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# Literature as a Tool for Teaching Cultural Awareness in the EFL Classroom

A literature review

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## Abstract

Culture is a factor, which is an essential aspect in language teaching and learning. Despite the complexity of defining the concept, students can be made aware of culture through a variety of teaching materials. This paper reviews literature as a tool to teach cultural awareness in the EFL classroom. Using literature in the classroom and offering students the opportunity to encounter different cultures in the Swedish curriculum (Skolverket, 2011). Given the particular importance of the relation between literature and culture, two aspects have been looked into in this review. Firstly, what genres of literature have been mostly used and are typically preferred among students? And secondly, how has teaching cultural awareness through literature been approached and what sorts of teaching strategies and methods have been applied? The findings show that literature and culture have a complicated but intertwined connection and literature is a beneficial tool that should be used for several reasons, especially for developing students' cultural awareness. This review will be concluded by a discussion and possible topics for future research.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Swedish curriculum for English at upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2011) states that learners should be given the opportunity to gain knowledge regarding living situations, social matters and cultural structures in different settings and parts of the world where English is used. Teaching should stimulate the student's curiosity in language and culture. The concept of culture is a central aspect in the language classroom since the world is becoming more globalized and in many cases classrooms are becoming more multi-ethnic. Educators are then given a great responsibility to incorporate culture teaching in a rewarding and educational way that leads to development of cultural awareness among students. A survey by Young, Sachdev and Seedhouse (2009) based on large-scale of research showed that culture was a factor influencing classroom activities, whether the partakers were aware of it or not. This shows how complex and inextricably linked language and culture are, and those are both elements integrated in the language-teaching classroom.

The concept of culture can be problematic to describe in a simple way since it has many definitions. Culture does not only cover the more traditional list of facts and information about one or two target cultures' civilisations that may often be the main focus in school. It can also be viewed as an experience that is lived and unique to each of us. The categories "Big C" and the "little c" have been used for examining culture and creating a better understanding of it (Lázár, 2007). "Big C" involves subjects that are more visible, such as geography, holidays, history and arts while the second category "little c" has elements of culture associated with region, group of people, language etc. (Lázár, 2007). Nonetheless, due to the concept being complex it cannot merely be reduced to the two categories or predetermined definitions.

Kramsch (1993) talks about culture as a factor in the background of all subjects. She has gone one step further in describing it as the fifth skill, which is incorporated in all of the other four language skills from the first day you start learning a new language. Culture should be regarded as a feature of language itself, but it is often seen as a separate part from language that functions merely as information that is transferred by language. If language is viewed as a social practice, then the very core of language teaching is culture (Kramsch, 1993). Language and culture has a dynamic relationship, where language is a significant part of culture simultaneously as culture is influenced by language. Culture would not be known if language

did not exist at the same time as language without culture would be as a tree without roots (Sun, 2013). Language and culture are entwined and indeed need each other to function.

Related to the concept of culture is “cultural awareness”. Tomalin and Stempleski (2013) defines the concept of cultural awareness as a development regarding the understanding of other people’s cultures and your own culture, a growing positive interests in how cultures can both differ and connect. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) explains it as a concept about becoming aware of the members of other cultural groups, this includes their behaviours, expectations, perspectives and values.

There are multiple ways of working with culture and cultural awareness in the classroom. In the Swedish curriculum for upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2011), the importance of using variations of methods in the classroom is emphasized and this can be essential in order for students to stay interested and attentive. Tools such as textbooks, literature, films and the Internet are merely a selection of materials that can be used when approaching cultural awareness in the classroom.

This paper will have its focus specifically on literature as the tool for approaching cultural awareness. Literature can be seen as one form of authentic teaching material in the sense that it was not essentially created for pedagogical purposes. The variety of genres and authenticity of literature that exists can give the learner opportunities to receive valuable insight into foreign cultures as well as into the language used.

Liddicoat & Sacrino (2013) have defined authentic as materials designed and created by speakers of a language, often for other speakers of the same language. Authentic material can widen the readers’ understandings of what language is and create a closer connection between the reader and the real world of the target language. However, it is mentioned that what is being seen as authentic for native speakers may not be authentic for non-native speakers.

Introducing the students to problems that are important and that need to be addressed can be tackled through literature (Lázár, 1993). In the curriculum for upper secondary school (2011), it is stated that literary texts and literature, such as different types of fiction and non-fiction should be used in teaching. Literary text often offers explorations of culture through the stories told. Studying and discovering literary works can provide a chance to practice cultural relativity, the idea that beliefs, values and practices are relevant to a person based on that person’s own culture and social context. This can influence students to become more aware of the cultural differences that various contexts offer.

The main aim of this paper is to review the use of literature as a tool for developing cultural awareness in the EFL classroom. The following research questions are addressed:

1. What types of literatures or genres are used?
2. What methods and strategies have been applied when using literature?

## 1.2 Method and material

The basis of this literature review consists mainly of peer-reviewed books such as, articles, by researchers within the fields of literature and cultural studies with incorporation of teaching in the language classroom. I have delimited literature to literary texts, such as fiction, multicultural literature, youth literature, poems and short stories that are common in the language-teaching classroom. Nine studies were incorporated. The majority of the studies used are international studies including two from Sweden. The international studies are conducted in different parts of the world and the levels of the students vary from primary school up to university level. The Swedish studies are empirical studies implemented in the upper secondary schools settings with a focus on interviews and surveys with students and teachers regarding their points of view on literature and culture teaching and learning.

A small selection of the studies incorporated was completed in English speaking countries such as America with students having English as L1 (first language).

*Table 1. Overview of the studies reviewed.*

<b>Author</b>	<b>Study</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Genre/literature</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Method</b>
Levy - Barnett, D.E	The effect of multicultural literature on the cultural awareness and sensitivity of freshman literature students.	USA	Multicultural literature	121 students	University	Quantitative and qualitative research
Linde, T	Att undervisa kultur genom litteratur	Sweden	Youth literature	101 students	Upper secondary school	Quantitative and qualitative

						research
Moecharam, N.Y & Kartika Sari, D.N	Let's talk and tolerate: strengthening students' cultural awareness through literature circles	Indonesia	Classic literature And Contemporar y realist fiction	70 students	University	Qualitative research
Murray, M & Puchner, L	Teaching for cultural competency: using fiction to learn about others	USA	Historical fiction	21 students	7 <sup>th</sup> grade	Qualitative research
Muthusamy et al.	Effects of teaching literature on culture learning in the language classroom	Malaysia	Short story	60 students	University	Quasi- experimental study
Scott, M.S & Huntington, A.J	Reading culture: using literature to develop C2 competence	France	Fact sheet & Poems	50 students	University	Qualitative research
Sundown, N.J.T	Using multicultural literature to promote cultural awareness and deepen understanding of your own	USA	Multicultural literature	15 students	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	Qualitative research

Tsai, C	Students' perceptions of using a novel as main material in the EFL reading course	Taiwan	Novel	93 students	College/University	Quantitative research
Tuhti, M	Man läser som man lär	Sweden	Youth literature	8 teachers	Upper secondary level	Qualitative research

The process of choosing materials for this study consisted of firstly, searching for information and definitions of the concept of culture and literature. Since the concept of culture is a very broad concept with many definitions, I chose to predominantly focus its definition within the framework of education. Secondly, a great period of time was spent searching for studies that are relevant and appropriate for this review. The studies were then divided into three sections. The first section involved empirical studies with control and treatment groups, the second selection consisted of studies carried out with specific teaching strategies. Lastly, the third section is studies with focus on interviews and surveys.

When searching for sources I have tried to provide a wide range of perspectives regarding both literature and culture in the classroom since both aspects are very important and vital part in schools. Looking at the broader view of the topics within education from different places around the world can lead to a more interesting outcome and discussions.

The paper is outlined as follows:

- Chapter 2 focuses on the concept of culture, both in general terms and in the context of language teaching.
- Chapter 3 discusses the three aspects of literature. What is meant by literature? How can it be used in the classroom? And why should literature be used in the classroom?
- Chapter 4 presents the results from the studies incorporated. In this chapter the genres and types of literature that have been used in the studies reviewed will be discussed, additionally, how the literature has been used in the classroom.
- Chapter 5 discusses the findings, limitations and implications the studies encountered, a conclusion will be given and finally, the chapter provides some suggestions for future lines of research.

## 2 Culture

This section will define the concept of culture as described and explained by scholars within the field. Firstly, the definition of culture in general will be touched upon and secondly, how the concept is viewed and defined within the education context will be examined. The second section will discuss culture and language teaching, and aspects teachers may need to take into consideration when working with the concept of culture in the classroom.

### 2.1 Defining Culture

“Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (Williams, 1981, p. 25). The quote by Williams shows the complexity of the concept culture and trying to define it in one way only is simply not possible. Before we look at the different definitions of culture, it can be interesting and suitable to briefly take a look at the history of the concept.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the concept culture was constructed as an idea and as a socio-political notion. According to Bauman (1999), the first discourse type focused on human independence, freethinking and being creative had a strong connection with ideas on education in the era of Enlightenment. The other discourse type had its focus on creation and maintenance of a national and cultural order. According to this discourse, culture was something regular and lasting, a system of values, norms and patterns of life that could systematically be explored. A system was alienated from another because an establishment of boundaries were created. There was an effort to integrate the great variation of local cultures and identities to be built into a coherent collective and national identity that could be maintained through education, control and even violence.

Different people have given culture numerous different definitions due to the concept's long history and the complexity in defining it. Previously, the concept culture included studies of common identities, nationalities and entities. Today, however, due to the development of information technology and increased travel, the concept can be understood as a “constant process of change within and between cultures” (Tornberg, 2000, p. 60). Byram (1989) divided culture into three general categories to define it. The first category is called “ideal” and it describes culture as a state or process of human perfection in certain universal values. The second category is “documentary” where human thought and experience are recorded in various ways because culture is the body of intellectual and creative work. From

such a definition, the analysis of culture is the activity of criticism. Finally, the last category is a “social” definition of the concept. In this case culture is described as a particular way of life, where certain meanings and values are expressed in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour.

Kramersch (1995) has two different ways of understanding culture. The first perspective emphasizes culture as being the way a social group represents itself and others through materials such as art, literature, reproduction through history and mechanisms of preservation. The second perspective sees culture as resulting from the contributions of social sciences, and involves beliefs, attitudes, and different ways of thinking and behaving, shared by members of a community. Shiarev and Levy (2004), on the other hand, has tried to combine and merge the two different perspectives. They define culture merely as a set of symbolic systems that are learned by members of a society. Those symbolic systems include knowledge, values, beliefs, norms, art, language, customs, habit and skills.

From a pedagogical perspective, culture has been defined in various ways. As mentioned in section 1.1, culture has been defined as the “Big C” and the “little c”. Within the “Big C”, elements such as civilization or achievement culture are part of it, (Lázár, 2007). “Big C” can also be seen as the objective culture, which refers to culture being formally learned and is consciously shared. Objective culture or “Big C” is what people make, and then what each individual knowingly and consciously convey from generation to the next generation. It can range from formal systems of information, art, and music to less complex objects. Subjective culture is then the “little c”, which is the less obvious side of culture. Simply it refers to physiological features such as values, needs and assumptions. Whilst “Big C” constitutes the context, “little C” constitutes the process, which can define a group of people. Unlike objective culture where much is formally learned and consciously shared, subjective culture is the opposite where it is informally learned and unconsciously shared. It can be a group’s distinguishing way of understanding and perceiving its social environment (Bennett, 1998).

In her PhD thesis investigating culture teaching in the English classroom, Gagnestam (2003) defines the concept in her own way by explaining that culture is something that both links us together but also differentiates us. Moreover, culture is a continually moving process for creating a sense of meaning in our existence. If it was not for culture that linked us together, we would be strangers, and if it were not for culture that separated us, humans would be completely united och understand each other to the full.

## 2.2 Culture and language teaching

Due to internationalisation and growing multi-ethnic classrooms, the demands on teaching has changed and incorporating culture in the classroom is an important aspect of teaching in school which has also been identified in the curriculum (2011):

The internationalisation of Swedish society and increasing cross-border mobility place high demands on the ability of people to live with and appreciate the values inherent in cultural diversity. Awareness of one's own cultural origins and sharing in a common cultural heritage provides a secure identity, which it is important to develop, together with the ability to understand and empathise with the values and conditions of others (p. 9).

Incorporating teaching of culture and to offer students the opportunity to develop cultural awareness is presented as vital in the curriculum. Students nowadays have easy access to a world of information through the Internet. However, there might still be a need to guide students through the process of discovery, which hopefully can lead to the development of a deeper understanding of one's own place in the world. Young et al. (2009) report that whether the teachers or students are aware of it or not, culture is always a factor present directly influencing classroom activities. Moreover, they mention that many students have different backgrounds and cultures that need to be taken into consideration, and the on-going growth of diversity within society makes it even more vital and crucial for developing an understanding and tolerance for diversity in the world.

Kramsch (1993) points out that what we can do is try to lead the students and show them the way; rather than posit a specific way of viewing things we can instead teach about culture. Additionally, by bringing forward some aspects and elements of the target culture and putting focus on characteristics and traits that for the members of the community are of importance. Kramsch (1993) continues to suggest that teachers need to refrain from taking an outsider's view and making students aware of the fact that superior and inferior cultures do not exist. Additionally, differences can exist within one culture as well. Teachers have to be careful with neither confirming nor prejudicing on students' deeply held convictions.

Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2011) mentions at least five different perspectives on culture in connection with language teaching, and those are functional, structuralism, phenomenological, poststructuralist and social-constructionist. Traditionally, language teaching has been concerned with mostly the transmission of information about people in the target country, their worldviews and attitudes. According to Kramsch (1993) the dominating perspective was then that one's own culture and the cultures of others could be objectively observed and resulted in the fact that culture could be a social construction or the idea that culture should be an outcome of ones own and others perceptions. Today, however, the view of what culture in language teaching is about has changed. Language is now understood as a social practice, which has led to new ways of understanding and perceiving culture and language. A term that is now associated with language teaching is interculturalism and the term implies that one's own culture is understood in comparison with others. Furthermore, one has to reflect on both the culture of the target language and on its own, this is also evident in the curriculum for English at upper secondary school (2011).

One of the teachers' goals for students should be to develop a greater complexity of thinking and one way for creating an opportunity for that is through the identification of similarities and differences between the learner's background culture and the target culture (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). The significant aspect is what the student's previous knowledge is regarding the target culture and similarities/differences that can be noticed between the students' own culture and the target culture. Comparisons can lead to reflection and the core element for developing interculturality is in fact reflection as argued by Liddicoat & Scarino (2013). Getting the opportunity to see something from multiple perspectives can lead to the student making sense of experiences and developing an understanding regarding it. Already existing knowledge should be taken into account since it can be used as a base to create new knowledge.

Ruiz-Cecilia (2012) discusses a few points teachers need to be mindful of when teaching culture. Firstly, if a teacher is teaching culture, teachers have to themselves believe in multiculturalism. This is a vital first step towards the process of developing positive attitudes. Secondly, we have to believe in what we say and feel ourselves, otherwise the students will not. What we are saying needs to be in accordance with our thoughts. Finally behaving multicultural is the third factor, which is putting all your beliefs and feelings into practice.

Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) attempted to define culture for a better understanding of the concept in connection with language teaching and learning. They divided culture into two

different attributes “culture as national attribute” and “culture as societal norms”. The first involves teaching culture within the frames of area studies, topics such as history, geography and the institutions of a country. Area knowledge gives the learner the background information for understanding language and society, since its merely observation the students remains external to it. The second attribute is “culture as societal norms” and in this approach culture is described in terms of practices and values. It is defining what people from different cultural groups are likely to do and additionally, understanding values from the different cultures that are placed upon certain ways of acting or beliefs. One criticism pointed at this attribute according to Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) is that it may tend to present the different cultures as static and homogeneous, which in turn can lead to stereotyping.

To sum up this section, it could be said that the concept of culture is a rather complex and difficult term to define, but it is believed to have a vital part in the classroom that should not be disregarded. However, educators and teachers need to be cautious when approaching cultural awareness in the classroom since stereotyping can easily occur. In the next section the focus will be on literature and three questions regarding the subject will be explored and discussed.

### **3 Literature - what, why and how?**

This section will discuss the importance of literature in the classroom from the following questions. What does literature include? How can it be used in the classroom? Why should literature be used as a tool for teaching?

Just as the concept of culture, literature can be difficult to define. Encyclopaedia Britannica (2017) defines literature as a body of written works and it can be divided into a variety of different categories such as language, national origin, historical period, genre and subject matter. Moreover, it is mentioned that “literature is a form of human expression”, but not all written words can be considered as literature. Depending on whom the question is asked, the answers to what literature includes can vary. However, the common division can often be fiction and non-fiction literature.

Fiction is a quite popular type of literature used in the language-teaching classroom. Fiction is also emphasized in the curriculum for Swedish upper secondary school (2011) under central content “form and content in different types of fiction” (p. 54). Literature contains a variety of genres and Reyes-Torres (2011) states that for example detective fiction is a genre that can be an effective tool, the mystery, suspense and action in the stories can

appeal to the students. The genre can be an approach to provoke discussions and be used as a pedagogical implement in the classroom to explore different issues relating cultural interaction, historical and political moments from all over the world.

Erkaya (2005) puts attention on the benefits of using short stories in the classroom and mentions that short stories can be motivational and lead to cultural and higher order thinking. Since short stories often have a beginning, middle and an end it can encourage students to continue reading and finish it to find out how the conflict is being resolved.

Youth literature and the classics are two very popular genres often used in the classroom. Youth literature can be especially beneficial since the themes, settings, situations and characters may have a close connection and can be relatable to the students (Tseng, 2010). The classics can help us understand the past, the changes that have occurred over time and hopefully work as a tool to prevent us from repeating those mistakes.

The usage of literature has many benefits in the classroom, which Fenner (2001) discusses. She starts by mentioning the authenticity of literary texts, which is about the intent of fulfilling a purpose within the language community where it was created, which Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) also agrees on. Secondly, literature offers the learners sufficient of opportunity to discover and explore the diversity of language but also culture. It creates room for the student's own personal interpretation and opinion. Additionally, through the foreign cultures in the literatures, students' can receive an important and necessary perspective of not only other cultures but also their own culture and an outside perspective of themselves. Fenner (2001) also argues that literature does not only represent cultures that are present today since it also offers students a chance of exploring and receiving an insight and representation of cultures of the past as well. Lastly, she discusses another important aspect that concerns identification and self-awareness, since through literature we increase an indirect understanding of the world. When a text is reflected upon the reader might turn the interpretations upon themselves, which subsequently can result in enriched understanding and self-awareness.

We are now aware of the benefits of using literature in the classroom, but selecting a book is not an easy task. It is important to keep in mind what material that has been chosen and how it will be used. Through literature, students can be offered the opportunity of exploring different cultures and issues that can lead to awareness among students regarding the culture or theme in focus. However, there are some aspects that teachers need to reflect on before choosing literature for students to read. Kramsch (1993) offers six criteria to consider when selecting a book for students to read. She starts with reader reaction i.e. the teacher

should examine his/hers own reaction to the book, and “ideally, a teacher should never have to teach anything to which he or she is totally indifferent; even hating that text can be the best incentive to find out something about that text and oneself as a reader” (p. 138). Personal experience is the second criterion; it is significant to developing a personal response by understanding the experience that is conveyed within the text. What is the text trying to say? Whether it is the human experience or theme. Textual clues and focus are two further criteria trying to identify the feature in the main text that represents the theme of the book. Additionally, the teacher should be careful with not bringing up too many points to present about the text. Lastly Kramersch (1993) mentions the last two points, one is about the pedagogical format and the activities planned in the lesson plan and that the teacher should be prepared to switch it up if needed. The last point mentions how the text is presented in class, whether it is reading it out loud or giving a paraphrase of the content.

Literature is an efficient pedagogical tool in that it has a wide range of genres and themes that can make the lesson more interesting and thought-provoking for students. However, it is not always an easy task to choose literature since it may need a deeper reflection depending on what the teacher is trying to achieve during the lesson and in the classroom.

So far I have explored what literature includes, how it can be used and why literature is an important authentic material to be incorporated in the classroom. In the next section the findings from the studies will be discussed.

## **4 Findings from the review**

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the different studies incorporated in this review about the relationship between the use of literature when focusing on cultural awareness and strategies the studies have applied in the process. Two of the studies found are on Swedish schools and the remaining seven studies are international with focus on schools from different parts of the world such as America, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and France. The levels vary from primary school up to university level, as shown in section 1.2.

Genre is defined as “ a style, especially in the arts, that involves a particular set of characteristics”, in that the material has been produced in relation to a specific style (Cambridge dictionary, 2017). There is a large variety of literature, which also leads to a great range of different genres. The common division of genres are fiction with sub genres such as novels, short stories and non-fiction with sub genres such as fact sheet, biography. This

variety of genres then offers teachers a large selection of both literature and genres that can be chosen from. Literature and different genres can have many positive effects and according to Tsai (2012) many literary texts as for example novels and plays can assist as a display to the target culture and additionally demonstrate how people think, communicate and live.

Fiction is the genre that dominated the focus among the studies analysed. In the curriculum for English at upper secondary school the genre is also highlighted and it is mentioned that different types of fiction should be incorporated in teaching (Skolverket, 2011). Murray and Puchner's (2012) study used a subtype of fiction called historical fiction novel to create discussion on topics such as culture, race and diversity-related issues, through the book, *Roll of Thunder, Myriad Colors*, by Mildred D. Taylor. The aim with their investigation was to examine whether the use of fictional literature that was required by the school can be used to increase students' awareness of social and cultural misconceptions. Moreover, Murray and Puchner (2012) collected data for this research through the use of qualitative methods such as, discussions and a strategy called think-aloud. Twenty-one students from a seventh grade class in a school in the USA partook in this study. The main focus of the material used for this study was in connection to racism and the idea was to discuss prejudice, discrimination and other diversity issues identified in the book. Murray and Puchner (2012) mentioned that since the students were the same age as the narrator of the book, they could make a comparison between their environments in both at home and in school compared to make the story in the book more relatable. Within the experience of the character and context of the book, topics as socio-cultural issues of discrimination and race could be discussed. The strategy used in this study, think-aloud, is a process of reading a text out loud simultaneously as the teacher explicitly states her thoughts to demonstrate how the text is processed and internalized during the process. This strategy may mostly be suitable for students of a younger age, however despite it being limited to younger ages, it is a method that can be useful to help the students learn about "others" through the literature and thus help the students create and construct new knowledge regarding "others". Murray and Puchner further discuss that if a text or book is read and discussed in critical and culturally appropriate and relevant ways can provide students the opportunity to discuss difficult issues and situations in a safe place (Murray and Puchner, 2012).

Another type of fiction studied was by Moecharam and Kartika Sari (2014) who made a comparison between contemporary realist fiction and classic literature. The method for their research used was a qualitative examination, where they wanted to study three parts. Firstly the students' responses to the literature circles, secondly, what the students' attitudes were

regarding the material used and finally, if there were any reported changes on the students cultural awareness. The aim with this research was to experiment and describe seventy Indonesian University students experience in a discussion method called literature circles, and to identify whether the use of literature circles has an impact on strengthening students' cultural awareness in combination with the materials used. Moecharam and Kartika Sari (2014) argued that literature is a useful tool when focusing on cultural awareness in the classroom. However, they took a closer look at what type of literature would be most beneficial when the area of cultural awareness is in focus. Moecharam and Kartika Sari (2014) mentions that many educators may choose the classic books because they give an insight into cultural and literary heritage for the students, but contemporary fictions can be more relatable and far more realistic for the reader in terms of the characters and themes in the book. The majority of the students in the study preferred young adult literature to the classics due to the fact that they could relate easily to the characters and their experiences in the stories. Young adult literature belongs within the category of realist fiction and can be considered a crossover between children's literature and adult literature. There are some distinctive elements that should be included in young adult literature, "the main protagonist must be a teenager, no adult's or child's perspective or point of view, a teenager's point of views and focalizations in the narrative, a plot driven with a minimum of description, priority to immediacy and brevity" (Moecharam & Kartika Sari, 2014, p. 119). The strategy used, literature circles, is a known method scholars use in order to "increase positive social learning opportunities in the classroom", (Moecharam & Kartika Sari, 2014, p. 122). Other researches found that through literature circles students' comprehension, their higher-level of thinking and quality responses to texts increases. Furthermore, it can promote reading as an enjoyment activity among students since it involves a social networking for the students in the class. Moecharam and Kartika Sari (2014) used literature circles as a method in their study and the outcome resulted in the students learning that reading is a social activity with many beneficial factors. It developed and improved the students' skills in literary analysis but also understanding of the lives surrounding them. An increase in cultural awareness was displayed, especially when sensitive issues such as personal beliefs and gender was highlighted.

Multicultural literature was a genre investigated in two different studies both carried out in schools in the USA by Sundown (2010) and Levy and Barnett (1995). They researched and discussed the importance of using multicultural literature in the classroom. The genre multicultural literature can be defined as "books, which involve encounters, values, and beliefs of various cultures . . . multicultural literature is a representation of new authors,

particularly authors of colour, who are sharing their own stories and perspectives. Through their themes they provide authenticity in areas of identity, and insight on their cultural heritage” (Sundown, 2010, p. 16).

Sundown (2010) used a qualitative method to collect data for her research. The students were given questions to answer in writing continuously whilst working with the material. The aim with Sundown’s research was to investigate on the use of multicultural literature and its contribution to students’ awareness and understanding of other cultures and languages. A selection of different literature was used in Sundown’s study to investigate whether the students make a stronger connection to some specific books or not. One main focus of the study was to elevate minority cultures that can be negatively represented or simply underrepresented which then can create walls and barriers for children in relations to their self-esteem, self-image and learning. In Sundown’s (2010) study, fifteen students in the second grade participated, where a method named Known, What, Learn was used. Sundown (2010) began the method with introducing the country, cultures and language through the use of geographical maps relating to the literature in focus. The students then presented their knowledge about country, culture, language and theme by filling out a Know, What, Learn chart. This chart is then hung in the classroom visible for the students whenever needed. Afterwards the story of the literature is read out loud, when important parts of the story is reached, they stop and discuss it and making connections with the graphic organizers created. The students are also encouraged to make notes and write details and events from each story additionally, to try making personal connections to them. This specific method used is according to Sundown (2010) mostly practical and relevant for younger students. Sundown analysed her research and came to the conclusion that through the use of multicultural literature the students’ became aware of other cultures and languages but also of their own culture and language and exploring other cultures helped the students see connections to their own culture, which lead to a better understanding and positive view on other cultures.

Similarly, Levy and Barnett (1995) used the genre multicultural literature for their study. However, they incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods for their research. Students participated in a paper survey and answered several questions regarding the material used and cultural awareness. Group discussions were also used as a qualitative method and the aim with the research was to examine whether multicultural literature can lead to an increase in cultural awareness and sensitivity among the one hundred twenty one university students that participated in this study. Levy- Barnett (1995) argued that a method that has been proven to have an effective and positive impact on class discussions regarding a

read book is when the teacher's role is neutral in the process in the classroom. The teacher has a non-directive role and is the non-sanctioning chairman additionally, asks questions to the students in an encouraging tone so students can start to reflect and investigate on their own. Levy-Barnett discusses that the teachers role in the process of teaching can be crucial in how students response to the teaching.

Both Sundown (2010) and Levy and Barnett (1995) mention that multicultural texts can equip can equip the reader with diverse perspectives, create critical thinkers, and furnish respect and awareness for diversity among students. Despite the importance of the genre, both studies found that there is a lack of multicultural books in schools and in the classrooms. An explanation is that books sometimes contain inappropriate language, which then can be used as an excuse for teachers if they neither want to nor are afraid of dealing with uncomfortable issues expressed in the books (Sundown, 2010; Levy & Barnett, 1995).

Muthusamy, Marimuthu and Sabapathy (2011) focused their study on short stories. Sixty University students in Malaysia partook and the aim with their research was to investigate whether literature, especially short stories can be used to enhance readers' cultural understanding in the language classroom. They investigated their aim with a quasi-experimental method, with a control group focusing on reading and comprehension activities on the materials provided whilst the experimental group used a literature based approach. Muthusamy, et al. (2011) argued that language, literature and culture are the element at the forefront of literature and language learning of today, and this enables understanding of inter-racial, inter-racial and global understanding. Besides functioning as a tool for teaching the four language skills, short stories can also spark interest and encouragement among students to continue reading since the endings have to be read to find out how the conflict in the story has been resolved. Short stories can be effective when teaching culture since they convey the culture of the people, whom the stories were written about (Muthusamy et al, 2011).

Scott and Huntington (2002) studied the usage between poems and fact sheet. By using a qualitative method such as, group discussions with the students, they wanted to research and compare attitude and performances of the students who read a fact sheet about Cote d'Ivoire and the students who studies poems about Cote d'Ivoire. Fifty University students in France participated in the study and the results between the two types of literature used were immense. Fact sheet only provides data and information about a certain topic whilst poems can stimulate and challenge the students' beliefs and viewpoints.

The two last studies used for this review are both Swedish carried out at upper secondary schools. Linde (2006) and Tuhti (2014) studies focused on, interviews with

teachers and students regarding types of literature that is mostly coveted among students and what genres usually come to teachers' minds when thinking about literature. The aim with Linde's (2006) study was to investigate how upper secondary students view fiction, what requirements they have as readable material and how fiction can be used to promote cultural understanding. Furthermore, to investigate how teachers view the possibilities of using fiction to promote students' cultural understanding. One hundred one students partook in this study.

The use of method style was similar for Tuhti's (2014) research, where he wanted to gain more knowledge of the use of fiction in English teaching. Additionally, Tuhti wanted to get an insight into teachers' perceptions of fiction and its importance for teaching. In this study eight teachers were interviewed. Fiction, especially youth literature, with themes current today is quite desired among students if they were to choose literature, many teachers however felt that the classics are the genre that they might reach for first, which can be due to the fact that teachers normally connect literature directly with the classic books (Linde, 2006; Tuhti, 2014).

The conclusion from this chapter can be seen as that all the studies used in this review have come to the same assumption regarding literature as a tool when teaching cultural awareness. There is an agreement on that literature is a very powerful tool to be used when focusing on culture teaching. Literature also gives the educator room for being creative with ways of taking advantage of literature through diverse methods, as we have seen through the variety of strategies and methods used by the studies. Scott and Huntington (2002) mentions that their study "confirms our belief that literature can be used, even at the earliest stages of language learning to develop students' empathy for and non-judgemental evaluation of another culture." (p. 629). Reading gives the reader opportunity of experiencing other cultures and discussion of literature can lead to a potential growth of awareness, sensitivity and understanding of others (Levy-Barnett, 1995).

## **5 Discussion and conclusion**

The research in this literature review is from countries such as, America, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan, France, and Sweden. Additionally, the levels of the students in the study differ. However, despite differences in nationality and environments, all the authors in the studies investigated agree that literature is a powerful tool that can and should be used when teaching culture and cultural awareness in the classroom. Firstly, literature offers readers the opportunity to explore and discover the diversity of both language and culture. Secondly, it

leaves room for the student's own interpretation and reflection, additionally, literature can offer students a necessary and vital perspective of other cultures as well as their own. Finally, literature not only gives a representation of cultures present today, it also gives the reader an opportunity of exploring the past (Fenner, 2001). Literature offers the readers the opportunity of discovering, exploring and becoming aware of other cultures whilst at the same time can enhance the language development. Furthermore, learners can be offered the opportunity to discover and explore the multiplicity of both culture and language through literature.

Culture is a factor that is present in the classroom whether we are aware of it or not (Young et al., 2009) and One factor can be due to the growth of multi-ethnic classrooms and internationalisation of societies. It then becomes important to dialogue and discuss the concept to become more aware of different cultures that exists additionally, develop sensitivity and understanding towards others. Focusing and working with culture in the classroom can be one way of entering opportunities for developing critical and greater complexity of thinking (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Depending on how culture is approached by the educator, culture teaching can become beneficial and function as a helpful tool for students to become more respectful towards other cultures and people they might interact with someday. According to Ruiz-Cecilia (2012), there are some crucial aspects an educator may need to take into consideration when teaching culture. The teacher has an important role and can make an impact on the students both positively and negatively therefore, believing in multiculturalism and diversity is a crucial aspect for the teacher to do. What is being said has to be in accordance with the teacher's thoughts and beliefs otherwise, there is a risk of misconceptions being generated. Another aspect teachers need to consider is the students' already existing knowledge since, their prior knowledge can be used as an advantage to create new knowledge. Comparing and focusing on similarities and differences between the student's own culture and the target culture can lead to reflection furthermore, getting the opportunity to regard something from multiple perspectives can develop into the student making a sense of experience and evolve an understanding concerning the topic in focus (Liddicoat & Scarino 2013).

The studies investigated have researched genres such as subtypes of fiction, short stories, poems, multicultural literature, classic literature etc. Historical fiction was the main focus in one of the studies analysed. Murray and Puchner (2012) incorporated the genre to cover themes such as, culture, race, and diversity-related issues. The students were the same age as the narrator of the book, which made it more relatable for the students when comparing situations and environments. Furthermore, with the use of this literature, topics as socio-

cultural issues of discrimination and race could be discussed among the students. Levy and Barnett (1995) and Sundown (2010) researched multicultural literature and they argued that through this specific genre, diverse perspective, critical thinking and awareness for diversity can be equipped among the readers. In Moecharam and Kartika Sari's (2014) study, two different genres, the classics and contemporary fiction were investigated and evaluated. They discussed that educators can often choose the classics because the genre gives an insight into cultural and literary heritage. However, contemporary fiction is more often relatable for the students in terms of characters and themes in the book. As previously mentioned, literature can create a more open discussion and reflection among students if the book is relatable to them. In Muthusamy, Marimuthu and Sabapathy (2011) and Scott and Huntington's (2002) studies, short stories, poems and fact sheets were examined. The difference between poems and facts sheets according to the results showed that poems can challenge and stimulate students' beliefs and viewpoints, however, fact sheets merely presents information regarding a topic. Additionally, short stories can be very beneficial regarding teaching culture, the genre can communicate the culture of the people, whom the stories were focused on.

If students had the freedom of selecting and choosing a category of literature themselves, it would be youth literature. The two Swedish studies by Linde (2006) and Tuhti (2014) used in this review focused their studies on interviewing teachers and students regarding literature. Students themselves mostly desired a specific subtype of fiction, youth literature, whilst teachers usually reached for the classics. Taken together, the outcomes from the international studies combined with the two Swedish interview studies, a clear popularity of the genre fiction is displayed.

As educators we have a broad variety of literature to choose from when we want to focus on teaching cultural awareness. This wide range gives us the opportunity to be creative with our selections and sometimes we might need to adjust our choices depending on whom we are teaching. The classics will always be important to be aware of however, if the idea is to focus on present issues then books with relatable characters, themes and environments might be more appropriate depending on the target students. Apart from traditional methods such as qualitative and quantitative research methods, some of the studies used for this review have also incorporated specific strategies such as, "literature circles" and "think-aloud".

Murray and Puchner (2012) and Moecharam and Kartika Sari (2014) used methods such as "think-aloud" and "literature circles". Both of the studies came to the conclusion that these two methods provided students with the opportunity to discuss difficult issues and

themes in a safe place. Additionally, students can feel comfortable to start dialoguing and discussing the target issues and themes with their classmates.

Selecting literature to be used for approaching cultural awareness is as indicated in the studies is not an easy task to be accomplished. All students in a class are different in terms of interest and development, which teachers need to take into consideration when selecting literature. However, often due to the lack of time for teachers in teaching, selecting literature depending on every single student in the class is simply not possible. To be aware of the spread and trying to switch and vary literature in the class can be one way of approaching literature and culture teaching (Linde, 2006).

Teachers have a great responsibility of making sure not to stereotype cultures. Since literature has a powerful way of affecting and influencing the reader, selecting literature may need more critical thinking from the teacher's perspective before presenting it to students. Sundown (2010) argues that it is crucial that authentic books with authors from various parts of the world are presented for students. This gives them the opportunity to become acquainted with the variety of literature that exists. However, teachers have to attentive and remind students that one book is not representative of a whole society or culture.

Even though the studies all have positive conclusions on the usage of literature to teach cultural awareness, some aspects should be considered by educators when conducting specifically culture teaching through literature. For newly acquired learning and awareness to really become internalized, a longer period of study and focus on the subject may be required and necessary. Sundown (2010) and Levy-Barnett (1995) both agree on that their studies may have initiated a process of development for multicultural awareness and sensitivity however, for the process to really adopt and internalize the learning regarding awareness, it might require a longer time with focus on specifically the target subject. Teaching cultural awareness is not something that can be taught during two or three lessons. It is an important theme that needs undivided focus, and time is a luxury that teachers and scholars unfortunately do not always have. Saluveer (2014) discusses that despite the importance of culture in language classes is recognized, teaching of the subject has continued to stay rather limited, one main reason is due to the lack of time. A comprehensive and thorough development of cultural awareness, sensitivity and becoming more open minded does require a significant amount of time, which of course also can differ from person to person. Moreover, according to Saluveer (2014), the teaching of culture has also stayed limited because teachers do not always know how to choose material or how to use the material that has been provided. Knowing how to choose the right material that is authentic to provide the

students with the best chance of learning about other culture without stereotyping can be complicated. Educators must be aware of how to evaluate and select literature that is appropriate so it can be integrated into the lesson plans (Moecharam & Kartika Sari, 2014). When Sundown (2010) completed her study regarding multicultural literature, there were a few points she reflected upon. Firstly, Sundown felt that more authentic and insider authors should have been used when choosing multicultural literature. For example, it is important to include authors of colour and insider authors to show a variety of authors in multicultural literature. Secondly, choosing more current titles can make the process of reading more relatable and feel more up-to-date for the students. Lastly, when concluding the study Sundown learned to be more aware of and attentive with the material that is being chosen and used with the students since books can influence the reader. Culture and literature do not have a simple relationship and assuming that a book is representative of a whole society can be dangerous for students and fall into fallacy additionally, create misconceptions.

Linde (2006) mentions that it is important for educators to be aware of the differentiation among students, both in terms of interest and development. As a teacher it can be easy to see what interest the students share and criteria for what they would like to work with. However, it is important to keep in mind that there are always students in the class who have special interest or in terms of development are on different levels. To be aware of this spread is very crucial. Many classrooms today can look different in terms of diversity. It can therefore be difficult to find literature that all students can relate to. When one book is chosen by the teacher that the entire class will read can present challenges, for example the more complex stories the more difficult it might become for some students to understand, (Murray & Puchner, 2012).

Based on the evidence found in this research, it is clear that literature is a very beneficial and effective tool to be used when teaching all the language skills, especially cultural awareness in the EFL classroom. Culture can often be seen as the fifth skill and whether we are ware of it or not, culture is always a present factor in the classroom (Young et el, 2009). Literature can help to develop awareness and internal value systems. Furthermore, characters, themes and environments played in the stories can help us understand and gain a broad view of society, different cultures and people. Additionally, through the eyes of another, understanding, empathy and tolerance can be fostered. However, a teacher may need to evaluate and take caution when selecting appropriate and relevant literature since literature can influence the reader both positively and negatively, which, then stereotyping and categorizing people can occur easily.

There is a fair amount of research on the topics, literature and culture. However, more research is needed on specifically how literature can be used when applying different teaching methods and strategies in the classroom to teach cultural awareness. This is to become inspired and creative on how one can apply literature and culture in teaching. Moreover, it would have been beneficial if further investigations were conducted on the topic including the use of other genres as well, besides for the common ones often used in the classroom. The studies used for this review differed significantly in the number of participants, twenty-one students partook in one study whilst more than one hundred students partook in another study. More extensive studies can provide a wider representative view. Therefore, there is a need for more studies to be carried out in this subject with a greater variation of participants on various education levels. Furthermore, for educators in Sweden it would have been very interesting and beneficial if more studies regarding the use of literature when working with culture were conducted explicitly in Sweden.

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