Reading in Language Introductory Program Classrooms in Sweden

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Abstract: The ability to read is important for studies, work and social life, and therefore, reading needs to be central in all school subjects. The purpose of this article is to shed light on the factors that either facilitate or limit second-language students in a transitional program at an upper secondary school in Sweden in terms of their reading and reading comprehension skills. Observations of teacher-initiated reading practices and interviews with teachers about reading and texts, which were analyzed using Bernhardt’s compensatory model for second-language reading, show that all teachers highlight the importance of reading and the fact that reading in the subject they teach can help students to become competent readers of Swedish texts. Despite this, the amount of reading and processing of texts varies—in some classes, students do not read at all, and in other classes, they read a great deal. The only teacher who seems both to include the processing of texts and to choose texts that interest students is the teacher of Swedish as a Second Language (SSL).

Keywords: L2 students at upper secondary high school; Swedish as a Second Language (SSL); reading practices; L2 reading

1. Introduction

The ability to read is of crucial importance for study, work and social life (Shanahan and Shanahan 2012), and as such justifies an investigation of reading practices in second-language (L2) instruction and in subject instruction for newly arrived upper secondary students. This article focuses on reading practices and on what teachers say about reading and texts in a transitional program at an upper secondary school in Sweden. The Language Introduction Program (LIP) is a transitional program for L2 learners at upper secondary schools, i.e., newly arrived migrant students aged 16–19. Adolescents who come to a new country and who want to study at an upper secondary school need to learn the language of instruction. In Sweden, newly arrived students aged 16–19 are placed in LIP, where they are instructed in Swedish as a Second Language (SSL) and in the school subjects they need to complement for admittance to mainstream upper secondary programs. Reading skills are of particular importance for studies at this level, and students need to develop not only general reading skills in Swedish but also subject-specific reading skills. Reading is central to all subjects, not just SSL. With a starting point in both observations of teaching and interviews with teachers, the present study focuses on reading practices within the framework of LIP in both SSL and other school subjects. In the analysis of reading within a second-language (L2) instructional context, in this case with LIP students, Bernhardt’s (2005, 2011) compensatory model for second-language reading was chosen as the theoretical base. The aim of this article is to develop insight into what factors facilitate or limit LIP students in the development of the reading skills they will need in upper secondary school. This being the case, the focus is on the conditions students are given to develop their reading skills rather than on the skills themselves. The questions that guide the study are:

1. How can reading practices identified in the classroom be linked to the development of students’ reading skills?
2. How can teachers’ reported views on in-school reading be understood in relation to these practices?

Such a study on LIP has not previously been conducted, and this study aims to fill some of this gap in research. It provides important information and increase knowledge about reading practices in LIP through discussion of the effectiveness of teacher-initiated reading practices in lessons aimed at improving students’ reading skills.

2. Research on Reading in a Second Language

Reading in a second language can be challenging. Therefore, L2 students need instruction which will develop their skills in reading and writing. Studies, both international and those conducted in a Swedish context, that focus on newly arrived adolescents and reading are hard to find. Most studies in Sweden that focus on reading in an L2 perspective concern primary school (see, for example Lindholm 2019; Reichenberg 2012; Schmidt 2013) or upper secondary school (see, for example Economou 2015). Wedin and Stenbäck’s (2020) study shows that there is little focus on text use in LIP teachers’ thoughts about reading. Other studies on reading and writing at LIP focus on reading (see, for example, Wedin 2020; Winlund 2021). There are studies that focus on reading in upper secondary school (see, for example, Olin-Scheller 2006), but newly arrived students are not included as a specific group in these studies. Liberg (2008) emphasizes the importance of continuous work with reading and writing throughout school. Other studies that do involve the instruction of newly arrived students include Westlund (2013) and Olin-Scheller and Tengberg (2016), who highlight the importance of teachers having knowledge of reading and reading instruction.

To improve reading comprehension skills, readers need constantly to develop their vocabulary and linguistic understanding (Cummins 2012, 2017). Even independent and advanced second-language readers encounter texts that are demanding and difficult to understand, since readability varies depending on the type of text used, the situation in which it is used and the purpose for which it is used (Halliday 2007). Research highlights how the reading and understanding of texts requires cognitive skills such as linguistic ability, perception and memory, as well as motor skills/function (Koda 2007). For L2 students, language proficiency is also important.

For many L2 learners in upper secondary school, reading is challenging, both in a functional sense and in a subject-specific way (see, for example, studies by Fang and Schleppegrell 2008; Kulbrandstad 1998, 2003). Cummins (2012, 2017) points out that an important reason why many newly arrived L2 students underperform at school is that they do not have sufficient access to texts and that schools do not devote enough resources or time to reading and writing. Thus, if students have no access to texts, it is difficult to stimulate commitment to and engagement in reading and writing among students. Kulbrandstad (2003, p. 10) highlights five key factors that make reading in a second language difficult: (1) the reader’s linguistic ability, (2) the reader’s reading technique and strategy, (3) the reader’s prior knowledge, (4) the reader’s understanding of what it means to understand a text and (5) the reader’s insight into their own reading. Preparing students to read a text has proven to be essential for their understanding (Fang and Schleppegrell 2008). Fang and Schleppegrell are just two scholars who state that students need both to be exposed to different texts and to have time set aside during lessons to read texts in interaction with other students. To support newly arrived students in their reading comprehension in particular and in their language development in general, texts need to be processed in the classroom. This can prepare students for potential cultural, linguistic and conceptual obstacles, and can reactivate their prior knowledge and understanding.

As subject-specific language becomes more integrated with content, students must learn to read and understand different texts in different subjects in different genres (Fang and Schleppegrell 2008). Fang and Schleppegrell’s research underscores the importance of all teachers knowing how to stimulate the development of both academic and subject-specific language to understand what challenges students face and support them in their
reading and learning. Furthermore, subject teachers need to support newly arrived students, and L2 students in general, with reading tasks and text work so that they can develop subject literacy. With such support, students thus become socialized into different subject disciplines in terms of both language and content (Schleppegrell 2004; see also Nygård Larsson 2013). L2 students, and particularly newly arrived students, may also need to receive additional support in the languages they master. Providing them with the opportunity to improve their mother tongue and another language they have mastered, as well as access to, for example, audio books and other digital resources, can help them work with challenging texts (Olvegård 2014).

Students need to increase their vocabulary if they are to read successfully in a second language. Several studies stress the importance of teaching that will support them in the learning of vocabulary (Cummins 2017; Wesche and Paribakht 2000; Laufer and Hulstijn 2001). In particular, the learning of sophisticated words and subject-specific words requires supportive teaching (Beck et al. 2008; Cummins 2017). In their studies on vocabulary acquisition, Haastrop and Henriksen (2000) and Wesche and Paribakht (2000) highlight the fact that it takes time and effort to learn new words. They stress that it is not enough simply to read a lot, which is the advice many newly arrived L2 learners receive when their aim is to learn new words (Wesche and Paribakht 2000). A language learner needs considerable support in the reading process, such as conversation about the content and the structure of the specific text type (Nichols et al. 2009). The results of a study by Zhang (2008), which focuses on L2 upper secondary school students, show that vocabulary difficulties affect reading comprehension (see also Adams 2011; Nation 2001). These studies show the importance of supporting L2 students in their vocabulary learning and of helping them find strategies to learn vocabulary that suit them individually (Zhang 2008). A reader needs to understand the words to understand the text content at a deeper level and to be able to infer—to find connections between text and prior knowledge—in order to interpret and understand the text (Albrechtsen et al. 2008). The ability to infer becomes more important when the reader is presented with more complex texts (Albrechtsen et al. 2008; Kulbrandstad 1998; Schleppegrell 2004).

Cummins (2012, 2017) argues that access to printed material and literacy engagement are important mechanisms that support reading comprehension. Access to print is essential for literacy engagement even though it does not guarantee literacy engagement (Cummins 2012, 2017). The amount of reading of long texts is important for a language learner’s reading development (Kuhn et al. 2006), which implies the importance of newly arrived students’ literacy engagement. The motivation to read and engagement in reading involve an active choice on the part of the reader to develop reading skills, as well as a commitment to overcoming obstacles (Kuhn et al. 2006). Kuhn and Schwansenflugel (2018) stress how non-fiction texts become more demanding and theoretical at the upper secondary level (Kuhn and Schwansenflugel 2018). As such, it is necessary that all students in upper secondary school, including L2 students, need to be fluent readers so that they can comprehend complex texts and focus on learning from them (Kuhn and Schwansenflugel 2018).

In summary, research works by Cummins (2017); Fang and Schleppegrell (2008); Kuhn and Schwansenflugel (2018); Kulbrandstad (2003); Nygård Larsson (2013); and Olvegård (2014) state that newly arrived students in upper secondary school, and L2 students in general, need support and guidance in reading in all of their school subjects to attain high-level reading skills and thus be able to work with more advanced texts. Therefore, it is essential that they encounter, and process, different kinds of texts that engage them in the different school subjects. Studies also show that for students to develop their reading skills in a second language, they need support and access to texts, they need to incorporate prior knowledge and experiences into their reading and they need to be interested and committed.
3. Bernhardt’s Compensatory Model of L2 Reading

One challenge faced by LIP teachers is that of designing interesting and stimulating lessons. This can be accomplished with regard both to students’ previous experiences and knowledge as well as to the disparity between their Swedish language skills and cognitive ability. To facilitate the study of conditions for L2 students’ reading proficiency development and the analysis of the data collected, Bernhardt’s (2005, 2011) compensatory model of second language reading was chosen as the theoretical base. In this model, designed and developed over many years, Bernhardt (2005) argues that reading comprehension is a social and a cognitive process that involves constructing and extracting meaning. She defines three elements that affect reading development in a second language and how they compensate one another. Her compensatory model of L2 reading is based on empirical results from research by Stanovich (1980) that had adult learners as its focus. Bernhardt argues that various knowledge sources, which she divides into three units, namely, L1 literacy, L2 language knowledge and an unexplained variance, help the reader by affecting, assisting and compensating for each other during comprehension. In this study, the third unit, the unexplained variance which comprises understanding strategies, interest and motivation, and commitment and prior knowledge, is used in the analysis. According to Bernhardt (2005), satisfactory subject knowledge, for example, or well-developed strategies that help the reader to understand can compensate for insufficient language skills in the second language. With this model, Bernhardt predicted that 50% of second-language reading ability is attributed to knowledge in the second language, of which 30% includes, for example, grammar and vocabulary knowledge, and 20% comprises first-language reading ability (alphabetic knowledge and vocabulary, and word, sentence and text structure). The other 50% is attributed to the unexplained variance. Bernhardt (2005) illustrates how the three different units included in the model function synchronically, interactively and synergistically. For this study, the third unit, including the components understanding strategies, interest and motivation and commitment and prior knowledge, was perceived to be suitable in the analysis because it indicates that students need both strategies to help them understand as well as interest, motivation and commitment. In the teaching of content, it is necessary to link to prior knowledge for students to be able to develop their reading skills. The component parts of the third unit are used as headings in the presentation of the findings.

In earlier studies that employ Bernhardt’s compensatory model, there is a great difference in the levels of clarified variance concerning the L1 and L2 (Alderson 1984; Bernhardt and Kamil 1995; Yamashita 2002). These studies specify that the variance between reading comprehension in L1 and L2 might differ depending on the linguistic distance between the two languages (Jeon and Yamashita 2014), which echoes Koda’s discussion. In this study, Bernhardt’s model is relevant for the investigation of factors that either facilitate or limit the reading development of LIP students.

4. Data and Analysis

The data for this study were collected in late 2018 and early 2019. The methods used for collecting data—observations and interviews—seemed most appropriate considering the aim of the study. An alternative would have been to video record the lessons and thus gain a view of reading practices, but at the time of the data collection, it was considered problematic for ethical reasons. A group of 17 students and lessons in five of their subjects were the study focus. Observations that focused on reading practices and text use were made, and in this way, substantial data were collected. These observations took place over a seven-week period, with focus on reading practices during lessons in different school subjects. Teachers of five subjects were interviewed about their classroom reading practices, text selection and organization of reading during lessons. The five subjects (see Table 1) were chosen because they are theoretical in nature, and the expectation was that reading would be a central feature of lessons. Only one of the five teachers in the study, the SSL teacher, had training in the teaching of second-language students. A total of 24
lessons, 60–140 min in length, were observed (see Table 1). The observations took place following the schedule the group had at the time. A large number of SLL lessons were observed during the data collection period. This is because students in the program have more lessons in SLL than they do in other subjects. Lessons in other subjects varied in length according to the scope of the course and the structure of the teaching. Since the ambition with this study was to gain an overview of teacher-initiated reading practices during lessons in the program, the number of observed SLL lessons in relation to other subjects should not be significant. Data collected from the observations consist of field notes and a flow chart, wherein reading practices observed in the classrooms and activities associated with them are highlighted.

Table 1. Overview of the observations.

| Teacher  | Number of Observed Lessons | Total Length of Lessons (min) |
|----------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| ST (SSL) | 8                          | 540                          |
| BT (Biology) | 3                       | 420                          |
| HT (History) | 4                        | 240                          |
| GT (Geography) | 4                       | 240                          |
| RT (Religion) | 5                        | 300                          |
| In total | 24                         | 1740                         |

The five teachers, who are all referred to as “she” in the presentation of the findings and who all taught the chosen group of students, were interviewed about reading, reading practices and texts they used during lessons. The semi-structured interviews, designed with the intention to encourage the teachers to talk about reading and text use in the subject they taught, took place at the school. Each audio-recorded interview lasted about 30–40 min.

The study was conducted in accordance with the Swedish Research Council’s principles for research ethics in humanities and social science research (Swedish Research Council 2011). Written consent was received from teachers and students. Furthermore, the participants were informed that their identity would be kept confidential throughout the study, that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from participation at any time without explanation. Due to the potential vulnerability of students in both school and society, no video recordings were conducted. Research data have been kept inaccessible to unauthorized persons.

The analysis was carried out in two phases. In phase one, the recorded interviews were listened to and transcribed with the purpose of gaining an overall picture of the data based on the research questions of the study (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). The observation data, including the flow chart, were reviewed several times with the same intention. In phase two, the coding was executed using meaning condensation, while preserving the essence of the meaning unit, after which the coding was labelled (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

In the analysis of what teachers said about reading practices, the components of the third unit—understanding strategies, interest and motivation and commitment and prior knowledge—were used (Bernhardt 2005). This procedure made teachers’ discussions of reading visible, and identified teacher-initiated reading practices in the classroom. In this study, the components were interpreted as follows:

1. *Understanding strategies*—various strategies that help students read and understand texts, with focus on both language and content, as well as the way teachers prepare students for reading, the way texts are processed linguistically and in terms of content and the way texts are processed after reading.

2. *Interest and motivation*—the way the teachers stimulate students’ interest and motivation through the texts, and how they plan students’ work with the texts they choose for them to read during lesson time.
3. **Commitment and prior knowledge**—how students’ commitment increases in reading practices and through the processing of texts, and how their prior knowledge is activated.

These three components constituted the analytical tool of the study and served as categories in the interview analysis and the data obtained from the observations. Analysis of the data involved searching for meaning units as they appeared both in reading practices and in what teachers said about reading and texts and interpreting them in light of the components.

**5. Findings**

In this section, the analysis of the three components is presented, followed by the answers to the research questions. The presentation of all three components is based on the two research questions separately and is followed by a summary.

**5.1. Understanding Strategies**

Here, focus is on the first component of Bernhardt’s third unit—understanding strategies. The findings from observations are presented first, followed by findings from the interviews.

**5.1.1. Observed Reading Practices in the Classroom**

Understanding strategies—that is to say, teacher-initiated reading practices and support in terms of content and language of texts—were identifiable in teacher-initiated reading practices. Students worked with understanding strategies by processing texts linguistically and focusing on their content. They did this both on their own and with the help of the teachers.

In Swedish as a Second Language (SSL) lessons in particular, various reading practices and work with understanding strategies were notable. The reading practices in SSL lessons that were identifiable were students’ reading of textbooks, articles, short stories, columns and a novel to themselves (silently) and to others (aloud). Students read for a while on their own during four of the eight observed SSL lessons. One entire SSL lesson was devoted to reading aloud (in turns) from an easy-to-read adaptation of a novel, with the teacher explaining vocabulary, grammar rules and language structures in Swedish. In another SSL lesson, students took turns reading aloud a column about bullying. After they had read, the teacher worked through the text with the students, interpreting the text together. Finally, the text content was discussed, and many students took part in that conversation. The words that the teacher pointed out were sophisticated: for example, *knappast* (hardly), *umgås* (socialize), *obligatorisk* (mandatory) and *självklar* (obvious). The SSL lessons were separate from the other subjects. The students did not ask the SLL teacher for explanations of words from other subjects, although they could have had the opportunity to do so. During lessons in the other four subjects, the teachers organized reading practices both differently from and similarly to the SSL classroom. Two examples of observable reading practices and understanding strategies during history lessons were the teacher reading aloud and students reading silently to themselves. In each lesson, the HT asked if students had read the texts before the lesson, and she urged them to read at home. When students needed help with the meaning of words, the teacher helped them by suggesting strategies for understanding that focused on vocabulary explanation; however, the HT always advised them to find the explanations of the words themselves. When students needed help with the questions, they were advised to find the answer in the textbook.

The reading practices observed during biology lessons followed a similar pattern; the teacher presented the theme of the lesson, and then students read chapters from the textbook. Some students chose to listen to them on Reading Services, which is an assistive technology service that provides audiobooks in Swedish as well as in many other languages. Almost all the textbooks, except for the SSL one, were available on Reading Services, and as such, these were easy-to-read versions of textbooks. Some students found it useful to listen to texts in other languages.
In biology, the BT encouraged all students to listen to and read in their “mother tongue” and in Swedish. In biology, they used standard textbooks for lower-secondary school because no easy-to-read version was available. In their biology lessons, students also read laboratory reports and laboratory instructions. The understanding strategies that were apparent during these lessons were students searching on their own and with each other for translations and word definitions on Google and Wikipedia and asking each other and the teacher for help understanding and processing the text they were reading. During the lessons, the BT explained a few words to students: these were generally subject-specific, such as "ven" (vein) and "artär" (artery).

In the four geography lessons that were observed, students were taught about maps; as such, these lessons did not involve much reading of written text. The teacher, GT, introduced a map computer game to the students, and for the most part during observations, students played this game. Understanding strategies that were identifiable during these lessons were the GT explaining several words and students asking for help when it was required. In one lesson, students read the chosen text from the textbook and answered questions in the exercise book. During these lessons, students also looked up the meaning of words in digital dictionaries and on Google.

Reading practices in the religion lessons differed from those in the other subjects, as these lessons involved the teacher—RT—retelling texts from the textbook. What was said during the retelling could be found in different chapters in the textbook, and the RT was careful to tell students which pages in the textbook were relevant so that those who wanted to could follow the text during the presentation. Understanding strategies seen during these lessons were mostly explanations of words connected to the retelling of the text content. During the retelling, vocabulary was written on the whiteboard, and some words, such as "underverk" (miracle), "hädelse" (blasphemy) and "nattvard" (communion), were subject-specific. In two religion lessons, students watched short videos about communion and Judas’s betrayal of Jesus. When they watched the videos, the RT wrote words on the whiteboard and afterwards explained them to students. In one lesson, students studied for an upcoming test while the RT helped them to answer questions.

In summary, what became apparent is that teachers in some way included understanding strategies in their teacher-initiated reading practices. Teacher-initiated reading practices, including processing of texts, that were identified during lessons were as follows: students (1) reading silently and aloud, (2) listening to the teacher read or retell aloud, (3) listening to Reading Services, (4) working on questions about text content, (5) receiving help with language structure and grammar during SSL lessons and (6) having words explained to them. The students themselves took the initiative to use digital dictionaries, Google, Wikipedia and websites to find translations and word explanations that might help them understand texts on their own. The SSL teacher was the only teacher to focus on understanding strategies other than explaining single words. This is perhaps to be expected since reading as an objective is explicitly included in the SSL curriculum, while reading skills are more implicitly present and required in other subjects.

5.1.2. What Teachers Say about Understanding Strategies and Reading Practices

In what they said about in-school reading and reading practices and the texts they chose, teachers highlighted the importance of reading at school. They also said that the ability to read was important since students will need it in their future studies, working life and social life. The ST stressed that reading is important during all lessons, especially SSL classes:

ST: Ämnet sva bidrar till att eleverna blir kompetenta läsare eftersom man läser mycket i ämnet. Men ja det gäller ju att läsa och dom läser nog på i alla ämnen egentligen . . . jag menar dom har ju böcker i alla ämnen . . . samhällskunskap geografin, religion ja i alla egentligen utom idrotten.

ST: The subject SSL helps students become competent readers because it involves a lot of reading. But yes, it’s a case of reading and they probably read in all
subjects actually . . . I mean, they have books in all subjects . . . social sciences, geography, religion—yes, in all of them besides physical education.

The ST emphasized how reading and working with texts in other subjects can help students to become efficient readers, develop their reading comprehension skills and expand their vocabulary. The GT talked about her views on reading:

GT: Läsa är ju viktigt för ordförråd för begrepp ja för att få det. Det är synligt för du lär ju med olika sinnen så klart. Och du får upp en läshastighet om du läser och har en vana till att läsa och läser man inte då blir man ju handikappad på läsning. Du får ju mindre saker att hänga kunskapen på och du får svårt att tillåtna dig kunskap så läsning är jätteviktigt.

GT: Reading is important for vocabulary and concepts. It’s apparent because you learn to use different senses, of course. And you acquire a reading speed if you read and have a habit of reading, and if you don’t read, then you become handicapped when it comes to reading. You get fewer things to use your knowledge for, and you find it difficult to acquire knowledge, so reading is really important.

Several of the teachers said that although they believe reading ability to be of great importance, it is not central to their teaching; their focus is on the subject they teach. The RT explained that she does not focus on reading in her instruction. The students have textbooks, and her lessons are based on the chapters in the textbook, but these they do not read. Her strategy was to keep with the content of the textbook so that students are familiar with it. She stated how she wants students to learn from her retelling of textbook content and how this will help them in their post-lesson reading.

The GT estimated that 10% of geography lesson time is devoted to reading. She explained that she used to read aloud during lessons, with her first reading aloud and then the students taking turns, after which they stopped and discussed the text. She said that she does not use this method anymore. She also mentioned time pressure—which has forced her to choose what she calls more effective teaching methods—as being one reason why she can no longer focus on reading.

The HT, on the other hand, described how her lessons are almost entirely about reading. She emphasized that the reason reading dominates in her lessons is that she doubts students read at home and that she definitely wants them to read. Therefore, each of her lessons includes reading—mostly her reading aloud and students silently reading texts from the textbooks, because she wants to nurture and develop students’ interest in reading. When teachers talked about texts, they talked about textbooks, with the exception of the ST, because students read different kinds of texts in SSL. In what teachers said about reading, all claimed that vocabulary development is important as it affects both the ability of students to read and their acquisition of knowledge. The BT pointed out that science courses involve searching for facts and require what she describes as “a good vocabulary”. Her opinion is that the subject of biology requires a relatively high level of language since students must pass mathematics before they can begin studying biology and as such must have sound language skills.

The GT claimed to focus on vocabulary throughout her course. She creates a vocabulary list with subject-related concepts that she hands out to students. On occasion, she explains the words, but mostly the students, with or without their classmates, have to find the meanings.

In summary, what emerges here is that the five teachers highlight the importance of advanced reading skills and a well-developed vocabulary for students’ academic success, as well as their future professional and social life. Several mention that reading is important but not a focus of instruction in the subject they teach and that they do not cover reading as a skill. The teachers want students to be able to read and to improve their reading skills, and they state that reading in the subject they teach would help students do so; nonetheless, they do not explicitly include reading in their lessons. This could be interpreted to mean that they see the responsibility of reading in their subject to be that of other teachers. Several appear
to have very little—if any—focus in their lessons on students’ reading or on situations in which students actually read and process texts. The SSL teacher stands out since she is the only teacher of the five who frequently includes the reading of different kinds of texts, which may come as no surprise since language development is the focus of her subject. The teachers also said that it is important that students have a sound vocabulary, which is why it is important that lesson time is focused on work with understanding strategies that help them build on their vocabulary. Regardless, however, four of the five teachers explained just a few words during the lessons.

5.1.3. Understanding Strategies—Summary

In terms of understanding strategies, all teachers said that they view reading ability to be very important and that reading in their subjects contributes to the ability of students to improve their reading comprehension and reading skills. However, there was a great variation in the proportion of teacher-initiated reading practices between both subjects and teachers as well as understanding strategies that would help students with their reading. Even though the number of lessons in SSL in the material was greater than in any other subject, they only constituted about one-third of the observed lessons. Regarding reading practices, the variation between SLL and the other subjects was considerable. The teachers said little about how they helped students improve their reading skills. Indeed, several stated that reading is not the focus of the subject they teach. Furthermore, a few teachers claimed that time pressures forced them to choose what they called more effective teaching methods. Students read, translated and searched for word explanations on their own, and sometimes asked each other or the teacher for help, or they used websites. To a great extent, students were left to read and understand texts on their own.

5.2. Interest and Motivation

For the second component, interest and motivation, the findings from observations and interviews are presented in two parts. The first part is based on the first research question and the second part deals with the second research question. As students themselves were not asked about their own interests and motivations, these results are based on teacher interviews, observable conversation, discussion, actions and level of energy.

5.2.1. Observed Reading Practices and Interest and Motivation

There were few observable teacher-initiated reading practices that stimulated students’ interest and motivated them. The reading practices that were observed mostly involved the use of pre-selected textbooks. There were few occasions when reading practices resulted in discussions or questions. During the lessons, students were generally quiet as they read; they listened to Reading Services, and they translated and tried to understand the texts. The ST was the only teacher to include different kinds of texts in her lessons. Occasionally, the reading of texts in the SSL lesson generated a discussion in which students were active. In history and geography, two of the students demonstrated their interest by asking the two teachers if they could read the standard textbook instead of the easy-to-read version. In addition, three teachers encouraged students to read the textbook at home, as they said it would help them complete their courses. Furthermore, they said reading at home would help them with the content and with understanding the text, and would motivate them to read more.

5.2.2. What Teachers Say about Reading Practices That Interest and Motivate Students

In the interviews, the two teachers said that they felt the standard books to be too difficult for students. Consequently, these teachers felt confident in the ability of the two students who had demanded the standard textbook, telling them that if they also worked at home, they may even be able to complete the courses earlier than planned. These easy-to-read-textbooks are what students read most often. The LIP teachers stated that they made
a joint decision on which textbooks to use, and that they chose the ones they felt would be easy to read and understand. When asked about them, the GT said:

GT: Det är mindre innehåll framförallt och sen tror jag att det är lite enklare språk också men sen har dom tagit bort en hel del bilder också sen är det ju också att i huvudversionen så finns det frågor som man . . . alltså analysfrågor och det saknas i den här.

GT: Above all, they have less content, and I think the language is a bit simpler, too; however, they removed a lot of pictures as well. In the main version, there are questions that you . . . analytical questions and those are missing in this one

When talking about reading and the organization of reading practices, the teachers said little about stimulating students’ interest and motivating them. The exception was the ST, the only teacher to choose texts other than those in the textbooks, who said that she chose poems, lyrics and texts that she thought students could relate to and discuss:

ST: Jag försöker vara i deras värld så att säga i deras sfär så kanske lite musik lite kanske om någon flykting och så men inte för mycket sånt.

ST: I try to put myself in their world so to speak—in their sphere, so maybe some music perhaps about a refugee and the like, but not too much about that.

All the teachers talked about what they called unmotivated and motivated students. They said that the students they termed “unmotivated” needed a different form of supervision than those they termed “motivated”, who were able to read the texts they were presented with. The teachers did not talk about how they supported the “unmotivated” students. The teachers also pointed out that “motivated students” studied at home. The HT described wanting to help the motivated students. Teachers claimed that the unmotivated students did not have the same energy as those who were motivated and that the motivated students usually asked for help. The HT also said that although all students could access audiobooks and study guidance in the mother tongue, it was primarily the students she termed “motivated students” who made use of them.

HT: Inläsningstjänst och stödtimmarna erbjuds men dessa verktyg nyttjas inte på bästa sätt. Det är bara de motiverade eleverna som är vana att be om hjälp och ta emot hjälp och de motiverade eleverna kommer alltid att klara sig.

HT: Audio books and support lessons are available, but these are not used in the best way. Only the motivated students are used to asking for help and receiving help, and the motivated students are always going to manage.

Some teachers, as exemplified by the HT above, said that the students who ask for help are those they term “motivated”. Thus, the teacher concluded, those who needed support were rarely those who requested it.

5.2.3. Interest and Motivation—Summary

When it comes to interest and motivation, only a few of the reading practices that were observed can be understood as stimulating students’ interest in the texts or motivating them in their reading. Only the SSL teacher talked about whether or not their classroom reading practices served to stimulate interest or motivate students. Meanwhile, all teachers talked about students as either motivated or unmotivated, and that they perceived that motivated students can read texts independently during lessons while the unmotivated students require help and support. The teachers seemed to relate students’ motivation to students’ academic achievement or prior knowledge rather than their teaching. The teachers did not mention how they support and help the students they term “unmotivated”. It is worth noting that two of the teachers felt the textbook to be boring or even not very useful.
5.3. Commitment and Prior Knowledge

For the third component, commitment and prior knowledge, the findings from observations and interviews are presented in two sections where the two parts focus on each research question.

5.3.1. Reading Practices and Commitment and Prior Knowledge

When it comes to commitment and prior knowledge in relation to teacher-initiated reading practices, a few such occasions were identifiable. The RT related to students’ prior knowledge on one occasion when focus was on stories from the Bible when Jesus walks on water and the Crucifixion. A discussion followed that demonstrated students’ interest in and prior knowledge about Jews and the Crucifixion; students also watched a series of short videos on these stories. From what they said, it was clear that all students were familiar with stories from the Bible.

The SSL teacher deliberately tried to tap into students’ prior knowledge and experiences. One example of this was during one SSL lesson when students read a column about school bullying. The subsequent discussion, which demonstrated students’ interest in the subject, was about bullying and its causes and consequences. Students were active in the discussion, with some sharing their personal experiences. What this demonstrated is that the text the students read in the classroom caused students to relate to their own experiences and prior knowledge.

In a history lesson, the teacher attempted to tap into students’ prior knowledge and experiences by asking whether they knew about the Roman Empire and whether they had read anything about it. These two questions did not result in any noteworthy discussion.

Teaching and reading content linked to students’ commitment and prior knowledge was observable a few times in reading practices in different subjects. On these occasions, the reading generated a discussion and questions that directly related to the students’ prior knowledge and experiences.

5.3.2. What Teachers Say about Commitment and Prior Knowledge

Teachers seldom mentioned students’ commitment and prior knowledge in relation to reading texts. Teachers connected students’ motivation to prior knowledge and commitment as they stated that the students whom they termed “motivated” are most often students whose study experience and reading habits help them manage their studies. The GT pointed out the fact that students must cover the entire geography curriculum for grades 1–9, which is challenging, especially for those without former schooling.

The HT described her constant attempts to have students themselves look for word definitions. She further described the difficulty of defining new words since it is unclear whether the students have any frame of reference that will help them understand them:

HT: Ja jag försöker att prata omkring orden och hela tiden försöka komma på hur eleven ska hitta själv hur mycket som helst och jag uppmuntrar eleverna att försöka hitta självt men det är enda sättet men man försöker förklara och det är svårt . . . därför att jag vet inte om eleven har . . . om i elevens världsbild finns den där grejen som orden handlar om

HT: Yes, I try to talk about the words, and I always try to figure out how the student can find the explanations themselves, and I encourage them to do so. You try to explain, and it is difficult . . . because you don’t know if the student has . . . if in the student’s view of the world, there is that thing that the words are about.

Here, the teacher highlighted a potential gap between students’ previous experiences and the words they encounter during their studies.

What teachers said about commitment and prior knowledge connected to reading and texts showed that those students whom the teachers considered to be motivated were those who had previous school and study experience, as well as reading experience. Situations where teachers were unable to work with students’ prior knowledge also became apparent;
this is exemplified by the HT when she said she did not know if students knew the words she was trying to explain because of their potential lack of vocabulary and prior knowledge related to them.

5.3.3. Commitment and Prior Knowledge—Summary

In terms of student commitment and prior knowledge, some situations were apparent in the data where teachers inquired about and identified students’ prior knowledge and experiences. Otherwise, students’ commitment and their prior knowledge were not frequently present during lesson time. The students clearly found the text about bullying interesting because it generated a discussion that involved almost every student. This might demonstrate the importance of using texts that students can relate to or that they find interesting. Engaging students is an important aspect of teaching as the students are likely to learn if they are interested and committed.

The teachers did not say much about students’ prior knowledge and experiences in relation to reading and texts except when mentioning that those students they termed “motivated” had previous schooling and prior knowledge. This can be interpreted to mean that the teachers understand that the students they term “motivated” are those who have prior knowledge of the subject content. However, the teachers do not describe how they build on the students’ prior knowledge in terms of subject content.

What may be considered a natural part of teaching L2 students—that is to say, teaching of both words and content—becomes apparent when one teacher refers to the difficulty of explaining new words, since it is unclear whether the students have any frame of reference by which to help them understand the words.

5.4. Teachers’ Talk and Reading Practices in the Classrooms

The findings relating to the components of Bernhardt’s (2005) third unit, an unexplained variance—understanding strategies, interest and motivation and commitment and prior knowledge—will now be used to answer the two research questions.

The results make for an arguably disappointing picture regarding the factors that facilitate or limit LIP students in the development of their reading skills. The observations show that classroom reading practices for this chosen class do not prepare students adequately to meet curriculum objectives relating to reading. The answer to the first research question, “How can reading practices identified in the classroom be linked to the development of students’ reading skills?”, is that reading practices observed mainly involve teachers reading aloud or retelling the text content to students; students listening to texts on Reading Services; students’ silent reading; and whole-class reading, with students taking turns. With few exceptions, teacher-initiated reading practices seem neither to activate students’ interest nor to motivate them, nor are their commitment and prior knowledge referred to. Students’ textbooks, the easy-to-read versions, do not sufficiently prepare them for the future in terms of reading skills. The textbooks could be supplemented with other texts or books—for example, those the two students asked to use.

In terms of the second research question, “How can teachers’ reported views on in-school reading be understood in relation to these practices?”, all teachers regard the ability to read as essential, and say that reading in the subject they teach improves students’ skills. However, even though the teachers believe reading to be important, they largely leave students to read on their own. There is little talk on the part of the teachers about integrating students’ interest, motivation, commitment or prior knowledge into their teaching. Time pressure is one reason that the teachers highlight for not doing so, as well as the difficulty many students have coping with reading. A general conclusion of this study is, therefore, that factors regarding in-school reading in LIP seem to limit the students in the development of the reading skills they will need in upper secondary school.
6. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate teacher-initiated reading practices and teachers’ thoughts on reading and texts in relation to LIP students in upper secondary school. First, the results show that LIP students read at school and are given opportunities to read. However, there are great differences in the amount and type of reading in the reading practices observed. In some lessons, students do not read at all, while in other lessons, they read to a greater extent. Furthermore, they appear to be mostly left to read alone, during which time they might use, for example, Google and Wikipedia. This is the case despite all five teachers in the study stating the importance of reading and the fact that reading in the subject they teach can help students to become competent readers of Swedish texts. These findings demonstrate that teachers shift their responsibility of text processing to various digital tools and Reading Services. Secondly, the only teacher who seems to process the texts and to choose texts that interest students is the SSL teacher. She is also the only teacher in this study who has training in teaching L2 students. Thirdly, when teachers talk about motivated and unmotivated students, they say that the students they term “motivated” are those who had attended school before and know how to read and are thus able to manage at school. This can be interpreted to mean that teachers understand that the students they term “motivated” are those who have prior knowledge of the content of various subjects. Furthermore, they say that “unmotivated” students need different forms of, and more, support. The results show that only the SSL teacher tries to find out what motivates students, which may be understood as teachers distancing themselves from one aspect of their professional responsibility, which is to support students. A careful choice of texts and motivation that supports students is a way of achieving this aspect of the professional responsibility.

A question worth raising is, what happens to the education and reading skills of the students who are termed unmotivated by the teachers when teachers have them employ digital help to read texts rather than teaching them in a way that will help them? Shifting the responsibility for reading and processing texts onto the students themselves—and, indeed, the SSL teacher—limits the amount of reading time students have in school and reading support they receive in school. This can have a long-term impact on the development of both students’ knowledge and reading skills. If during all lessons, not just SSL lessons, students were to be given the opportunity to process texts, they would have better chances to build on their reading skills. Given that L2 students need a teacher who gives them occasions to develop both their second language to a sufficient linguistic level and their knowledge (Schleppegrell 2004), all students need instruction that helps them develop on their own and with the teacher’s support. The fact that subject teachers do not know how to teach second-language students since their teacher training did not equip them in this regard is likely to be one factor that prevents LIP students from developing sound reading skills. This raises the following questions: who is responsible for the education of L2 students in upper secondary school, and who should be responsible for reading skills in subject teaching? What measures should be taken so that subject teachers can help and support students in their reading? That there is a need for such issues to be included in the education of subject teachers is clear given that there are several factors that make L2 reading difficult and challenging, such as the readers’ linguistic ability, insight into their own reading, the readers’ reading technique and strategy and the readers’ prior knowledge (Kulbrandstad 2003). What this study highlights is that the curriculum for each subject, including the curriculum for teacher education, needs to state more clearly the importance of the reading skills of SSL students.

The LIP situation is challenging in many ways. The subject teachers argue that time pressure is but one factor that limits class reading time. I, however, would argue that time pressure makes it even more important to include reading in all subjects, since the result would be long-term gain for students in terms of knowledge and time. As earlier research has highlighted, it is important that teachers of all subjects, not only SSL, support students in their reading (Fang and Schleppegrell 2008; Nygård Larsson 2013; Olvegård
2014), especially since non-fiction texts become more abstract and complex with every level of school (Kuhn and Schwanenflugel 2018). To develop their language skills, students need proper instruction that allows them to process the language and content of texts (Fang and Schleppegrell 2008). Students need support and instruction that motivate them and activate their interest, commitment, prior knowledge and understanding. These are important components that, according to Bernhardt (2005, 2011), impact L2 reading. L2 learners need to increase their vocabulary as this is important for their reading development, and this must be supported in a more comprehensive way than teachers simply defining words (Albrechtsen et al. 2008; Cummins 2017; Wesche and Paribakht 2000; Laufer and Hulstijn 2001). Teaching in the LIP requires methods that ensure that students are adequately prepared for future reading.

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**Notes**

1. The textbooks used were designed for adult education, Swedish for Immigrants, D-level.
2. Easy-to-read books intended for students with learning disabilities.
3. In excerpts . . . denotes a longer pause.

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