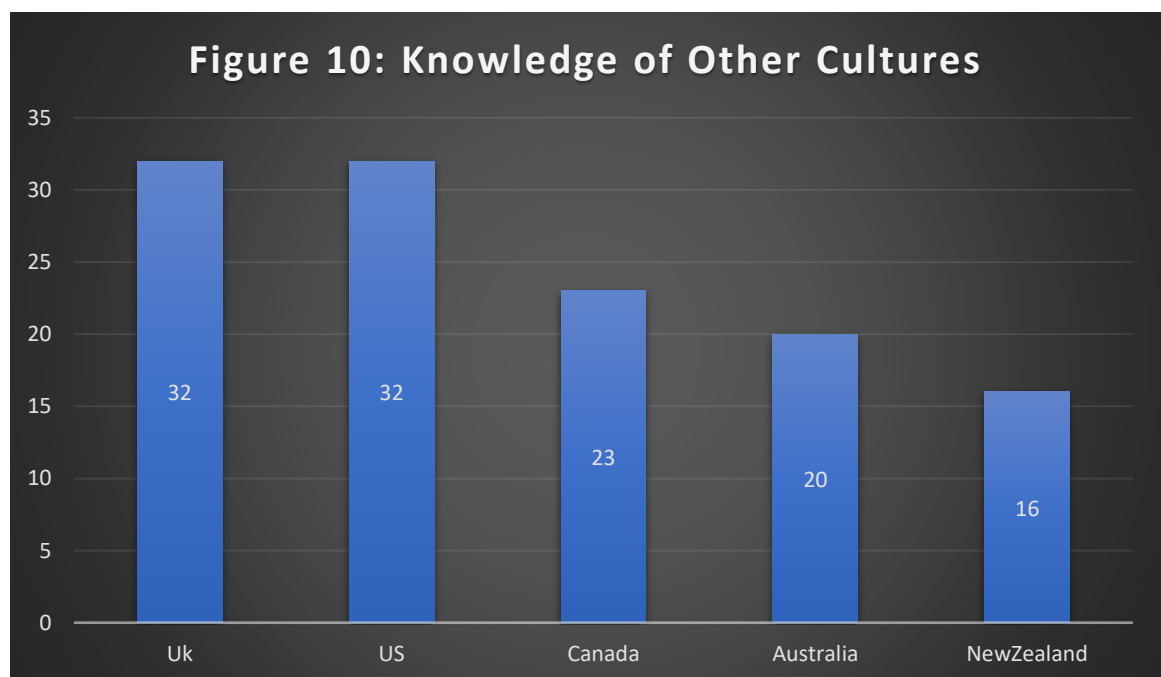
The participants chose one of three possible answers: their knowledge of one of the mentioned countries, at least three countries, or five countries. Half of the participants answered that they know the customs and traditions of the five countries, while 40% said they know about three of

these countries, and 10% said they knew about only one country. The pie chart in figure 9 shows the percentage of the respondents' answers:



**Question 14: Name these countries:**

All participants commented on this part, writing the names of the countries with the culture with which they are familiar. Participants chose countries from the five countries mentioned in question 14. The following diagram shows the percentages of respondents' answers:



The diagram shows that all participants claimed knowledge of US and UK culture. At the same time, some of the participants claimed not to know the cultures of the other countries, i.e., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Compared with the participants' answers in the first part of the question, it seems that the participants acquired a part of their knowledge of the cultures of the English-speaking countries through their visits to them, so they had more knowledge of the cultures of the countries they frequently visited.

**Question 15: Where did you learn about the cultures of these countries? (i.e. from TV, social media, school...)**

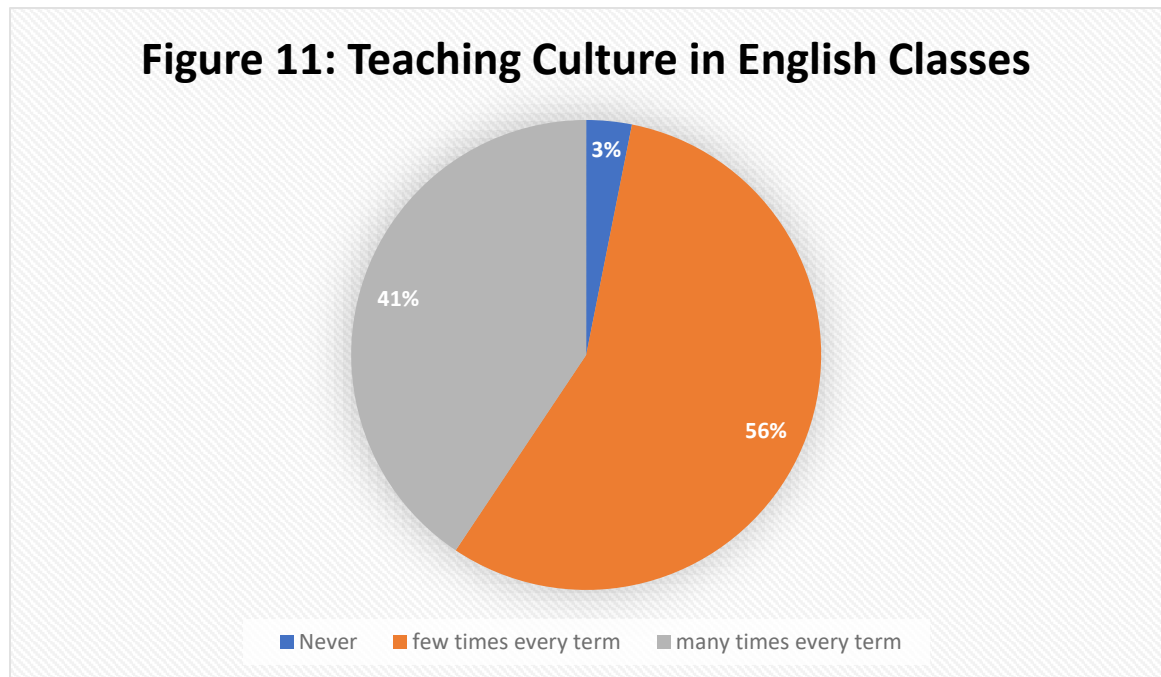
Participants' answers to this question varied, as some explained that they learned about the culture of these countries through reading different materials such as *novels, newspapers and reading about the countries*. Others reported learning about these cultures through daily activities and practices such as *watching films, using social media*. Most of the participants reported that they developed their knowledge about the cultures of English-speaking countries through *travelling to these countries or living there for some time*. Some participants also explained their constant contact with people in those countries, as they have *friends or family members living there*. The participants' answers to this question are consistent with the answers to the previous question, as the results showed an increase in the participants' knowledge of the cultures of the countries they visited. Participants also gain part of their knowledge of cultures through reading, watching films and communicating with people from other countries.

**Question 16: Do you work with culture of English-speaking countries, in English classes?**

The participants chose their answers to this question from among three available answers about their work with the cultures of English-speaking countries in language classes. The options available were *never, few times every term, many times every term*. The following graph shows the percentages of the respondents' answers:



**Figure 11: Teaching Culture in English Classes**

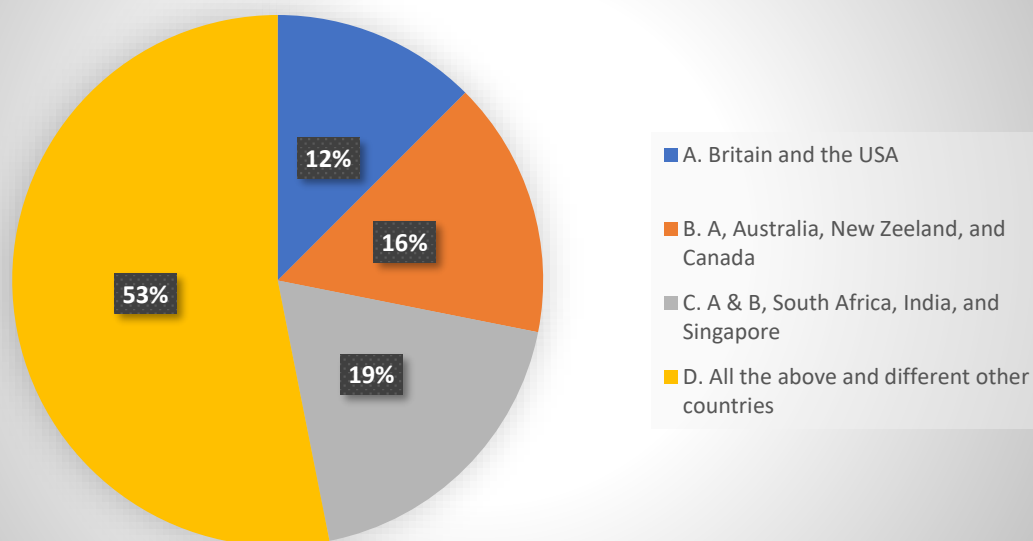


The results show that most teachers work to include culture in language classes but to varying degrees. These results may indicate teachers' awareness of the importance of teaching culture in language classes, an issue that Kramsch raised many years ago (1993). The results are consistent with what Godley (2012) found in her study already 10 years ago that teachers are increasingly aware of the need to include culture in language classes.

**Question 17: English is used as a first, second and foreign language in different countries. These countries were chosen according to the classification of Kachru (see appendix 1). Which of the cultures of these countries are usually covered in your language classes?**

The participants answered this question by choosing an answer from among the four available answers. Some of the country names were selected in the options according to Kachru's classification (see Appendix 1). The following graph shows the answer options and the percentage of respondents' answers.

**Figure 12: Cultures Covered in English Classes**

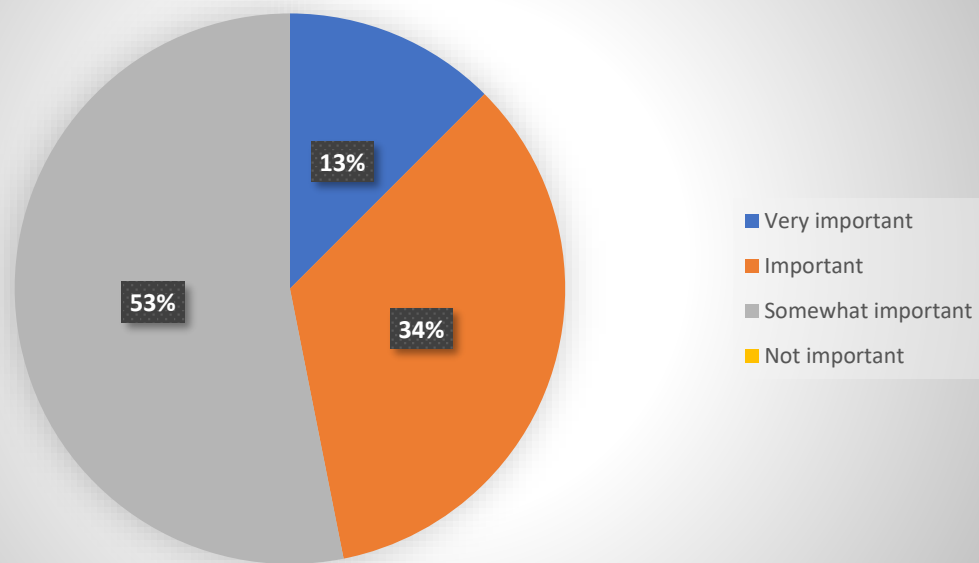


The results of this question are consistent with the participants' previous answers to Question 15, where the participants demonstrated their knowledge of the cultures of many English-speaking countries. Allred (2018) argues that teachers' experience with the cultures of different countries makes them more efficient in teaching culture.

**Question 18: How do you think the Swedish curriculum for the subject of English states the significance of intercultural competence when teaching English as a foreign language?**

The participants answered this question by choosing an answer from four options that reflect their perception of the importance of intercultural competence in the curriculum. The options were: *very important*, *important*, *somewhat important*, *not important*. The following graph shows the percentage of respondents' answers:

**Figure 13: Intercultural Competence in the Swedish Curriculum**

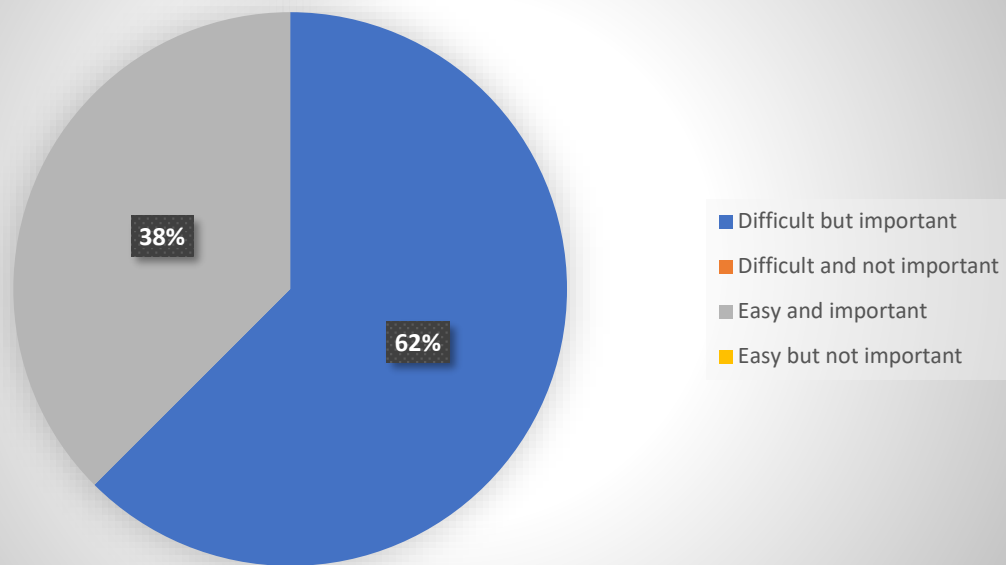


The results show that all participants believe that the Swedish curriculum presents intercultural competence as necessary. Participants' perceptions vary about the extent to which the curriculum emphasizes the importance of intercultural competence, but none of the participants thought it was unimportant in the curriculum. Although intercultural competence is not explicitly mentioned in the curriculum, teachers can infer its importance by realizing the importance of students' knowledge of different cultures and stimulating their curiosity about them (National Education Agency, 2017).

**Question 19: Do you think that developing the student's intercultural competence is important and difficult to teach?**

There were four options that participants could choose to answer this question: *difficult but important*, *difficult but not important*, *easy and important*, *easy but not important*. The following graph shows the percentage of respondents' answers:

**Figure 14: Importance and Difficulty of Teaching Intercultural Competence**



According to the respondents' answers, 20 teachers, or 62% of the participants, think that developing students' intercultural competence is important and difficult, while 12 teachers, or 38% of the participants, believe it is important and easy. None of the participants thought it was unimportant, which was evident as none of the participants chose options that indicated intercultural competence as unimportant. Furthermore, all participants chose their answers without commenting on this choice. Thus, in the answers to this question, none of the participants made it clear why they believed intercultural competence to be easy or difficult to teach.

*To sum up part 2*, the participants' knowledge of the meanings of culture, interculturality, and intercultural competence varied. Some participants expressed their understanding of these concepts through their attribution to the culture of countries, customs, and behavior of individuals. Others also explained that these concepts are related to the need to be aware of the existence of other cultures and to learn about these cultures. Moreover, many participants linked their knowledge about other countries focusing on facts about different countries and knowledge of cultural issues in the culture of English-speaking countries. Moreover, participants' definitions of intercultural competence were more comprehensive than those in Gu (2016) where Gu investigated teachers' perception and practice in China on intercultural competence. Participants in Gu's study (2016) followed a traditional approach that focused on factual knowledge of other countries without reference to attitudes

and openness to their cultures. In this thesis, participants' definitions of intercultural competence included at least one of the factors mentioned in Byram's definition "Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self" (Byram, 1997, p. 34). However, the participants' definitions varied, with some focusing on one's knowledge of other cultures while others focused on skills or attitudes. Tian argues that the difference in teachers' definitions of intercultural competence may indicate teachers' uncertainty about the concept of intercultural competence (Tian, 2013).

The results also showed that the participating teachers are aware of the significance of teaching intercultural competence in language classes. Most of them explained that it is crucial and helps students understand the language. The participants have good knowledge of many English-speaking countries, and many of them gained this knowledge by visiting English-speaking countries and constantly communicating with people in them. According to the results of Olson and Kroeger's (2001) study, participants' knowledge and communication with English-speaking individuals may explain their awareness of the importance of intercultural competence, as participants in that study rated themselves as interculturally competent if they socialized with people from other cultures.

### **Part 3:**

#### **Question 20: How often do you work with the following activities?**

This question included four activities that may contribute to students' intercultural competence development (Council of Europe Publishing, 2014). The participants answered the question by choosing an answer from three options for each activity. The following table shows the activities, answer options, and percentages of the participants' responses:

**Table 1: Working with activities help developing intercultural competence**

	Never	Few times every term	Many times every term
<b>Reading authentic texts (i.e., texts that provide real examples of the use of language in everyday life).</b>	3%	37%	60%
<b>Making presentations of specific countries.</b>	7%	86%	7%
<b>Analysing or discussing videos including cultural situations.</b>	26%	66%	8%
<b>Making interviews with foreigners to get information about the interviewed persons' cultures.</b>	80%	20%	0%

The results show that most of the participants depend for their teaching on materials that provide information about cultures, whether through reading authentic texts or oral presentations. This indicates that teachers focus more on developing the knowledge factor. However, discussion of video including cultural situations, which teachers work with to some extent, could develop students' attitudes, skills, and awareness. The results also show that only a small number of participants, less than a quarter, sometimes work with activities in which students interview people from other cultures, while the rest of the teachers never work with such activities.

Developing students' knowledge of cultures enables students to use this knowledge to discuss and analyze cultural situations that students may see in the videos used in the activities. These activities help to develop students' ability to interpret documents related to other cultures and thus develop skills of interpreting and relating which Byram (1997) has pointed out as important in developing intercultural competence.

**Question 21: Which of the following skills do you work with when developing intercultural competence in your English classes? How often?**

The participants answered the question by choosing an answer from three options for each skill. The following table shows the skills, answer options, and percentages of the participants' responses:

**Table 2: Working with skills help developing intercultural competence**

	Never	Few times every term	Many times every term
<b>Learning about the culture of English-speaking countries.</b>	0%	62%	38%
<b>Learning about the history of English-speaking countries.</b>	3%	87%	10%
<b>Presenting the student's own culture to others.</b>	36%	61%	3%
<b>Learning to be respectful and open to others' ideas.</b>	3%	65%	32%
<b>Reflecting and defining one's own values.</b>	10%	48%	42%
<b>Comparing others' perspectives to one's own perspective.</b>	3%	42%	55%
<b>Analysing critically, one's and others' cultural behaviors.</b>	26%	61%	13%
<b>Learning about shared values between different cultures.</b>	13%	68%	19%
<b>Presenting events and experiences belonging to a variety of cultural societies (music, films, literature, etc).</b>	0%	68%	32%
<b>Developing the students' attitudes of tolerance and openness towards students or persons from other cultures.</b>	7%	52%	41%
<b>Learning how to act in situations with intercultural contact.</b>	23%	65%	12%

The results show that many teachers, more than 90% of the participants, focus on developing the factor of knowledge. Knowledge is focused on introducing students to English-speaking countries' cultures, the history of these countries and learning about

shared values between different cultures. The results also show that teachers place great emphasis on developing skills of relating, as all participants work with activities that help to develop them. For example, skills of relating are developed through activities in which the teachers present events belonging to other cultural societies through films, literature, or music. Intercultural attitudes also have a great emphasis where more than 90% of the participants work with activities that could develop the students' attitudes to other cultures, such as learning to be respectful and open to other ideas, reflecting on one's own values, and developing the students' attitudes of tolerance and openness towards persons from other cultures.

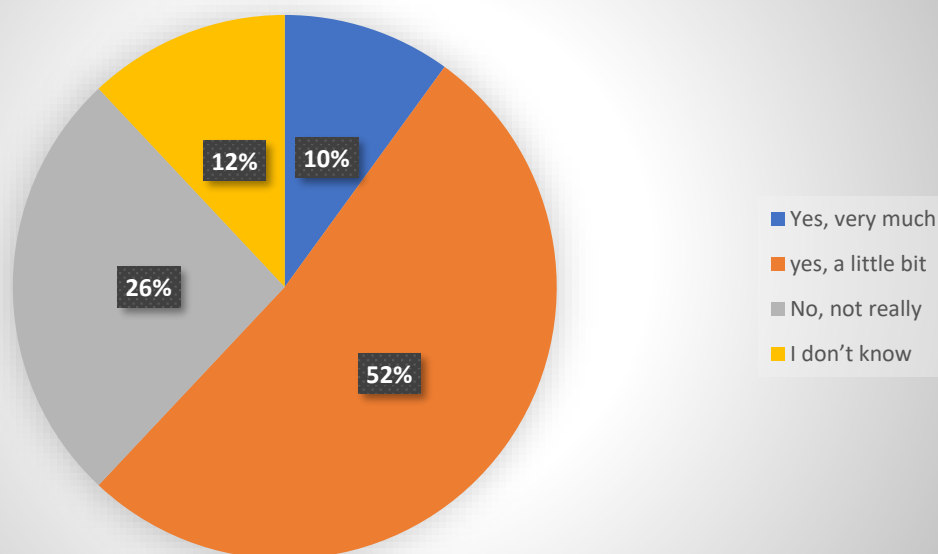
Critical cultural awareness is focused on through activities in which the students compare others' perspectives to their own perspectives. However, 26% of the participants do not work on developing the students' ability to critically analyse their and others' cultural behaviors. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a focus on the factor of critical cultural awareness but less than other factors of intercultural competence. It is obvious that minor emphasis is given to students' cultures, where more than a quarter of the participants do not focus on introducing students to their cultures, comparing their cultural behavior with other cultures, or even how to behave in intercultural situations. A lack of focus on these aspects affects the development of students' skills, attitudes and thus students' intercultural competence.

**Question 22: Do you feel that you should include more “topics for intercultural competence” in your English classes?**

The participants chose one of four options to answer this question. The answer options were: *Yes, very much, yes a little bit, no, not really, I don't know*. The following graph shows the percentages of respondents' responses:



**Figure 15: Increased Topics for Intercultural Competence**



The participants' answers to this question varied. More than half of the participants believe that they need to use more topics to develop students' intercultural competence. At the same time, more than a quarter of respondents believe they do not need to increase the topics used to develop students' intercultural competence. The question did not include the reasons for the participants' beliefs, but teachers may need more material to develop all the intercultural competency factors of students. Persons should know diverse cultural situations and contexts and be able to work in them to become interculturally competent (Council for Cultural Co-operation Modern Languages Division Council of Europe, 2001).

**Question 23: What are the reasons that may hinder including more “topics for intercultural competence” in your English classes?**

The participants' responses to this question varied. Twenty-eight participants answered this question and mentioned the reasons that they believe impede the inclusion of more intercultural competence topics in their classes. The main reason mentioned by most of the participants was time. Several participants reported that there is not enough time to include material on intercultural competence as the curriculum requires covering many topics. Others thought that including more material on any topic meant that something else had to be excluded. Several participants stated that sometimes it is difficult to find appropriate materials related to intercultural competence and that the language levels that students have mastered may sometimes constitute an obstacle if it does not help them delve deeper into different topics. Moreover, three participants thought they did not need to include more

material on intercultural competence. Most respondents' answers show that they view intercultural competence as something separate from the language skills students need to work with. The teacher's view differs from Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), who assert that intercultural competence is a process in which learners combine their cultural and linguistic identities to share with other identities they need to understand. Liddicoat and Scarino, therefore, see the learning process as an interaction between language and culture. Accordingly, texts can be chosen so that the text itself helps to develop students' language skills and intercultural competence.

**Question 24: How do you understand your role as a teacher? Choose the three most important options:**

The participants answered this question by choosing three out of six options. Participants chose the options they thought were most important in their work as educators. Most teachers reported understanding their role as teachers by focusing on teaching different language skills and making sure the students understand the language in different situations. At the same time, teachers stated that they are keen to *meet the curriculum requirements* and *pass on knowledge, skills and experience to the students* to enrich their knowledge of how to act in various situations. Some teachers explained that it is *important to be on good terms with students*. Other teachers mentioned that they discuss students' personal problems with them and *provide the necessary support*. Many teachers reported that they sometimes try to focus on the students' interests; however, the main focus is mostly on developing the students' knowledge and preparing them to use the language in various situations.

The responses show that most participants see their role as teachers as combining the development of students' language skills and intercultural competence. Many participants emphasized their focus on students' use of language in different situations, which may include situations with people from other cultures. The participants' answers are consistent with Riley's (2007) and Alyasery's (2018) views about the relation between language and the cultures of societies as well as the living conditions in these societies.

**Question 25: Determine the percentage of your work with each of the following points in your lessons:**

This question included six points for teachers' work in their language classes, and the participants chose one of four options to determine the extent to which they worked with

these points. The following table shows the points included in the question, the answer options, and the percentages of the participants' answers:

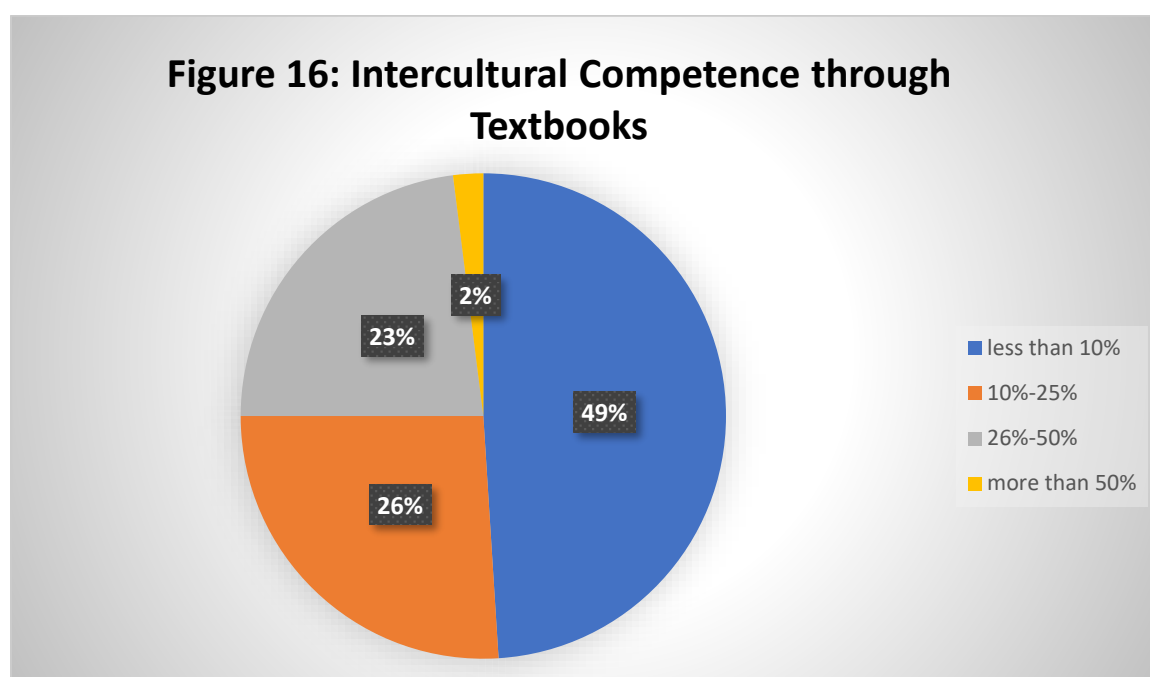
<b>Table 3: Percentage of work with different points in English lessons</b>				
	less than 10%	10%-25%	26%-50%	more than 50%
<b>Encouraging students to communicate in English in the classroom and in some situations outside the classroom.</b>	0%	32%	20%	48%
<b>Ensure that students are familiar with the culture of English-speaking countries.</b>	7%	35%	42%	16%
<b>Work on developing language skills such as reading and writing.</b>	0%	6%	39%	55%
<b>Employing students' language skills in reading literary works in English (short stories, novels, etc.)</b>	10%	39%	39%	12%
<b>Emphasizing the need to open up to and accept other cultures, even if they are unfamiliar.</b>	23%	42%	22%	13%
<b>Helping students understand and realize their identities and their cultures.</b>	36%	39%	19%	6%

The participants' answers show that they are working to develop students' knowledge and skills factors, which are among the factors identified by Byram (1997) to develop students' intercultural competence, as teachers are keen to introduce students to the cultures of English-speaking countries. Teachers also focus on developing students' skills through their use of language in and out of the classroom and in different situations. It was striking that almost half of the participants did not give much importance to students' openness and acceptance of other cultures or even students' awareness of their own cultural identities. Thus, the focus on attitudes and awareness is much less than other factors. The results of

this study are consistent with a previous study by Atay et al. (2009), in which participants in that study focused more on developing knowledge and skills than on attitudes and awareness.

**Question 26: To what degree do you think textbooks help students develop intercultural competence?**

The participants answered this question by choosing one of four options that show how much teachers believe textbooks help students develop intercultural competence. The following graph shows the answer options and the percentages of the participants' answers:



According to the participants' answers, 15 teachers, or 49% of the participants, believe that textbooks do not help develop students' intercultural competence. In comparison, nine teachers, or 26% of the participants, think that they help to a good extent. Seven teachers, or 23% of the respondents, believe that textbooks help to an acceptable extent in developing students' intercultural competence. In contrast, only one teacher, or 2% of respondents, believes that textbooks help develop students' intercultural competence. The disparity in teachers' views can be related to different reasons, such as Berg's (2016) claim that research on materials that help develop students' intercultural competence differs. Berg (2016) explains that some research focuses on the topics included in textbooks and teaching materials, while others focus on how teachers use materials to develop students' intercultural competence. Another reason can be related to Sobkowiak's findings (2015) in his study in Polish schools. Sobkowiak argued textbooks usually introduce intercultural competence

issues superficially without reinforcing them with purposeful exercises. Also, cultural topics are sometimes presented fragmentarily, meaning that the materials are presented separately from each other, which makes it difficult for the student to link and understand them.

**Question 27: What teaching materials (related to intercultural competence) do you use in English lessons?**

This question included four options about the teaching materials if any, that teachers use to develop their students' intercultural competence. The following table shows the answer options and the percentages of the participants' answers:

<b>Table 4: Teaching materials used in English lessons</b>	
<b>I only use textbooks</b>	0%
<b>I use textbooks and other materials such as extra texts and worksheets</b>	0%
<b>I use textbooks and other materials such as texts, novels, films</b>	19%
<b>I do not use textbooks and rely on various other materials (movies, novels, worksheets)</b>	81%

The answer to this question can be linked to the participants' responses to the previous question (26), as the belief of many teachers that textbooks do not cover the issue of intercultural competence is reflected in their choice not to rely on textbooks in language classes.

**Question 28: What criteria do you follow in choosing the teaching materials that you use?**

No options were identified to answer this question, and it was left to the participants to explain the criteria they followed in selecting the teaching materials in their language classes. The criteria set by teachers for the selection of teaching materials varied, as many teachers attached importance to the novelty of the topics; *materials that are current*, and their continuity with the conditions of daily life. Other teachers wanted the materials chosen to be appropriate to the interests of all students *to create a learning environment where all the students feel represented and where they want to engage in learning*. Some teachers stipulated that the topics are chosen to be good and exciting, but easy to work with at the

same time. Some teachers rate subjects as good if they help develop students' knowledge and attitudes *such as environment, race, bullying etc.* The teachers did not directly state the need for the selected subjects to include topics that develop students' intercultural competence. Still, the participants' answers indicated their interest in increasing students' knowledge and awareness of topics related to intercultural competence.

**Question 29: Would you like to add any information about your opinion on teaching intercultural competence in English classes?**

Most participants responded that they did not have any additional information about teaching intercultural competence in language classes. Only five participants gave their views, with some stating that *everything you work with in the classroom is culture*. Some participants explained that the essence of intercultural competence could not be underestimated at present as *we live in a multicultural society*. Some participants explained that they are aware of the importance of intercultural competence as students are prone to participate in different situations requiring such competence, such as *when playing an online game, having a discussion on a website, or dating*. This view is consistent with Byram's (1997) suggestion of attempting to give students opportunities to truly connect with other cultures, which was difficult in Byram's time. However, the development of technology and communications that has occurred until now makes participation in intercultural situations more readily accessible, something that is confirmed by Rydholm (2018) in the results of his study on intercultural competence in Swedish schools. The results of the Rydholm study (2018) indicated that school students in Sweden have a great deal of exposure to communication in which they share intercultural situations with people from other cultures. Such exposure may occur through various means of communication.

**Question 30: Would you like to add any information about your experience in “including intercultural competence in English language teaching”?**

Most of the participants responded that they did not have any additional information about their experiences of including intercultural competence in language classes. Only five of the participants gave their opinions based on their teaching experience. The additional information reported by the participants indicates that some teachers' experience in teaching intercultural competence varies according to the presence of students from other cultural backgrounds in their classrooms. One of the participants explained that his/her work in teaching intercultural competence is small because *s/he works in a very homogeneous area*.

In contrast, another participant reports that they *discuss it every day in class, especially as students share their diverse experiences from different backgrounds*. The results also show that the inclusion of intercultural competence in language classes varies according to teachers' practices, as some have indicated that they do this by diversifying education, where *students watch films, news and read texts from English speaking countries*.

The results show that some teachers associate the teaching of intercultural competence with the presence of students from other cultural backgrounds, so this topic is not given much emphasis in homogeneous classes. However, many teachers develop students' intercultural competence by diversifying the sources used, such as news and films.

**Question 31: Do you have any other ideas or opinions about further measures to develop intercultural competence for students in Swedish schools?**

Most participants responded that they did not have any other ideas or opinions about additional measures to develop intercultural competence in language classes. At the same time, some participants made suggestions such as courses that increase teachers' knowledge and experience in teaching intercultural competence, reading books about other countries' cultures, and sharing different opinions and experiences through *arranging special days or weeks when our differences are acknowledged in a positive way*. Some participants also pointed out the need to make use of *materials the students are familiar with, such as Tiktok, series, and YouTube*, in developing students' intercultural competence. The suggestions made by the participants demonstrate the participants' awareness of the need to include intercultural competence in language classes and the diversity of ways to do so.

*To sum up part 3*, the results showed that teachers work with activities that help to develop various factors of intercultural competence, as identified by Byram (1997), but to varying degrees. The percentages of teachers working on developing various factors showed that some teachers focused more on developing knowledge and skills than on intercultural attitudes and critical intercultural awareness. The results also showed that the participating teachers had little to do with activities in which the students interview people from other cultures, which could have allowed them to develop a practical use of their intercultural competence. Byram (1997) attributes the lack of students' actual communication, such as interviewing people from other cultures to the possibility that the school is located in an area with few English speakers. This study argues that life conditions have changed since Byram's study, as technology has provided various means of communication. Thus, teachers

can employ technology to allow students to communicate effectively in English. Moreover, the activities chosen by the participants link intercultural competence mostly with knowledge. The skills they develop in the classroom show that they are also developing students' skills and attitudes toward other cultures. The part that participants mostly neglect is the students' own culture and the need for students to understand it. Byram (1997) argues that knowledge includes understanding one's own culture and other cultures.

Finally, the participants believed that the curriculum presents intercultural competence as important or somewhat important. However, they reported that textbooks and time constraints are not conducive to developing students' intercultural competence. Berg (2016) discussed the role of textbooks in developing the students' intercultural competence. Bergh (2016) suggested that teachers use other materials to supplement the textbook.

## **5. Conclusion**

This thesis sheds light on teaching intercultural competence in English language classes in Swedish schools. It has been hypothesized that the lack of an explicit mentioning of intercultural competence in the curriculum may affect the content and methods of teaching English and that teachers may focus only on the factual knowledge of English -speaking countries. Therefore, this study examined the link between English teaching and intercultural competence by collecting information about teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and experiences. The main focus of this study was on answering the following research questions:

- What are the attitudes and beliefs of English language teachers about teaching intercultural competence in the English language classroom?
- What methods do teachers use to develop students' intercultural competence?

In this study, the results confirmed that all participants take a positive attitude towards teaching intercultural competence and are aware of the importance of culture in language classes. The results also confirmed that the participants have sufficient knowledge about the cultures of English-speaking countries and that they apply this knowledge in teaching the cultures of these countries. Teachers' knowledge and constant exposure to other cultures



explain their positive attitude toward teaching intercultural competence. Moreover, the respondents indicated that they base their lessons on the curriculum. Thus, their positive attitude towards teaching intercultural competence can also be related to understanding its presentations in the curriculum as important.

The study results indicated that the participants use different methods to develop students' intercultural competence. For example, the teachers use many teaching materials, such as novels, movies, and worksheets, and do not rely on textbooks. Moreover, the respondents reported that they work to develop students' intercultural competence through various activities that increase students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards other cultures. The activities range from reading different authentic texts, making presentations about English-speaking countries, discussing videos that include cultural situations, or meeting people from other cultures. However, the used activities lack the development of some aspects, such as the students' awareness of their own cultures, which may affect, even to a partial extent, the development of students' skills and attitudes towards other cultures. Time constraints, which the participants mentioned, might be a reason for the failure to address all aspects of teaching intercultural competence.

The results of this study cannot be generalized to all of Sweden, nor to the regions to which the participants belong. The reason is that the survey was limited in the number of participants and geographical scope. However, the results are indicators of the need to further research teachers' attitudes and knowledge about intercultural competence, and in addition, what actually takes place in their classrooms.

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## **Appendix 1:**

### **Teacher questionnaire: Intercultural Competence**

This survey includes questions for high school teachers in Swedish schools. The first part includes questions about the teachers' backgrounds. The second part includes questions about the knowledge of the participating teachers about intercultural competence. The third part includes questions about the ways/methods teachers work with intercultural competence in the classroom.

#### **Part 1:**

**1. Age: Which age range do you belong to?**

- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61+

**2. What is your nationality?**

**3. Did you usually travel abroad to other countries (before covid-19)? How often?**

**4. Name the countries that you have visited:**

**5. Have you ever lived (for a period of time) in another country? How long?**

6. Do you communicate, using English, with people from other cultures?

7. How long have you been working/ have worked as an English teacher?

8. Have you ever worked in schools abroad? If yes, for how long and in which countries?

9. What is the percentage of students from backgrounds other than Swedish at your school?

less than 10%

10%-25%

26%-50%

more than 50%

## **Part 2:**

10. How would you define the word *culture*?

11. How would you define the term *interculturality*?

12. How would you define the term *intercultural competence*?

13. How would you describe the role of culture in language classes?

**14. If you know about the customs and traditions of the English-speaking country/countries, choose one of the following alternatives:**

At least one country                      At least three countries                      the five countries (mentioned above)

- Name these countries:

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**15. Where did you learn about the cultures of these countries? (i.e from TV, social media, school,...)**

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**16. Do you work with culture of English-speaking countries, in English classes?**

Never	few times every term	many times every term
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**17. English is used as a first, second and foreign language in different countries. The names of some of these countries were chosen according to the classification of Kachru. Which of the cultures of these countries are usually covered in your language classes?**

- A. Britain and the USA
- B. A, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada
- C. A & B, South Africa, India, and Singapore
- D. All the above and different other countries.

**18. How do you think the Swedish curriculum for the subject of English states the significance of intercultural competence when teaching English as a foreign language?**

Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important
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**19. Do you think that developing the student's intercultural competence is?**

Difficult but important	Difficult and not important	Easy and important	Easy but not important
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### **Part 3:**

#### **20. How often do you work with the following activities?**

- Reading authentic texts (i.e., texts that provide real examples of the use of language in everyday life).

Never	few times every term	many times every term
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- Making presentations of specific countries.

Never	few times every term	many times every term
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- Analysing or discussing videos including cultural situations.

Never	few times every term	many times every term
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- Making interviews with foreigners to get information about the interviewed persons' cultures.

Never	few times every term	many times every term
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#### **21. Which of the following skills do you work with when developing intercultural competence in your English classes? How often?**

- Learning about the culture of English-speaking countries.

Never      few times every term      many times every term

- Learning about the history of English-speaking societies.

Never      few times every term      many times every term

- Presenting the student's own culture to others.

Never      few times every term      many times every term

- Learning to be respectful and open to others' ideas.

Never      few times every term      many times every term

- Reflecting and defining one's own values.

Never      few times every term      many times every term

- Comparing others' perspectives to one's own perspective.

Never      few times every term      many times every term

- Analysing critically, one's own and others' cultural behaviors.

Never      few times every term      many times every term

- Learning about shared values between different cultures.

Never      few times every term      many times every term

- Presenting events and experiences belonging to a variety of cultural societies (music, films, literature, etc).

Never      few times every term      many times every term

- Developing the students' attitudes of tolerance and openness towards students or persons from other cultures.

Never      few times every term      many times every term

- Learning how to act in situations with intercultural contact.

Never      few times every term      many times every term

**22. Do you feel that you should include more “topics for intercultural competence” in your English classes?**

Yes, very much      yes, a little bit      No, not really      I don't know

**23. What are the reasons that may hinder including more “topics for intercultural competence” in your English classes?**

**24. How do you understand your role as a teacher? Choose the three most important options:**

- It is important to be on good terms with my students
- I make sure that I meet the curriculum requirements in my lessons
- I try to pass on my knowledge, skills and experience to my students and use this knowledge to explain the various situations that students may face.
- I work to get the students' attention and interest in the lessons.
- I try to introduce my students to different attitudes and skills related to the English language to increase their understanding of it.
- I have conversations with my students about their personal problems and provide the necessary support.

**25. Determine the percentage of your work with each of the following points in your lessons:**

- Teachers’ answers to these questions help clarify their positions on including intercultural competence topics in language classes, as well as the extent to which teachers are working to educate students about intercultural competence.

- Encouraging students to communicate in English in the classroom and in some situations outside the classroom.

less than 10%      10%-25%      26%-50%      more than 50%

- Ensure that students are familiar with the culture of English-speaking countries.

less than 10%      10%-25%      26%-50%      more than 50%

- Work on developing language skills such as reading and writing.

less than 10%      10%-25%      26%-50%      more than 50%

- Employing students’ language skills in reading literary works in English (short stories, novels, etc.)

less than 10%      10%-25%      26%-50%      more than 50%



- Emphasizing the need to open up to and accept other cultures, even if they are unfamiliar.

less than 10%      10%-25%      26%-50%      more than 50%

- Helping students understand and realize their identities and their cultures.

less than 10%      10%-25%      26%-50%      more than 50%

**26. To what degree do you think textbooks help students develop intercultural competence?**

less than 10%      10%-25%      26%-50%      more than 50%

**27. What teaching materials (related to intercultural competence) do you use in English lessons?**

- I only use textbooks.
- I use textbooks and other materials such as extra texts and worksheets
- I use textbooks and other materials such as texts, novels, films
- I do not use textbooks and rely on various other materials (movies, novels, worksheets).

**28. What criteria do you follow in choosing the teaching materials that you use?**

**29. Would you like to add any information about your opinion on teaching intercultural communication in English classes?**

**30. Would you like to add any information about your experience in “including intercultural competence in English language teaching”?**

**31. Do you have any other ideas or opinions about further measures to develop intercultural competence for students in Swedish schools?**

