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# Intercultural Competence in Swedish EFL Teaching

An Attitudinal Study on Teachers' Beliefs

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## Abstract

In a multicultural society and in a globalised world, it is essential that Swedish education aims to develop students' Intercultural Competence (IC). This would enable students to meet other cultures without prejudice and with an open mind to other values and beliefs. Since the English language today is considered a lingua franca, IC has been argued to be an appropriate aim for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. Hence, if IC is to be promoted in EFL teaching it is relevant to investigate teachers' attitudes to this matter. Even though previous research has shown that teachers have mixed attitudes to the inclusion of IC, there is a lack of research on Swedish upper secondary school teachers' attitudes. This study has filled this gap by conducting semi-structured interviews with five non-native Swedish EFL teachers in upper secondary school. The research questions of the study aimed to (1) address to what extent the teachers find IC an appropriate aim for EFL teaching, and to (2) investigate how the teachers feel the Swedish curriculum provides opportunities to incorporate IC in their teaching. The results showed that IC is, to some extent, promoted and perceived as an aim in EFL teaching. However, the curriculum was described as too vague and did not provide any thorough guidelines for the participants' culture teaching. This indicates a need for a more explicit curriculum, if IC is to be ensured as an aim for Swedish EFL teaching.

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# 1 Introduction

In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses for upper-secondary school in Sweden, emphasis should not only be on teaching lexical skills, but also on exposing students to different cultural issues (Skolverket, 2011b). This is stated in the Swedish EFL curriculum for the upper secondary level. More specifically, the curriculum states that teachers should incorporate “cultural features” in their EFL teaching, and that students should be given the opportunity to discuss and reflect upon different cultures that exist in the English speaking world (Skolverket, 2011b).

Even though culture is treated to some extent in the curriculum, it could be argued to quite vaguely define how this should be dealt with in the classroom. Firstly, there is no definition of what “cultural features” actually are. Furthermore, it gives no explanation for exactly how and which issues should be included. Moreover, culture is not treated in the criteria for assessment. Since there is no explicit understand of cultural issues that students should have attained by the end of an EFL course, culture could be argued to be an even more difficult aspect for teachers to deal with. Lastly, no explicit and specific purpose is mentioned in the curriculum, regarding why students should be exposed to cultural features.

Despite the lack of clarity given in the curriculum, the treatment of culture is to some extent clarified in the curriculum’s commentary material. Here, Skolverket (2011a) explains the term “cultural features” refers to both cultural expressions, such as literature and art, but also to values, approaches, and behaviour in communication, shared by different groups of people. In this material, Skolverket (2011a) further explains that the treatment of culture should not only call for cultural features bound to nationality level, but also the many other contexts in which English is used (Skolverket, 2011a). Lastly, the commentary material mentions the term Intercultural Competence (IC) as a relevant term in relation to culture in EFL courses (Skolverket, 2011a). Even though IC is mentioned in the material, and could therefore be perceived as an aim for EFL courses, no concrete recommendations are given to teachers regarding IC. Lastly, it is not explained whether IC actually should be incorporated in Swedish EFL teaching.

According to the Council of Europe (2001), who argues for the importance of IC in Foreign Language (FL) teaching, IC refers to the ability to critically reflect upon cultural issues, and to be open-minded towards cultures and values that are shared by different groups of people (Council of Europe, 2001, p.103-105). In conclusion, the assumption is that having intercultural awareness and competence would ensure respectful communication between

people who belong to different cultures (Council of Europe, 2001, p.103-105). Furthermore, IC aims to acknowledge the complexity inherent in a cultural identity. Instead of seeing cultural identity as something bound to one's nationality, it acknowledges that cultural identity acknowledges the different social groups that an individual belongs to (Tornberg, 2009). Hence, having an intercultural competence would allow seeing beyond national stereotypes. Developing IC would consequently lead students to see that more factors than nationality has influence on people's beliefs, values and traditions.

In a globalised society, and where English is used worldwide, it could be argued that there is a greater need for this skill (Tornberg, 2009). Supposedly, our students will not only communicate in English when visiting the English speaking world, but also when communicating with other non-native speakers, in non-native speaker contexts (Nault, 2006, p. 318). Hence, English will most likely be the language used when our students encounter different cultures. Therefore, to focus on promoting IC in EFL courses could be argued to correlate with the lingua franca role of the English language today.

A great number of attitudinal studies on teachers' perceptions of IC argue that this is an important skill to develop in foreign language teaching. However, some negative attitudes to it have also been identified. Firstly, it has been reported that teachers find it dangerous to let students reflect on and discuss cultures, because they have concern about facing racist opinions in classroom discussions (Young & Sachdev, 2011; Larzén-Östermark, 2008). Secondly, some teachers find that IC is not appropriate for EFL teaching and should, rather, be promoted in instruction on communicative situations outside of the EFL classroom (Young & Sachdev, 2011). Lastly, some research shows that some EFL teachers think that IC is irrelevant to their teaching since there is no emphasis on culture teaching in their country's English curriculum (Young & Sachdev, 2011).

However, no research has been conducted in the Swedish EFL upper secondary context. Yet, if IC is a skill that should be promoted in EFL teaching, as is argued by the Council of Europe (2001) it is worth looking into Swedish upper secondary teachers' attitudes towards including it as an aim in their EFL courses. Furthermore, since IC is mentioned in the curriculum's commentary material, it is worth looking at how the Swedish EFL curriculum for upper secondary level provides opportunities for promoting IC, and how this is perceived by Swedish EFL teachers.

## 1.1 Intercultural Competence

In this section, I will first define and explain the concept of IC by presenting the three parts that IC consists of. Furthermore, I will discuss the relevance of incorporating IC in EFL teaching. It is, first, worth mentioning that IC is sometimes also referred to as Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) (Baker, 2015). However, in this text the shorter term, IC, will be used. This is because this is the term used in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and also in the majority of the literature which has served as a foundation for this study.

Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002) describes IC as consisting of three parts; knowledge, attitudes and skills (p.6). For someone to be described as intercultural competent and to be able to communicate respectfully in cross-cultural encounters, they must have mastery of all components. The knowledge needed, as Byram et al. (2002, p.7) describe it, is the facts about different cultural issues and processes. The attitudes refer to being positive and having an open mind towards meeting new cultures (Byram et al., 2002, p.6). Byram et al. (2002) argue that IC will never be achieved without having a positive attitude towards encountering new cultures, which makes this component essential for a learner's IC development. The skills needed refer to being able to engage with another culture by comparing and contrasting it to one's own culture (Byram et al., 2002, p.7). It also refers to the ability to apply attained information and knowledge about the new culture to one's communication practice (Byram et al., 2002, p.7). This means taking into consideration customs, values and beliefs of a certain culture in order to communicate respectfully and more understandingly when encountering people who belong to that specific culture.

In light of Byram et al.'s (2002) description of IC it is, furthermore, worth discussing the aim and relevance of IC to EFL teaching. In the CEFR it is mentioned that in communicative situations, there is a distance between the speaker and interlocutor (Council of Europe, 2001). This distance could be due to an information gap between the two communicators, or it could be due to a gap which is caused by differences in beliefs and values (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 51). It is argued that there is a need for learners to be able to understand the "*mental context*" of their interlocutor in order to decrease the distance between them when communicating (Council of Europe, 2001, p.51). When it comes to the type of gap related to values and beliefs, learners' IC helps them to decrease that distance between themselves and their interlocutor (Council of Europe, 2001, p.51).

Hence, IC gives the language user the possibility of meeting the interlocutor and the

interlocutor's cultural identity with an open mind and with greater understanding in communicative situations (Council of Europe, 2001). It helps the learners to understand the mental context of the interlocutor, since IC is based on the awareness of how cultures are portrayed from an outsider perspective. Furthermore, IC is based on the awareness that national stereotypes have an impact on our preconceptions in communicative situations with other people (Council of Europe, 2001, s.103). This awareness hence gives the possibility of acting and communicating beyond national stereotypes and preconceptions, instead of seeing people as products of a national culture.

The traditional cultural approach in FL teaching has been argued to see culture as something static and as a product, which supposes that culture is something that does not change (Sundberg, 2009, p.112). Seeing culture as a product, hence, makes it easier draw broader generalisations about a group of people. It also supposes that culture is something that could be "taught" by providing students with cultural facts, since it is perceived as static and non-nuanced (Sundberg, 2009, p.112). This approach to culture could be argued to foster a stereotypical mind-set and could create a problematic perception of an individual coming from a specific cultural group. In contrast, seeing culture as a process, where there is a belief that culture is something that is created when interacting with other people, one could assume a greater openness and willingness to understand one's interlocutor (Sundberg, 2009, p.112). Sundberg (2009) means that seeing culture as a process argues for the notion that culture does not simply exist as a static phenomenon. Instead, culture is perceived as something that is constructed in communication between two individuals (p.112). This approach to culture is preferred when trying to make students achieve IC, since it is based on the idea of making individuals able to communicate respectfully and to create a willingness to understand one another (Sundberg, 2009).

Moreover, the traditional approach to culture in EFL teaching has been argued to increase learners' knowledge of national cultures, with emphasis on the Anglo-American one (Nault, 2006, p.316). Nault (2006) argues that EFL teaching should no longer merely expose students to cultural issues from the "original" native speaking countries, which he refers to as the previous "owners" of the English language, as for instance Great Britain and the US (p.320). Instead, he means that it is necessary for students to see the many varieties and nuances in the cultures in which the English language is used (Nault, 2006, p.317, 318).

He emphasises that EFL teaching should focus on cultural issues from the English speaking world, and on having an international approach (Nault, 2006). When discussing the English speaking world he refers to countries such as India and South Africa, which today are



perceived as native speaking countries, even though they do not get as much space as the “original” native speaking countries in EFL teaching. He further argues, following Alptekin (2002), that focusing on cultural issues of the native speaker is both irrelevant and furthermore impossible, since it does not reflect the spread and the global usage of the English language (Alptekin, 2002; Nault, 2006). In a globalised world where English is widely used as medium of communication, it would be irrelevant to merely focus on, for instance, British or US cultures (Nault, 2006, p. 317). It is necessary to take into consideration the fact that students will most likely engage in English communication in the English speaking world and also in non-native contexts, instead of “original” native contexts (Nault, 2006, p. 317).

In light of what has been discussed, instead of having an approach to working with culture where emphasis is on the original native speaking countries, Alptekin (2002) argues for teaching culture with an aim to make students achieve IC. This is also highlighted by Nault (2006, p.320) who believes this would be a more relevant aim, since it takes into consideration the variety of cultures and communicative situations in which learners might encounter the English language. Having IC as an aim would also highlight how cultures are not merely determined by nationality.

In the following sections, the text will at certain points discuss “native speaking countries”. This refers to what Nault (2006) describes as the “original” native speaking countries, as for instance the US and Great Britain. Furthermore, when discussing the “English speaking world”, this will henceforth refer to *all* the countries where English is either spoken as an official, first or second language.

## 1.2 Aim and Research Questions

Since IC is considered to be a skill worth promoting in EFL teaching (Council of Europe, 2001; Nault, 2006; Alptekin, 2002; Byram et Al, 2002), this study aims to investigate what role IC has in Swedish EFL courses. Furthermore, this study aims to investigate teachers’ perceptions of how well the Swedish EFL curriculum provides opportunities for the incorporation of IC. Hence, this study aims to answer two main questions.

The first question aims to investigate Swedish EFL teachers’ attitudes to culture teaching and IC, in an upper secondary context. Teachers’ attitudes to culture teaching have been carefully studied in other countries, and findings have shown both positive and negative attitudes to the incorporation of IC in the EFL classroom (Sercu, 2005; Sercu, 2006; Young & Sachdev, 2011; Göbel & Helmke, 2010; Larzén-Östermark, 2008). However, there is a lack of

research on Swedish EFL teachers' attitudes to IC. It could therefore be argued relevant to investigate what attitudes Swedish EFL teachers have on the matter, and to what extent the promotion of IC is present in their EFL teaching.

The second question aims to investigate what Swedish EFL teachers' attitudes are to the Swedish EFL curriculum. The focus will be on what possibilities the curriculum creates for EFL culture teaching, and IC incorporation. Even though a few Swedish teachers have been interviewed regarding the curriculum in relation to IC (Byram, 2014; Sercu, 2006), there is a need for further investigation to establish how Swedish EFL teachers perceive the curriculum and what possibilities they think it creates for their culture teaching. With these two main points in mind, the questions of this study are:

1. To what degree is Intercultural Competence (IC) an appropriate aim for EFL learning according to a select group of Swedish EFL teachers?
2. How do these EFL teachers perceive the Swedish English curriculum, in terms of creating possibilities to incorporate IC in their teaching?

## 2 Literature Review

In this section, I will review the literature on teachers' attitudes towards culture teaching, and on teachers' attitudes to working with IC in the EFL classroom. Furthermore, I will discuss research that examines different countries' curricula and teachers' attitudes towards their EFL curriculum in terms of how it creates opportunities for incorporating IC in EFL courses.

### 2.1 Teachers' attitudes to addressing culture in the EFL classroom

By looking at a number of studies on teachers' attitudes towards culture teaching, it becomes evident that there is consensus amongst teachers that culture is an important issue to incorporate in language teaching (Lessard-Clouston, 1996; Bayyurt, 2006; Luk, 2012; Karabinar & Guler, 2012). However, it has been reported that many teachers exclude culture teaching from their practices due to a number of issues. For instance, it has been reported that teachers do not feel sufficiently prepared or trained to present the target culture in their language teaching (Lessard-Clouston, 1996; Bayyurt, 2006; Luk, 2012). In addition, the exclusion of culture teaching has been argued to depend on students' lack of motivation to culture learning (Lessard-Clouston, 1996; Bayyurt, 2006).

This was indicated in one of the earlier studies conducted in the field by Lessard-Clouston (1996). He conducted a study in China with 16 EFL middle school teachers, in which he used both a survey and interviews in order to get the teachers' attitudes to culture teaching (Lessard-Clouston, 1996). The study revealed that amongst the participating teachers, 50% reported that they scarcely included culture in their EFL courses, and that 19% of the teachers did not include culture teaching at all (Lessard-Clouston, 1996, p. 207). However, his investigation also showed that about 69% of the participants considered culture teaching "very important", and that 31% found culture "important" (Lessard-Clouston, 1996, p. 213).

These findings revealed a gap between the teachers' attitudes to culture teaching and their self-reported practices on the matter. Even though the teachers had a positive attitude to including culture and found it to be important, many did not actually include it in their teaching (Lessard-Clouston, 1996). However, the reason for why half of the participating teachers did not include culture was not clarified in the study. Yet, 19% of the teachers argued that students lack the motivation to learn about the target culture (Lessard-Clouston, 1996, p.209). This was further specified by one of the teachers, who argued that students in

China focus more on passing their English exams, and see culture learning as irrelevant (Lessard-Clouston, 1996, p.209). Hence, this could be a potential reason for why teachers chose to exclude culture from their EFL teaching, at least in this context.

As mentioned earlier, teachers' attitudes to culture teaching seem to be mixed. Even though the participants, in Lessard-Clouston's (1996) study, reported that they did find culture to be an important aspect to include, many also reported that it was not included in their teaching, and that they experienced some difficulties with culture teaching.

This ambivalence to culture teaching was also noticed by Bayyurt (2006), who conducted an interview study in Turkey with 12 non-native EFL teachers. It was reported in the study that the majority of the participating teachers found culture important to include in EFL courses (Bayyurt, 2006). According to Bayyurt (2006), the teachers perceived culture and language as closely linked to one another, which consequently meant that they found culture relevant to include in a language classroom (Bayyurt, 2006 p.289). However, the study also revealed negative attitudes amongst teachers regarding the teaching of culture. For instance, Bayyurt (2006) reported that some teachers did not feel that culture should be included if it did not correlate with students' motivation (p.242). Moreover, some teachers in the study reported that they did not feel that they, as non-native speakers of English, had enough knowledge of the target culture to successfully teach it (Bayyurt, 2006, p. 242).

This finding, discovered by Bayyurt (2006), could suggest that non-native EFL teachers feel limited because they have not experienced the target culture as a native EFL teacher has. A similar discovery was made in a study carried out by Luk (2012, p.251), who conducted a study where she used semi-structured interviews with 12 upper-secondary EFL teachers in Hong Kong (Luk, 2012). The participants in the study were both native and non-native speakers of English (Luk, 2012, p.252). The non-natives teachers in the study reported in the interviews that they experienced a certain disadvantage in terms of discussing and presenting culture in the classroom, in comparison to the native speaker teachers (Luk, 2012, p.259). This perception amongst the non-native speakers was reported to be grounded on not feeling sufficiently proficient in English to introduce and discuss more complex cultural issues, as for instance cultural ideologies (Luk, 2012, p.259). Still, they felt prepared to provide students with information on cultures, but their language proficiency caused limitations for discussing cultures in the classroom (Luk, 2012, p.259).

In light of the previously discussed studies, it could be argued that there is a belief amongst teachers that there is a type of native speaking culture which is supposed to be taught in the EFL classroom. This was, for instance, indicated by the non-native teachers in

Bayyurt's (2006) study who felt limited because of their lack of knowledge of the target culture, since being non-natives. This was also expressed in Lessard-Clouston's (1996) study, where the interviewees often referred to the English target culture as the culture found in the US and Canada (p.213). One of the teachers stated that these were the countries that were connected to the English language, and were therefore the countries whose customs should be learned in order to function in English communicative situations (Lessard-Clouston, 1996, p. 213). This implies that there is a conception amongst some teachers that culture is bound to nationality, and that the culture which is perceived to be English is the Anglo-Saxon culture (Alptekin, 2002; Nault, 2006). The rest of the English speaking world and the variety of existing cultures, hence, seem to have been disregarded in some teachers' approach to culture teaching.

It is also possible to say that this view of culture teaching, where focus lies on the native-speaking countries, correlates with a certain purpose of culture teaching which has been expressed in some of the previously discussed studies (Bayyurt, 2012; Lessard-Clouston, 1996). For instance, some teachers argued that culture is merely a necessary aspect to include for going to the native-speaking countries and having to engage with that specific culture (Bayyurt, 2012, p.240; Lessard-Clouston, 1996, p.213). Hence, these findings give the idea that teachers' main purpose of culture teaching is to help students in becoming native speakers of the English language (Nault, 2006; Alptekin, 2002). It could be argued that using culture teaching as a means to increase students' intercultural awareness and competence is non-prioritised, and is to a great extent disregarded. Instead of teaching culture with the aim of making students communicate respectfully on an international level, the main focus is on making students communicate in the native speaking countries.

## 2.2 Teachers' attitudes to addressing IC in the EFL classroom

In contrast to the conclusion that was made in the previous section, a number of studies that have researched teachers' attitudes have concluded that IC is an aim in language teaching (Karabinar & Guler, 2012, Sercu, 2006).

For instance, IC was found as an objective for language teaching according to Karabinar and Guler (2012), who conducted interviews with six FL teachers in Turkey. In the study, Karabinar and Guler (2012) drew the conclusion that IC was present as an aim in FL teaching, by arguing that there was evidence for this in the themes that had been derived from the interviews. However, the teachers' utterances, which were perceived as evidence, did not

actually describe that IC should be promoted in the classroom (Karabinar & Guler, 2012, p. 1323). Instead, the teachers described what activities could be used in order to promote IC. Hence, this does not actually give us any information on whether IC was seen as an aim, or if it was actually promoted in the classroom. It merely gives us the knowledge that the participants knew how to promote IC.

Yet, the majority of the participants were reported to have the belief that cultural awareness and competence was necessary in order to communicate respectfully when engaging with other cultures (Karabinar & Guler, p.1325). This aim is named to be one component for IC development, which hence could imply that some teachers in the study found IC a somewhat relevant aim for their EFL teaching (Council of Europe, 2001; Byram et al., 2002). Hence, Karabinar and Guler (2012) concluded from their findings that IC is present as an aim, to some extent, in EFL teaching in Turkey (p.1326).

However, this conclusion could be argued to have been challenged by Castro, Sercu, and García Méndez (2004), who conducted a survey study on teachers' attitudes to IC, with 25 secondary EFL teachers from Spain. In the questionnaire, the teachers ranked what they thought were the most and the least important objectives for EFL courses (Castro et al., 2004, p.97). On a scale of one to eight, the objective of making students more open minded to other cultures, was ranked as number six (Castro et al., 2004, p.97, 98). Furthermore, the objective of making students develop a greater understanding of their own culture and identity was ranked as number eight on the scale. These two objectives are two main components for IC development (Byram et al., 2002). Hence, because the teachers ranked these objectives quite low on the scale, it could be argued that they found IC to be an unimportant aim for EFL courses in the Spanish context.

This was further revealed when teachers in the same study ranked what objectives that EFL culture teaching should have, more specifically (Castro et al., 2004, p.99). On a scale of one to nine, teachers perceived the least important objective as making students capable of handling intercultural communicative situations (Castro et al., 2004, p.99). This hence supports the conclusion that is drawn in the previous paragraph. However, the objective for culture teaching which was ranked as number two on the scale was the aim of developing a positive attitude and open-mindedness towards different cultures (Castro et al., 2004, p.99). As mentioned in section 1.1, having a positive attitude to other cultures is considered as a crucial component of IC (Byram et al., 2002). Hence, in this sense it could still be argued that IC was present as an aim.

A more positive attitude towards including IC in FL teaching was noticed in an extensive study with participating teachers from a number of European countries (Sercu, 2006). The study used both a questionnaire and interviews. In the questionnaire, the participants rated on a scale from one to five, to which extent they agreed on certain statements in relation to culture teaching and to IC (Sercu, 2006, p.122). The findings retrieved from the different countries were in general similar to one another (Sercu, 2006, p.124). Sercu (2006) reported that the teachers agreed completely to that IC should be taught in FL learning, and that this should be done independently of whether the class had a majority of students with an ethnic minority background (Sercu, 2006, p. 122, 124). The majority of this study's Swedish participants also agreed on this matter.

Furthermore, the questionnaire also asked about teachers' willingness to incorporate an IC approach to their FL teaching (Sercu, 2006, p.127). On this question, the majority of all the teachers said that they agreed completely, and 24% answered that they agreed to a certain extent (Sercu, 2006, p.127). About 75% of the Swedish EFL teachers in the study stated that they agreed completely when asked if they are willing to incorporate IC (Sercu, 2006, p.127).

From these results, attitudes seem positive regarding including IC in FL teaching. Sercu's (2006) study showed that the teachers both found IC to be important to include in FL teaching, and that the majority of the teachers also were willing to do this. This makes it interesting that other studies have not found IC to be an expressed aim for culture teaching (Bayyurt, 2012; Castro et Al., 2004; Lessard-Clouston, 1996; Luk, 2012).

A potential explanation for why IC might not be expressed as an aim in some contexts was provided by Sercu (2006), in her study. She reported that IC was explicitly mentioned in many countries curricula, which made it more relevant and important for teachers in these countries to include it in their FL teaching. Moreover, it was mentioned by the Swedish representative in the study that IC, and culture in general, was not presented as a clearly stated objective for FL courses (Sercu, 2006, p.32). According to the Swedish representative this made it more important to focus on other aspects, such as linguistic skills, instead (Sercu, 2006, p.32). Hence, the reason for teachers' excluding IC from their FL or EFL teaching could depend on the lack of emphasis on culture in their national curricula. With no emphasis in the curriculum, IC becomes an objective which is non-prioritised and only promoted if there is spare time after the completion of what has to be taught according to curricula.

## 2.3 Teachers attitudes to their curriculum regarding culture and IC

In the previous section, it was reported that the inclusion of IC, and the willingness to include IC could depend on how the teachers' national curricula create opportunities for IC inclusion. Hence, it is important to get an understanding of how teachers perceive their country's curriculum in terms of how it addresses cultures and, more specifically, how it creates opportunities for promoting IC.

In the studies that have looked into teachers' attitudes on the matter have found that teachers experience several issues in relation to IC inclusion which are argued to be due to their country's curriculum. The EU (2007) conducted a study where different European countries' curricula were analysed. The study was based on an analysis of curricula, and on interviews and a questionnaire concerning how teachers perceive their FL or EFL curriculum (EU, 2007). This study revealed that the majority of the participants from all of the countries perceived that they had a lack of time to include IC in their courses (EU, 2007, p. 45). This perception was further discussed by one of the participants who said that the course planning was too tight in order for the teachers to have time to promote IC (EU, 2007, p.46). Another participant also explained that if IC should be given time in language courses, it had to be more emphasised in the curriculum (EU, 2007, p.46).

Furthermore, according to the participating teachers, IC was too vaguely defined in the curricula, for it to be easily incorporated in their teaching (EU, 2007, p. 54). Hence, it was recommended by some of the teachers that for IC objectives to be easily included in their course planning, curricula needed to be clearer in the descriptions of these objectives (EU, 2007, p.55). This perception of curricula being too vague was not shared by all the countries' participating teachers. Yet, this vagueness in relation to IC, which was discussed by some of the countries' representatives, could hence explain why IC is promoted in some contexts, and not promoted in other ones.

Unfortunately, the study carried out by the EU neither investigated the Swedish EFL curriculum, nor Swedish teachers' attitudes to the Swedish EFL curriculum. There are no studies that have investigated the actual EFL curriculum for upper secondary level, or investigated Swedish EFL teachers' perceptions of how the curriculum creates opportunities to incorporate IC. However, the Swedish FL curricula have been discussed by a few Swedish teachers that have been interviewed on the matter. In an article by Byram (2014), he reached out to a network of teachers and researchers from different countries that took interest in culture and its role in FL teaching (Byram, 2014). The majority of the countries'



representatives reported to Byram (2014) that IC now was an aim and was present in FL teaching. However, the Swedish representative argued that in Sweden, IC was now less emphasised than previously (Byram, 2014, p.113). She further stated that this mainly was because of the new curriculum, since it did not include the term IC, as was done in the previous curriculum (Byram, 2014, p.113). Still, there is a lack of studies on Swedish EFL teachers' attitudes to the curriculum for upper secondary school. Hence, it is difficult to make any conclusions on how Swedish teachers perceive the curriculum in relation to IC promotion.

Furthermore, Byram (2014) reported that FL teachers mainly had positive attitudes to their curriculum in relation to IC. However, research conducted in several countries on teachers' attitudes, have revealed that teachers feel that their curriculum does not provide enough emphasis on cultural issues (Larzén-Östermark, 2008; Young & Sachdev, 2011; Sercu, 2006). It has been argued that the lack of emphasis in the curriculum makes it less important to include in EFL teaching, in comparison to skills that are mentioned in greater extent (Larzén-Östermark, 2008; Young & Sachdev, 2011; Sercu, 2006).

In light of what has been discussed in these three sections, 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, it could be argued that IC is not perceived as an expressed aim in today's EFL teaching. Instead, the main focus seems to be on working with the native speaking countries, and more specifically Great Britain and the US. Hence, it could be argued that the purpose of EFL teaching is to make students become native speakers and to function in specific native speaking contexts. This seems to be prioritised, instead of making students international speakers of English where the aim would be to foster IC, and hence, to make students able to communicate properly in many different contexts, both native and non-native, in which English is used.

However, it has also become evident that there is a great willingness of teachers to incorporate IC into their teaching, and also that it should have an important role. Yet, it has also been revealed that some teachers find it difficult to incorporate IC in their teaching because of a lack of time and clarity regarding IC in the EFL or FL curricula. Hence, the possibility to incorporate IC could be argued to be dependent on where you practice as a teacher, and the curriculum that you lean against when designing your courses.

Even though some research from the European context has been conducted with the aim of investigating teachers' attitudes to IC teaching, there is no research that investigates the issue in a Swedish upper secondary context. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap, by looking at Swedish EFL upper secondary school teachers' attitudes to promoting IC.

Furthermore it will investigate how Swedish EFL teachers perceive the Swedish EFL curriculum, in terms of creating opportunities for promoting IC.

### 3 Method

The procedure of the study has been in alignment with the recommendations for conducting an interview study, provided by Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009). In the primary stage of the study a qualitative method, and more specifically, semi-structured interviews were chosen. This decision was made due to the nature of the study, which aimed to investigate teachers' attitudes and beliefs. The primary aim was not to generalise the results, but rather to get a thorough and precise description of the participating teachers' experiences and attitudes to the chosen topic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.47). Therefore, a qualitative method, and more specifically interviews, was perceived appropriate to achieve this study's aim (McKay, 2006, p.51). Furthermore, the participants all practiced as teachers at the same upper secondary school. Hence this could be described a case study, since it merely focuses on a single group of teachers who practice in the same context (McKay, 2006, p.72). Therefore, it is difficult to draw any broader generalisations from the findings. However, as mentioned earlier, this was not the primary aim of the study.

#### 3.1 Participants

The five teachers who participated were chosen through a sample of convenience, and they all worked at the same upper secondary school. This upper secondary school is situated in Gothenburg and has around 1000 students. Moreover, the participants were all non-native speakers of English. All of them had many years of experience as practicing teachers, from 40 years of experience at the most, to 15 years of experience at the least. However, some of the participants had not been teaching EFL during all of their practice. Also, two of the teachers (T2 and T3) had lived for a few years in countries where English is spoken as a first language. This was not the case for the other three participants (T1, T4 and T5).

#### 3.2 Instrument

The instrument used for this study was an interview guide, where questions concerning teachers' cultural practices were included. The guide was constructed in order for all of the interviews to cover the same themes, and hence to make the results comparable (McKay, 2006, p.52). This guide served as the base for the semi-structured interviews which were conducted with the five participating teachers. The interview guide was written in Swedish, since all the participants were non-native speakers of English. Hence, the interviews were

conducted in Swedish in order to go around potential difficulties with expressing themselves in English (McKay, 2006, p. 53). The interview guide is attached in the appendix as a translated version of the one used for the interviews.

The interview guide consisted of five sections, and had a total number of 12 questions. The first section aimed to investigate how teachers defined culture, how they worked with culture in the classroom and whether they felt that they had enough time to focus on culture in their EFL teaching. This part also included questions on how teachers perceived the curriculum's expectations on how culture should be taught in the classroom. The second section of the interview guide aimed to get information on what teachers felt was the purpose of culture teaching, and also what purpose they thought that the curriculum had for culture teaching.

The third and fourth sections aimed to investigate teachers' attitudes to IC in EFL teaching. In comparison to many studies carried out in the field, the interview guide did not use the term IC. Instead, the term was broken down into several items which could be argued to describe different aspects of the concept. This was mainly done because research has shown that there is a lack of knowledge of what the term IC actually means, amongst teachers (EU, 2007; Gu, 2016; Tian, 2013). Therefore, the questions regarding IC were created by taking into consideration how Byram et al. (2002) defines the concept and also how they argue that IC can be promoted in the classroom. The term IC, however, was never mentioned in the interviews.

The last part of the interview guide merely wanted to look into whether the teachers perceived any difficulties with culture teaching in the EFL classroom. The last question also allowed the interviewees to add anything, if there were thoughts that might have come up during the interview.

### 3.3 Procedure

When the interview took place, the study and the interview were described to the interviewee, and the interviewee was then asked for the consent to record the interview. The participants were also made aware that they would have confidentiality in the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 99). Since the interviews were semi-structured, the interview guide contained potential follow up questions. However, not all of these were used in each interview. This depended on the answers to each main question.

After conducting the interviews, each interview was transcribed. The transcripts do not contain all small pauses or unnecessary words, such as “mm”. These words were mainly excluded to make the transcripts easier to comprehend. Furthermore, since this study did not aim to analyse how the teachers expressed themselves, this was considered unnecessary (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 221, 227). Moreover, the transcripts include the exact wording of the questions that was used in the interview guide. This is because the way the questions were asked was very similar to the exact wording in the interview guide. However, all the follow up questions that were asked in the interviews that were not included in the interview guide were transcribed as they were phrased in the interview.

### 3.4 Analysis

The analysis of the transcripts was done by using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hence, the process of analysis aimed to find certain themes in the data set, in order to see patterns in the teachers’ attitudes and to be able to draw conclusions in relation the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). In the results section, the themes that were found will be discussed, and examples will be given of how they were expressed by the participants.

The process of analysis followed the recommendations provided by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87). This first included becoming familiar with the entire data set, by both transcribing and reading the transcripts several times (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87). Each utterance from the interviews was then coded by giving a short explanation for what was expressed in that utterance. This was done in order to facilitate the search for patterns across the data set and, hence, to find relevant and prevalent themes. Each theme was reviewed by both looking at how well it described specific utterances, and also by looking how prevalent each theme was in all the interviews, in general (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Even though some themes were named already in the coding process, these names were later edited and redefined. Furthermore, the themes that were found, and will be discussed in this study, were the ones that best captured important aspects in relation to this study’s research questions.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

In the study, several ethical considerations were made, in accordance with the recommendations provided by Vetenskapsrådet (2002). As mentioned in section 3.3, all of the participants were made aware of the main purpose and topic of the study before the interview

took place, which made it possible to get an informed consent from each of the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 107; Vetenskapsrådet, 2002, p.7, 8). Furthermore, the participants were assured that they would have confidentiality in the study (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002, p.9). Hence, the participants will be referred to by using a ‘T’, for teacher, and a number from 1 to 5.

During the interviews, further ethical considerations were made. Before recording, the teachers were asked for their consent to be recorded. The subject matter for the interview was then explained one more time, and lastly they were asked if they still agreed on doing the interview. This was done in order to reassure them that they had the possibility to leave, if they did not feel comfortable with doing the interview (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).

The relationship and the difference in power between the interviewer and the interviewee were also taken into consideration (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Therefore, in order to make the interviews as comfortable as possible, questions that might have seemed accusatory, or were emotionally charged, were asked with caution.

### 3.6 Limitations

The limitations of the study mainly concerned the number of participants. Since this study used a limited number of participants, who also practiced as teachers in the same context, it was difficult to achieve external validity (McKay, 2006, p.13). McKay (2006) refers to external validity, in qualitative research, as transferability and explains that this refers to the extent to which the results could be generalised and applied to different contexts (McKay, 2006, p.13). Yet, the internal validity, which is referred to as credibility by McKay (2006, p.13), could be achieved. This was done by doing a thorough transcription and analysis of the data, and also by trying to present the findings without including personal interpretations of the teachers’ utterances (McKay, 2006, p.13). This was also assured by discussing the analysis and interpretation of the data with peers, which is recommended by McKay (2006, p.13).

An additional limitation was that the reliability, which is referred to as dependability by McKay (2006). This was affected negatively to maintain the participants’ confidentiality. In order to achieve dependability, a rich description of the context and the participants should be provided (McKay, 2006, p. 14). However, if a richer description would have been provided in the study, the confidentiality of the participants would have been affected.

## 4 Results

In this section, the themes that have been assessed as prevalent and relevant for this study's research questions will be presented. Each theme will be explained by describing how the theme has been, or has not been, present in each of the interviews. This will be done in order to provide a deeper understanding of the teachers' attitudes and how these attitudes were accounted for in the interviews. The themes that have been found will be discussed in relation to the study's two research questions.

### 4.1 To what degree is IC an aim for EFL learning?

#### **4.1.1 Culture teaching should aim to work with students' attitudes to cultures instead of students' own cultural identity**

The interviews show that the majority of the participants have the opinion that culture teaching should aim to create awareness and tolerance, instead of focusing on students' own cultural identity. This is evident in the different opinions that the participants expressed. For instance T5 suggests that EFL courses should aim to challenge the perspectives of students, instead of merely presenting cultures which they feel familiar with, and can relate to. She further argues that since students have a rather extensive knowledge of English culture, school should aim to provide students with information they would not have encountered on their own. T5 argues that the students' cultural identity should be given some space by letting them discuss and allowing their voice to be heard in the classroom.

A similar attitude is reported by T1 who argues that working with students' cultural identity is not the main purpose of culture teaching. This is, however, worked with indirectly, as students' cultural identity is present in discussions and in writing exercises where they have to give their own opinion on a matter. T1 argues, like T5, that culture teaching should instead focus on exposing students to new perspectives. She argues that her work involves working with stereotypes, or involving students in role play where they have to take different stances, in order to get a more open mind to other perspectives and cultures.

In similarity to T1 and T5, T4 finds it more essential for students to go outside of their own cultural identity and, instead work with other cultures. However, she also states that feeling safe in your own cultural identity is important. Despite this point of view, she does not express a willingness to work with cultural identity in the classroom. Furthermore, when T4 discusses attitudes to other cultures, she is critical of how other cultures are discussed and

perceived by the students. She argues that there is a need for a more critical perspective towards other cultures, whilst students, today, tend to only see positive aspects with different cultures. Hence, she argues that working with attitudes to other cultures is important, as do T1 and T5, but she also emphasises a need for a more critical perspective.

Moreover, T3 expresses a similar attitude to working with students' cultural background, which she says is something that comes naturally. She supposes that students make a connection between cultures that are presented to them and their own culture. She also argues that working actively with students' cultural identities could be interesting in a class where there are a greater variety of cultural identities than in her classes. Hence, according to her, this could work with a class of greater heterogeneity. When discussing attitudes to other cultures, she describes this as something highly important to incorporate in EFL teaching, in order to avoid stereotypical mind-sets and to get a deepened comprehension of different cultures.

In contrast to the other four teachers, T3 argues that both working with students' cultural identity and their attitudes towards other cultures is important for EFL courses. She feels that students need to be able to work with cultures which they can relate to. She also states that students first have to become aware of their own culture and values. Once this is achieved, the focus can be to broaden their perspective and to create open-mindedness to other cultures and values. This open-mindedness would, hence, be based on the awareness of one's own values and culture.

#### **4.1.2 To critically discuss cultures in the classroom can be done more or less successfully depending on the class**

In the interviews, it became evident that cultural issues are discussed in the classroom. The majority of the teachers feel that they are able to have critical discussions that concern different cultures. However, the majority also suggest that the appropriateness of culture related discussions could depend on the character of the class.

For instance, T2 suggests that critical discussions could take place in the classroom, if the possibility were to come up. Hence, she would not avoid having critical discussions, yet she would not include this actively. In explanation, she mentions a situation that occurred after she had discussed the legalisation of gay marriage in a native English speaking country. She states that because of some students' opinions were "narrow-minded", and since many of the students were homosexual, the discussion did not feel appropriate in that classroom. Even



though she tried to discuss the matter with the students who were against gay marriage, she had to stop the discussion because it became too hot-tempered. In spite of this experience, T2 still has the belief that critical discussions could take place in the classroom, as long as the teacher has an interest to do this. She also says that the discussions could be relevant if the topic concerns certain laws of an English speaking country.

T1 expresses similar opinions as T2. Although, she goes further and argues that depending on the individual student, difficulties could arise. She explains that if students have no willingness to get a wider perspective, and especially if students have not reflected on stereotypes before, a productive discussion could be difficult. An additional difficulty could arise when she has trouble getting the discussion going. In that case, she would prefer having a lecture regarding the cultural phenomenon in question, although she still emphasises the importance of actually letting students' discuss the topics which she presents in class. She explains this, and says that it is difficult to assess how the students have processed information if they have not had the opportunity to discuss it afterwards.

Another aspect that has influence on critical discussions, according to T3, is how well you know the class. First, T3 mentions that students from a certain programme tend to enjoy discussions. Hence, with these students she does not see any problem with these types of conversations. For instance, she says that she sometimes can provoke her students, by giving them a statement which she knows will challenge their perspectives. However, she says that it is important to know your students, what is appropriate to discuss, and how much one can provoke the students. Hence, in some classes you might have to be more careful, which both depends on how well you know the class and on what type of class you have.

Moreover, T5 explains that having critical discussions is something first and foremost present in the last English course in upper secondary level. In this course, T5 states that critical theory is presented to the students, which leads to many discussions where students have to base their discussions on a given perspective. She suggests that she feels safe with these types of discussions, especially when she knows that she is well prepared. Yet, she argues that it is impossible to be prepared for all the topics and discussions that might arise in the classroom.

Lastly, T4 states that having critical discussions in the classroom is of interest to her as a teacher. However, she states that her students are not comfortable with being critical towards other cultures. She further specifies that today, it is not a problem for students to criticise Swedish culture, but that if they were to criticise other cultures, they would perceive this as racist. Hence, it is concluded in the interview that there is no real fear of students

potentially going too far, and for instance express racist opinions. Instead she means that students tend to be too careful in discussions.

### **4.1.3 More time is devoted to address native speaking cultures**

When talking about the cultural issues that are discussed in the participants' EFL courses, the majority of the participants report that native English speaking cultures get the most space. Furthermore, it is reported that this is due to issues, such as time limitations, but also that there is a greater motivation amongst students to learn about the native English speaking countries. Lastly, this is also due to that some teachers have lived in a native speaker country.

When T1 talks about the cultures which are addressed in the classroom, time limitations and student motivation become two central factors. She suggests that the courses tend to focus more on the native speaking countries, such as the US and Great Britain, because these are the most commonly chosen English varieties amongst students. T1 states that other varieties and cultures are present, but to a less extent. Also, T1 wants to address subcultures in her teaching, but states that there is not enough time to focus on these. She acknowledges the difficulty of finding a balance between the cultures which she addresses in the classroom, and that it is difficult not to focus too much on the British or the American culture. According to T1, this is a consequence of the lack of time, which makes it harder to incorporate a greater variety of English speaking cultures.

Finding a balance and assessing which cultural issues that should be addressed in the classroom is also expressed as a difficulty by T5. She explains that there is a great range of choices when it comes to culture teaching. Hence, she argues that it becomes difficult to see what is relevant to include in her teaching, in relation to what students have been exposed, and have not been exposed to, before. However, there is no statement of T5 that provides evidence for her laying more focus on English native speaking cultures.

T2 suggests that she has learned a lot from the experiences abroad, and that she incorporates her own knowledge of that specific culture in her culture teaching. Hence, she provides students with facts and examples in order to show differences and similarities in society, as, for instance, in how the education system works. However, she also mentions that other cultures, such as teenage culture and other English speaking cultures are present in her culture teaching, although, she points out that her culture teaching is to a large extent influenced by her own experiences.

T3 expresses similar beliefs regarding her own culture teaching. She states that a lot of focus in her courses, when it comes to presenting history and traditions, tends to be on the history and traditions from the country where she has lived. Even though she is aware of this, she argues that these facets of culture should be taught in the classroom, since these are aspects that students need to have knowledge of.

However, T3 also mentions that she has a project where the English speaking world is the main theme. In this theme, students get the opportunity to focus on an English speaking country and that national culture. She argues that one of the major benefits of this project is that students also get to see that English is a language that is spread globally. T3 states that the native speaking culture which she tends to focus on is relevant, although she also argues that having knowledge of the English speaking world is the aim of culture teaching in EFL courses.

In the interview with T4, she explains that even though she includes a project concerning the English speaking world, she focuses on native speaking cultures. She claims that British culture gets more room in her teaching than, for instance, the American culture. The reason for this is mainly due to her perception that English culture actually exists in England. In spite of her beliefs and reported culture teaching practices, she feels, like T3, that the aim of culture teaching should be to give students' knowledge of the world. However, when she discusses countries that students should have knowledge about, she only mentions native speaking countries. Hence, her focus could also be argued to be on teaching native speaking cultures. Lastly, T4 states, like T1, that a major issue for her teaching is the time limit she has to consider, and that working with culture takes a lot of time.

#### **4.1.4 Culture is dealt with differently in different EFL course levels**

In the majority of the interviews, the teachers explain a change in their teaching regarding what is presented, how it is done and why. Hence, culture is argued to be addressed differently depending on the course that the teachers have. T2 is the only participant who does not represent such a change.

T1 explains that her culture teaching in the first EFL course in upper secondary focuses on providing students with a general image of the English speaking countries, and also the most well-known English speaking countries. In the last EFL course, she explains that she instead focuses on the less well-known cultures, and, for instance, discusses indigenous people, in the classroom. Hence, she concludes that culture teaching in the upper

secondary level starts by giving a broader image, by presenting the English speaking world, and then continues by going into greater detail regarding specific cultures.

Similar reports are made by T4, as she explains that students in the first EFL course are given information on the English speaking world. Then, in the second EFL course, she focuses on literature and literature history. In the last course, she puts emphasis specifically on India, and the culture of India. Hence, all of the students immerse themselves in the same English speaking country. When working with this, they discuss “...*religious diversion, the role of women, and also other*” aspects. In this course, T4 also works with texts from different English speaking countries.

Moreover, when T5 mentions her culture teaching, she reflects on whether critical discussions should be included in EFL teaching. She comes to the conclusion that this mainly is an aim for the last EFL course in upper secondary school, where critical theory is presented. Hence, it could be concluded that T5’s aim of culture teaching also changes depending on what level she teaches.

Furthermore, T3 expresses this change of aim by describing her work in her different courses. She reports that she usually discusses Martin Luther King in her EFL courses, both in the first and the second EFL course. However, she states that her purpose in addressing the topic differs in the two courses. In the first course she usually focuses on Martin Luther King’s speech, which then leads to working with oral skills. In the second course, however, T3 rather addresses the topic in order to give students knowledge of US history, as the civil rights movement and also the slavery in the US. Hence, in the first course the purpose is to give an introduction to working with oral skills, whilst in the second course the focus is to discuss historical aspects of US culture. Moreover, she explains, like T1, that in the last EFL course focus is more on the less well-acknowledged English speaking cultures.

## 4.2 How is the curriculum perceived, in terms of creating possibilities to incorporate IC?

### 4.2.1 The Swedish curriculum gives much room for interpretation

In all of the interviews a central topic is how the teachers perceive the curriculum and how it addresses culture. What becomes evident in all of them is that the participants do not feel that there are specific expectations set by the curriculum which teachers have to use. Even though many teachers believe that there is a specific purpose to culture teaching according the

curriculum, they still feel that it is possible to interpret the directives in the curriculum in a number of ways.

Three of the participants (T1, T2 and T3) think that the main objective of culture teaching, according to the curriculum, is to provide knowledge of the world. However, T1 explains that the objective is quite vaguely defined, and that it could be interpreted as more or less important. For instance, she mentions the directive in the curriculum which states that EFL courses should promote knowledge of the English speaking world. According to her this is a vague directive, since it could mean providing students with knowledge of one particular aspect of one country in the English speaking world. Hence it does not become evident to what extent this should be included, or which cultures from the English speaking world teachers should include.

According to T2, she also perceives the curriculum as making room for interpretation. She thinks that the curriculum is formulated in a manner which makes it possible for teachers to decide on their own what culture they should include, and what they want to put emphasis on. She further states that she has the freedom to do what she wants for her culture teaching, because of the room for interpretation.

Even though T3 never actually states that there is vagueness in the curriculum, she also feels able to include what she wants. T3 explains that she can include critical discussions in her EFL course, even though she states that this is not explicitly a directive in the curriculum. Since it does not say that she cannot include critical discussions, she feels that she has the opportunity to include that if she wants to do so. Hence, T2 and T3 do not carry out the same sort of questioning of the curriculum as T1. Instead they focus on the possibilities they are given because of the curriculum.

Moreover, T4 and T5 express similar feelings, and argue that it would be preferable to make the curriculum more explicit in its directives in order to make it easier for teachers to know exactly what to include. T4 explains that the curriculum does not give her any expectations that she has to meet. She further specifies that because of the vagueness in the curriculum she can include whatever she wants depending on how she wants to interpret the directives. Furthermore, she expresses the need for more clarity in the courses' curricula.

This is also stated by T5, who first states that the curriculum is formulated in a way that much interpretation can be made. When discussing the vagueness of the curriculum in relation to culture, she acknowledges that more clarity would be achieved if culture would also be addressed in one of the course criteria. She further states that including an assessment criterion that regards for culture would increase the clarity regarding how it should be treated

in EFL courses. In addition, she also states, like T4, that it would be preferable to have a curriculum which is more explicit regarding what teachers should include in their courses. She argues that this would facilitate decision making when reflecting on what she should expose her students to. She states that this is a difficulty today since it is not really possible to see what the learners have been exposed to in previous EFL courses. Before they come to her courses, students have had different teachers who have interpreted the curriculum in different ways. Hence, there is no common foundation that T5 knows that she can continue to build on. However, if the curricula would be clearer on what, specifically, students should have attained after each course, it would also be possible to determine what learners know when they come to the next course.

## 5 Discussion

These results show how teachers approach culture in their EFL teaching, what they believe that their culture teaching should aim for and also how they perceive the curriculum. Hence, this study has filled the original aim, which was to provide insight to EFL teachers' attitudes and self-reported practices on how they treat culture in their teaching.

Amongst other things, the majority of the teachers see it as an opportunity to work with attitudes towards other cultures, instead of working with students' cultural identity. Only one of the participants actually sees discussing cultural issues as an opportunity for students to engage with their own cultural identity. Byram et al. (2002) argue that in order to achieve IC, working with attitudes is an important part. However, they also stress that for IC to be achieved, learners need to engage with their own culture, and be able to compare and contrast their culture to other ones (Byram et al., 2002). In spite of these recommendations for IC promotion, cultural identity is not seen as an appropriate task for the EFL courses in upper secondary school, according to the majority of this study's participants. These findings correlate to some extent with Castro et al's (2004) findings. Even though Castro et al. (2004) reported that neither working with attitudes nor with cultural identity were not perceived as an important aim for culture teaching, the participants in their study still perceived working with attitudes as more important in EFL teaching (Castro et al., 2004, p.97).

The reason for why teachers find it irrelevant to work with students own cultural identity might depend on their own perceptions of what culture is, and consequently how it should be included in EFL courses. By looking at how the participants describe how culture is included in their teaching, it could be argued that the majority tend to see, and work with culture as a product rather than as a process (Sundberg, 2009). One could claim that the majority of the participants tend to treat culture as something static and something that could be taught. Many of the teachers report that they usually provide students with information of certain countries and cultures, or ask students to search for information about other countries and cultural issues on their own. In this sense, the cultural approach here culture is seen as a product is highly present according to the participants' reports. Furthermore, since the majority of the teachers express reluctance to including a contrasting treatment of culture, where students get the possibility to relate cultural issues to their own cultural background, there is no actual meeting and interaction between cultures. This interaction is highlighted in a process approach, which is preferable to use in order to promote students' IC (Sundberg,

2009, p.112). With this in mind, one could argue that the intercultural perspective is lost in a sense, when looking into the participants reports of their own cultural practices.

Moreover, the findings show that the majority of the teachers feel that they have to adapt their culture teaching depending on the class. This issue mainly regards the appropriateness of having critical cultural discussions. According to Byram et al. (2002), learners need to be given the opportunity to both critically reflect on their own values and culture, and also to reflect critically on other cultures' values and beliefs. In light of this study's results, it could be argued that promoting this critical cultural awareness, as Byram et al. (2002, p.9) define it, is perceived as more or less appropriate in EFL teaching depending on what type of class the teachers have.

For instance, T2 mentions that she has experienced one critical discussion which escalated in a rather bad manner, where she had to deal with opinions that do not correlate with the common principles of the Swedish school. This situation ended with her having to set a stop to the discussion because of the bad climate in the classroom. This has been pointed out as an issue in other studies which have investigated teachers' attitudes to IC (Young & Sachdev, 2011; Larzén-Östermark, 2008). Teachers in these previous studies have expressed a certain fear of letting students reflect on and discuss cultures critically, because of a fear of what the discussions might lead to, and what opinions the teachers have to answer to (Young & Sachdev, 2011; Larzén-Östermark, 2008).

Interestingly, T4 expresses a very different experience, as she explains that discussing critically is a problem since students do not feel comfortable to discuss other cultures or values critically. Although, despite her experiences, she states that she tries to incorporate this in her teaching, and also that she feels prepared to include these kinds of discussions. On this point, there is a consensus amongst the participants. The main differences in their statements lie in the difficulties that can arise depending on the class or the different students they have.

Another point of interest, found in the interviews, is that the majority of the teachers perceive knowledge of the world as the main aim for their culture teaching. However, it is also evident that the main focus, according to the teachers' self-reports, is native speaking cultures, such as, the British or the American one. This might, to some extent be due to that two of the teachers have lived in native English speaking countries. However, time constraints have also been expressed as a reason for this emphasis. T1 describes that finding a balance between the different English cultures is the main difficulty for her culture teaching. Alptekin (2002) discusses the focus on native speaking countries as outdated since it sees English as belonging to the Anglo Saxon culture, instead of seeing it as a world language. Instead, he



wants to put emphasis on having an international perspective to culture teaching, and to promote IC (Alptekin, 2002). Although, as is pinpointed by T1, this might not be easy, as there is a limited amount of time in the course in order for an international and IC approach to be included. This has also been expressed by teachers in other studies that have looked at attitudes to IC promotion (Cheng, 2007; Larzén-Östermark, 2008).

In addition to showing that there is a focus on native speaking cultures, the data also shows that changes in content and in purpose arise depending on the level of the EFL course. It could be summarised that the first EFL course for upper secondary school focuses on giving a general image of the English speaking world, whilst the second EFL course focuses on historical aspects of culture in native English speaking countries. It is in the last course where teachers report that they immerse themselves in specific cultural issues, which are not as familiar to the students. Furthermore, it is reported by T5 that it is in this course where a more critical perspective can be adapted. In light of this, it might be arguable that an IC approach is only adopted in the last EFL course, since this study's participants report having a more critical and discussion friendly perspective in this context. However, according to Byram et al. (2002) providing students with knowledge of other cultures is also part of promoting IC. Providing students with historical aspects can also be argued to be part of IC development, since this could be a way to make students aware of values, beliefs and traditions of a certain culture, and also how they have arisen (Byram et al., 2002).

Moreover, it is interesting that even though the majority of the teachers perceive the Swedish EFL curriculum as vaguely defined, and that there is much room for interpretation, they also tend to have very similar culture teaching practices. This is more evident for the two first courses where the teaching practices seem nearly identical. However, some of the teachers also mention in the interview that their own practices are influenced by a collegial course design, which has been based on the curriculum. Hence, since this is a group of English teachers who practices as teachers at the same school, the similarities in the course could depend on common planning. Yet, their individual views of the curriculum are still very clear. Furthermore, the attitudes which have been reported in this study correlate to a great extent with other studies' findings on teachers' attitudes to the curriculum, where the curriculum has been described as too vaguely defined (EU, 2007; Sercu, 2006).

## 6 Pedagogical Implications

With the results and the discussion in mind it has become evident that there are some important aspects that needs to be taken into consideration, if the role of IC should be ensured in the EFL classroom, which has been argued for by Council of Europe (2001) and the aiding material for the Swedish EFL curriculum (2011).

Firstly, there is a need for teachers to reflect on their own perception of what culture actually is. It has been shown that the participating teachers tend to use a product approach to culture, instead of a process approach. In order for IC to be promoted in the classroom, a change in perspective needs to be taken. If students should develop IC, they need to get the possibility to meet and interact with other cultures and cultural issues.

Moreover, there is a need for a more explicit Swedish EFL curriculum. The participants mention that the EFL curriculum in Sweden is vague in how it treats culture. All of the teachers feel that they can include culture in what way they find relevant. The problem with the vagueness of the curriculum is described by some of the participants in the study. They argue that they find it difficult to choose and being able to assess what is relevant to include in their culture teaching, since previous courses' curricula do not give any explicit information on what the student have been exposed to previously. Hence in order to facilitate the decision making for teachers in their practices and in order to increase the equality in upper secondary education there is a need for a more explicit and detailed EFL curriculum. In addition, this is relevant in order for IC to be ensured. If IC would get a more prominent role in the curriculum, it would supposedly render in more teachers working with this in the classroom

## 7 Conclusion

In light of what has been found, it could be concluded that IC is, to some extent, an aim for EFL courses, according to Swedish EFL teachers. It has been noticed that the majority of the teachers put emphasis on working with attitudes towards other cultures. There is also a gradual immersion taking place where focus firstly lies on providing cultural knowledge, whilst then focusing on creating awareness of values and beliefs, and lastly, focusing on specific cultures, and having a critical perspective on these. Critical discussions have also been reported as important amongst teachers, even though they carry the attitude that this must be done with respect to the class they have. In this sense, it could be concluded that teachers find IC relevant to include in their EFL teaching, and also that teachers do include it in their teaching.

However, it has also been shown that teachers find the promotion of IC irrelevant in some aspects. This is in its interpretation as engaging with students' own cultural identity. Furthermore, it has been shown that the participants' teaching tends to give information of native speaking cultures. Hence, in this sense, it could be concluded that a critical and international perspective, in which IC is promoted (Alptekin, 2002), is not present in the EFL classroom.

The second research question which aimed to address how the curriculum is perceived, in terms of creating possibilities to promote IC, is difficult to answer. This is mainly because the majority of the teachers find the curriculum too vague, and believe there is much room for interpretation. However, this could be argued to answer the second research question, as the teachers report that it does not provide any specific expectations or guidelines which they have to meet. In conclusion, if IC is relevant to one teacher, he or she has the possibility to include IC promotion in their EFL courses.

To conclude, it is possible to say that this study has given insight to Swedish EFL teachers' attitudes to IC and the Swedish EFL curriculum. However, even though some conclusions can be drawn from this study's results, one has to consider the limited number of participants and also note that it is a sample of convenience. Hence, it is difficult to draw any broader generalisations from this study's results. Therefore, a study of a more extensive nature is needed regarding Swedish EFL teachers' attitudes to IC. This especially regards for how the Swedish EFL curriculum for upper secondary school is perceived, in terms of creating opportunities for IC incorporation, since there is a lack of research on this matter from the Swedish context. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that in order for IC to be ensured,

teachers need to change their perspective on culture in their classroom practices. It has been shown in this study that culture is perceived as a product, which can be taught in an objective way. In order to ensure that IC is promoted in the classroom, teachers need to take on a new perspective on culture, and also to take on new positive attitudes to working with students' cultural identity in the classroom. In order for students to achieve IC, they need to be able to relate and interact with different perspectives than their own, which could be done if working with culture as a process in the classroom. In addition to what has been discussed, this study's results show that in order for IC to be fostered in Swedish EFL courses, there is a need for a more explicit curriculum where culture is dealt with in more specific terms.

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# Appendix 1

## Interview guide: attitudes to culture teaching in the English classroom

### Background information

1. *Education*
  2. *Teaching experience*
  3. *School: Type of school and age of students*
  4. *Present EFL courses (how many, and what levels)*
- 

### The teacher's culture teaching and the expectations from the Swedish EFL curriculum

1. *Firstly, how do you interpret the term "culture"? For instance, what would "culture" mean for your EFL teaching?*
  2. *According your experience, do you have enough space to work with culture in the English classroom?*
    - a. *According to you, is there enough emphasis on culture in the EFL curriculum?*
    - b. *Why/why not?*
  3. *How would you describe your work with culture in the classroom? (Eg. Isolated or integrated? Knowledge of facts? **What material and topics, and how are these worked with? Facts? Discussion of different cultures?** )*
    - a. *What types of cultures are included in your teaching?*  
*Eg. National? Subcultures?*
  4. *How do you experience that the curriculum expects you to work with culture?*
    - a. *Why do experience this?*
    - b. *According to you, should culture teaching be conducted differently?*
- 

### The purpose of culture teaching

5. *What do you want your students to take with them from your culture teaching? What do you consider being the main purpose with your culture teaching? (Eg. Cultural awareness and understanding of people with different cultural identities, or facts about different cultures?)*
  6. *Also, what purpose do you experience that the curriculum provides for culture in EFL courses?*
- 

### A critical approach to culture

7. *Would you say that there is a risk of reproducing stereotypes if culture is worked with in certain way in the classroom? How could you challenge stereotypes?*
8. *What do you think about critically discussing different cultures in the classroom? Would it work? Why/Why not?*



- a. *Do you feel safe and sufficiently prepared to work with that kind of teaching?*
  - b. *Does the curriculum give you the opportunity to work critically with culture?*
- 

**A critical approach with emphasis on the student**

- 9. *How do you think that culture teaching should work with students:*
    - a. *Cultural identity*
    - b. *Attitudes and approach to other cultures*
      - i. *In what way?*
  - 10. *According to you, is the EFL classroom an appropriate platform for that type of culture teaching? (...where cultural identity and attitudes to other cultures are worked with)*
    - i. *Why/Why not?*
    - ii. *Where should this be worked with instead?*
- 

**Difficulties and other thoughts**

- 11. *Do you experience any difficulties with culture teaching?*
  - a. *Could you take an example?*
- 12. *I have what I need. Is there anything you would like to add before we finish?*