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Teaching Language with Moving Pictures:
Teacher attitudes toward fictional films in EFL classrooms

Degree project in English

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ABSTRACT

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Previous research has suggested that teacher attitudes toward film in the classroom (film pedagogy) is influenced by general attitudes to film as well as lessons' learning objectives. This study presents five Swedish upper-secondary English teachers' attitudes to film in the classroom, in relation to six specific learning objectives: cultural aspects, reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, writing skills, grammar skills and oral skills. This study also presents the teachers' general attitudes to film and their opinion of film as a potential motivator in the classroom. The findings suggested that learning objectives influence attitudes to film in the classroom and the approach to film pedagogy. Furthermore, teachers' general attitudes and personal film habits might influence their opinions on the value of film, as a tool for teaching EFL or as a motivator. An implication of this study is the importance of teacher attitudes and their effect on pedagogical choices made in classrooms.

Keywords: teacher attitudes, EFL, film in classroom, film pedagogy, learning objectives, motivation, teacher cognition

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*A special acknowledgement to my fiancée for her unyielding support.
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and for providing excellent comments.*

1 Introduction

“I have a theory that movies operate on the level of dreams”

– Meryl Streep, actress.

It is more common to come across a group of students discussing the latest Marvel film, than it is to overhear a conversation about a finished book. Undoubtedly, movies have grown into a powerhouse within both pop culture and the broader culture at large. The significance of film from a pedagogical perspective should, therefore, not be overlooked due to preconceived notions towards the medium. In this context, teacher attitudes are important to study, since attitudes influence actions and determine pedagogical choices made in both the planning phase and inside classrooms. This perception falls under the relatively new field of language teacher cognition research (Borg, 2003), where attitudes and beliefs are recognized as influencing factors in “teachers’ professional lives” (p.81).

Moreover, the current boom of digital media across our culture has all but incentivized the need to further investigate the matter from a pedagogical perspective. The digital boom now allows teachers to show film in the classroom without the hassle of dragging a heavy TV-set across the hallway, or the need to wrestle with archaic forms of technology. Netflix and similar subscription or multimedia services, alongside projectors and computers, allow teachers to show film or comparable multisensory media in quick succession without losing valuable lesson time. In that sense, the age of multisensory media is upon us, a fact that rings especially true if one considers students’ everyday lives and frequent consumption of film.

Although the process of screening films in the classroom has been made less demanding than ever, attitudes to film among teachers in a Swedish context remain largely unidentified in the field of film-based pedagogy. However, Ruusunen (2011) investigated English teachers’ attitudes towards film in a Finnish setting and found that learning objectives are important to consider while discussing the merits of film. After all, a film might work perfectly well while teaching about different English-speaking countries but offer little of worth during grammar lessons. While the findings in Ruusunen (2011) suggest that teachers are positive to the use of film, it is important to note that the study was conducted a few years ago and in Finland. It is of interest to investigate the same topic in a Swedish context, in order to ascertain what kind of beliefs, attitudes and approaches exist among EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers in Sweden.

1.1 Aim and scope

The aim of this study is to contribute to the shared knowledge within the didactic field of study, especially regarding EFL-learning and the application of visual media in the classroom. In that sense, the aim is to further continue the study of attitudes toward film-based pedagogy and to collect and analyze data from a Swedish upper-secondary school setting.

The national curriculum for Swedish upper-secondary school consists of, among other directives, learning objectives, i.e., aims that the students should attempt to achieve. This study has identified six objectives that are of interest when investigating attitudes toward film-based pedagogy. These objectives were suggested by Ruusunen (2011) but adapted based on the Swedish curriculum. The objectives are an important part of the contextualization of the study, since the research will be carried out in a Swedish upper-secondary school setting. The learning objectives that will both contextualize and limit the study are: cultural aspects, reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, writing skills, grammar skills and oral skills (Skolverket 2011, cf. 2.1 and 2.3 for more information on the learning objectives and the curriculum).

This study will focus exclusively on the use of fictional feature film, rather than all types of visual media or uses of film, such as student created films. However, the use of small segments of a feature film will still be encompassed in the definition, regardless of whether the full length of the film was shown or not. As mentioned in the introduction, students consume fictional feature film regularly, especially since the medium has grown into a significant source for entertainment. The concept of motivation will, therefore, be included and serve as a final limiting framework for the study, since a pedagogical discussion on students' film watching habits will be enabled through said inclusion.

1.2 Research questions

- What are five Swedish upper-secondary English teachers' attitudes to film in general?
- What do five Swedish upper-secondary English teachers think about the potentially motivating effect of film in the classroom?
- What are five Swedish upper-secondary English teachers' attitudes to film pedagogy, in relation to a specific learning objective?
- How do five Swedish upper-secondary English teachers work with film during EFL teaching, in relation to a specific learning objective?

2 Background

Firstly, the background section aims to contextualize the study in a Swedish setting with an account of learning objectives from the curriculum. Secondly, the field of film-based pedagogy will be presented, with a particular focus on the potentially motivating effect of film in the classroom and film as a group process. Thirdly, previous research on film in the classroom, based on the aforementioned learning objectives, will be presented. Lastly, the background will end with a section on previous research regarding attitudes to film-based pedagogy.

2.1 The curriculum

The national curriculum is a regulatory document issued by the governmental agency of Skolverket and should both dictate and guide educators in their profession. Skolverket (2011) writes that upper-secondary school students should acquire sufficient English proficiency in the areas of reception, interaction and production (p.53). The six learning objectives: oral skills, writing skills, grammar skills, vocabulary knowledge, cultural aspects and reading comprehension are all grounded in these areas of language conduct.

Before an account of the steering document can commence, it is worth bearing in mind that the national curriculum consists of further learning objectives that could be included in future iterations of research on this topic. Among these are listening comprehension and literary knowledge, which are objectives that certainly would be interesting to investigate with this topic in mind. However, since this study already included one additional learning objective that could not be found in Ruusunen (2011), the threat of losing focus with each additional learning objective became apparent. Thus, six learning objectives should be considered as a sufficient framework.

As a first step in this account, it is important to note that students should learn how to communicate orally in English, according to Skolverket (2011, p.53). For example, students should be able to undertake a wide range of communicative functions, such as produce instructions, explanations and retellings or summaries (p.55). Students should therefore learn how to use the language with a purpose in mind. In other words, the Swedish curriculum regarding speaking emphasizes the creation of strategies, since students are expected to develop an oral production that works in differing language contexts. Thus, the concept of authenticity is of particular importance, mainly due to the fact that the language has to be authentic in order to work in settings outside of the classroom. As an example of the stated need for authenticity,

Skolverket (2011) writes that students should learn how to adapt their language based on purpose, recipient and speech situation (p.54).

Similarly, the development of writing skills is necessary in order to achieve a comfortable language production (Skolverket, 2011, p.53). Skolverket (2011) states that students should learn how to express themselves in a manner that achieves linguistic variation and complexity (p.53). It is, therefore, not enough that the written production has few grammatical errors, it has to show a variety of language choices as well.

Moving forward, the national curriculum does not explicitly state that grammar should be actively taught in upper-secondary schools. However, some educators argue that grammar is an intrinsic part of both oral and written production, regardless of whether it is actively taught or not (Zhou, 2007). Grammar will, therefore, still have a role in the EFL-teachings in upper-secondary schools. Grammar skills are necessary to acquire in order to attain a language that has linguistic accuracy (Zhou, 2007, p.31). Teaching grammar should therefore be considered as an implicit part of the national curriculum, even though it is not a clearly stated goal.

Acquiring new vocabulary items is not explicitly stated as a goal either, but the process is nonetheless an important part of developing a varied and authentic language. After all, it is impossible to speak any language acceptably without a sufficient number of vocabulary items to choose from. Furthermore, the national curriculum does mention that students should develop some form of vocabulary knowledge, at the very least in order to achieve effective writing skills (Skolverket, 2011, p.55). Consequently, the choice to teach vocabulary knowledge is certainly supported by the national curriculum.

In contrast to vocabulary or grammar, the national curriculum for Swedish upper-secondary school does explicitly state that students should learn about different English-speaking countries and their cultures (Skolverket, 2011, p.53). Skolverket (2011) writes that students should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural representations in different contexts and parts of the world where English functions as a national language (p.53).

While all of these stated learning objectives were also suggested in the study by Ruusunen (2011), the last relevant learning objective is unique to this study and was selected exclusively due to my own personal interest. The national curriculum states that students should develop the ability to understand spoken and written English (Skolverket, p.54). The students should also learn how to interpret the content of either spoken or written English (p.54).

This requirement could be understood as the development of reception or comprehension: either reading or audio comprehension. Reading comprehension is, therefore, the final learning objective that will be detailed in this section. These learning objectives are necessary to keep in mind while reading the chapter on previous research, since the background section will be partly structured around them.

2.2 Film pedagogy

Film is a relatively new medium, in comparison to theatre, music or literature. While the latter forms of art could be established early in human history, directing films was an impossible task until our technological development allowed for simulations of audiovisual experiences. Therefore, other art forms, such as literature, enjoy a time-related advantage, since they have been successfully incorporated into school activities before the birth of film. Allan (1985) writes that language teachers are seldom described as innovative users of technology during their classes: “With a few exceptions, the majority of language teaching isn’t exactly on the cutting edge of technology” (p.1). However, this view is not shared by Stoller (1988), who argues that film in the classroom is championed by “growing numbers of ESL/EFL professionals” (p.2). Certainly, views on teachers’ adaptability to film-based pedagogy was not conclusive in the 1980s, a decade that had not yet experienced the boom of digital media. However, irrespective of the rather late entrance of film as an art form, the research is quite extensive on the topic of film-based pedagogy.

In one of the pioneering works on film-based pedagogy, Cunningham (1923) conducted the first ever case study of film in classrooms. Cunningham (1923) writes of her experiment, which consisted of the students first reading a piece of literature and then watching a movie adaptation based on it, that film should not be disregarded entirely in favor of literature: “It is useless to condemn moving pictures; we may as well condemn all novels because ‘dime novels’ are pernicious” (p.490). Cunningham (1923) wrote of her experiment that “the interest created by the prospect of the moving picture caused the class to work hard during the entire month” and concluded that “the experiment in the English class at Commerical High was a success” (p.490). It might not be possible to draw any viable conclusions based on a study from the 1920s. On the other hand, her study shows that interest of film as a pedagogical tool emerged almost directly after the invention of the medium.

2.2.1 Film as a motivator

As noted in the study by Cunningham (1923), the students worked extra hard as a result of film-based pedagogy. The potentially motivating effect of film has been researched in more modern times as well. Rogers (2007) writes that “films appeal to the twenty-first century student: they are visual, up-to-date and engaging” (p.171). He also argues that film as an audiovisual medium excites the senses of a ‘modern’ student more than texts do (Rogers, 2007). Similarly, Allan (1985) argues that dialogs in film are of authentic nature and that this “motivates students and also teaches language that is useful” (p.2). Additionally, Allan (1985) writes that film-based pedagogy introduces variety to the regular scheduled planning (p.2). The introduced variety might lead to increased motivation, seeing as the students could perceive it as a break from the otherwise familiar and monotonous routine. Stoller (1985) agrees with this view and adds that the inclusion of film in the classroom has led to an “ongoing tradition of bringing authenticity, reality, variety, and flexibility into the ESL classroom” (p.3).

The fact that film is a part of students’ everyday lives might also contribute to the motivating effect. Mishra (2018) explains that the underlying structure of film is easily accessible for students: “Today’s students are part of a visually literate generation, brought up on a steady diet of images and icons” (p.113). This enables students to successfully decode film transmitted information. However, students unfamiliar with film transmitted information might have a hard time accomplishing a fluent decoding process, which in turn would negate any motivational effect of film. As is the case with spoken and written language, visually transmittable information is emitted through a vocabulary of sorts. Camera shots, effects or soundtrack all contribute to the creation of information that consists of images. It is, therefore, worth keeping in mind that different individuals might struggle with the process of decoding film.

2.2.2 Film as a group process

The process of decoding both the visually transmittable information and the audio in film is not done entirely on an individual basis. It is achieved both individually and through shared communication among, for example, students (Sturm, 2017). To illustrate this point, Sturm (2017) writes that “watching films is a personal experience that is often shared (in a cinema, one’s home, or a classroom) and gives learners much to talk about—their reactions, opinions, and a myriad of other topics” (p.248). Thus, a shared process of decoding information from film might instigate scaffolding, through which the students can assist each other in their interpretation of acquired knowledge (Lundahl, 2012, p.133-36).

On a similar note, Mishra (2018) writes that “film can easily and effectively be the tool that makes the classroom come alive” (p.112). Mishra (2018) points to the same observation that Cunningham (1923), Rogers (2007) and Allan (1985) brought up, namely that the medium stimulates and motivates students. On that note, film is an engaging visual medium that can create discussions in the classroom, according to Mishra (2018)

2.3 Film and learning objectives

Regarding the potential of film-based pedagogy, it is necessary to consider the use of film in relation to a learning objective, since film might be an excellent tool when teaching one particular learning objective but lack sufficient value for teaching another.

2.3.1 Cultural aspects

The perhaps most obvious strength of film-based pedagogy is its ability to introduce authenticity in the classroom. Accordingly, Sturm (2007) writes that film “elicit[s] learner responses and give students a chance to practice meaningful language while exploring culture” (p.247). This exploration could be understood as the visual and auditory reception of cultural markers, i.e. accents, traditions or norms. Consequently, Yalcin (2013) argues that film can be used as “means of understanding cultural diversity” (p.260) since “films are windows into culture. They highlight particular sectors from the general cultural life of a society” (p.265). According to Yalcin (2013), film has the potential to show the visual and auditory realities of a culture through authentic representations. Yue (2019) provides credence to Yalcin’s sentiment: “Foreign films, with their authentic language, real physical settings and human interactions, can be used as scenario simulation by teachers and learners” (p.198). Although we live in a globalized world, authentic intercultural meetings are difficult to facilitate in a classroom. Teachers cannot, after all, invite speakers from a sufficient amount of English-speaking countries without completely draining the school budget. As a result, Yalcin (2013) and Yue (2019) endorse film as a potential substitute for the shortage of genuine cultural meetings in a classroom.

2.3.2 Reading comprehension

While the cultural knowledge teaching potential is obvious, the relationship between film and the improvement of students’ reading comprehension might not be immediately recognizable. Furthermore, listening comprehension might be seen as the only viable comprehension developed through classroom film use.

However, the abundance of film adaptation of books proves that there is a connection to be made between reading books and watching films. Swaffar and Vlatten (1997) claim that film is a “multisensory medium” that provides the students with “the opportunity to read visuals as well as auditory messages” (p.175), and as previously mentioned, Mishra (2018) has shown that students are rather adept readers of film.

While reading visuals or auditory messages is not exactly the same as reading text, it is worth noting that film often comes with subtitles. English subtitles have been proved to increase the effectiveness of film in the classroom (King, 2002; Massi & Blázquez, 2008). It could, therefore, be claimed that film is indeed a multisensory medium that can be ‘read’ in a traditional, visual and auditory sense. Consequently, Swaffar and Vlatten (1997) claim that film is a superior medium for teaching comprehension of messages, both written and spoken.

Film can show more than a text can. Allan (1985) writes that film enables students to “see facial expressions, gestures, and whether the speaker is hesitant or not about a particular subject” (p.2), which is something that is not entirely obvious while reading a text. Furthermore, not all students are capable of visualizing whatever they are reading, which in turn means that film has an advantage in the portrayal of so-called “paralinguistic characteristics” (Allan, 1985, p.2). These characteristics can, according to Allan (1985), “give valuable meaning clues and help pupils to see beyond what they are listening to, and interpret the text more deeply” (p.2). However, this does not necessarily mean that film is superior to text in all regards, and some students would probably respond more positively to a book than a film. Nevertheless, the multisensorial aspect of film can still create opportunities to practice additional comprehension skills that in turn can improve students’ regular text-based reading comprehension.

2.3.3 Vocabulary knowledge

The potential development of students’ vocabulary through the use of film has been researched as well. The multisensory aspect of film might also affect the acquirement of new vocabulary items. The students get to read (through subtitles), hear (auditory messages) and see the actions behind or consequences of used words. Rezaee and Shoar (2011) investigated if film, if watched in tandem with reading texts, could improve students’ vocabulary. Specifically, their study investigated if film or other multisensory media could have a beneficial effect on students’ continual acquirement of new vocabulary items if the use of film was limited to a complementary role, while “reading comprehension texts” were the primary focus of the lessons (Rezaee & Shoar, 2011). The findings from their experiment suggest that a multisensory medium, for example film, could increase the amount of student-acquired vocabulary items.

Kabooha (2016) claims that “several studies also show that movies help in increasing the confidence of the students in speaking as they learn how to use certain words and to pronounce correctly [sic]” (p.249). Since film allows students to see new words being used in context, the assimilation process is facilitated and student confidence increases. The fear of committing marked language choices decreases, mostly because the students can relate the use of the word to a practical example and understand how to apply it effectively in their own daily language use.

2.3.4 Writing skills

Film can be used to teach textual cohesion and coherence, which are two notable writing skills. Baratta and Jones (2008) conducted a six-week pilot program where the writing instructions involved the use of film in the classroom. The authors found a modest increase in the students’ writing capabilities after the completion of the program, but more importantly, received “[students’] appreciation of visual teaching methods as a means to explain academic writing conventions” (p.15). Baratta and Jones (2008) writes that the students’ interest in the lessons increased due to the use of film, which in turn enabled a more effective knowledge attainment (p.32). However, they also conclude that “a minority of participants would indeed have preferred a more congruent manner [...] of instruction” (p.33), which indicates the existence of a minority preference for more traditional instructions on writing.

Film can be treated as complementary material that facilitates inspiration during writing exercises. Katchen (2003) writes that while film has been utilized as a first step in writing exercises for quite some time, little scientific attention has been fixed upon the potential benefits of film in this context (p.222). However, Katchen (2003) writes that film as a motivator can be utilized during the commencement of writing exercises, to spark both interest and motivation among the students (p.222). Consequently, film reviews and creative writing assignments related to film are examples of exercises that can combine both film and the development of writing skills.

2.3.5 Grammar skills

Film can be equated to a text in the sense that both have linguistic components. While film imagery does not consist of sentences in the more traditional sense of the word, a film shot can still be understood as an “equivalent to a sentence” according to Baratta and Jones (2008, p.22). However, the connection between the development of grammar skills and the use of film is more so related to the use of film as a motivator.

According to Van Abbé (1965), film has the ability to motivate students during grammar lessons, since traditional grammar lessons are oftentimes considered as too detached from the students' regular lives. Teaching grammar with the help of film can establish a link between authentic language use and grammar concepts, for example if the students analyze the grammatical components in a dialogue between characters. Film can therefore be used to teach grammar, if treated as complementary material that evokes motivational feelings among the students.

2.3.6 Oral skills

Film can expose students to authentic language use, which in turn might improve their individual oral production (Seferoğlu, 2008). However, while Kabooha (2016) claims that film can improve students' pronunciation, a study done by Shing and Yin (2014) could only demonstrate minor improvements of pronunciation due to film. The study could nonetheless indicate a significant increase in students' control of intonation, stress and pauses, which signifies that while pronunciation might be better improved through actual oral language use, film can still benefit students' oral skills overall.

Students themselves seem to agree that film can improve their oral skills, since the study by Seferoğlu (2008) noted that participants “acknowledged that viewing feature films exposed them not only to a wide range of native speakers, each with their own slang, accents and dialects, but also to a wealth of contextualized vocabulary expressions and authentic cross-cultural information” (p.8). Thus, students seem to view film in a rather positive light, not least regarding the development of oral skills and as a potential motivator.

2.4 Attitudes to film pedagogy

While previously mentioned sources seem to be positive toward film pedagogy, alternative views do exist. In spite of everything, film use can still be irrelevant or detrimental to student progress. For example, showing a film in isolation carries little to no pedagogical value. Rogers (2007) writes that teachers can utilize film poorly, especially if no pedagogical planning has been prepared in advance: “All too often films are shown as rewards for the completion of a unit of study, as a way to fill a few odd days before vacation, or as an isolated component of a unit focusing on another topic” (p.171). Similarly, a teacher who drops a book in front of the class without a stated purpose will most likely not facilitate language progress.

Moreover, not everyone is convinced by the utility of film. Keene (2006) writes that film is a “technology that is mainly used in the learners’ home for entertainment, escapism and relaxation all of which encourage a passive form of viewing” (p.223). This indicates that while books might be seen as gateways to knowledge, film has a so-called entertainment stigma attached to it, which might be difficult to disregard completely. Film-based pedagogy could be ascribed negative connotations by EFL-professionals. Swaffar and Vlaten (1997) share the same view as Allan (1985) regarding teachers’ reluctance to adapt to film and write that “many FL teachers remain reluctant to integrate video materials as significant parts of their curriculum” (p.175-176). Negative connotations are likely to play a significant part of the observed hesitancy to adopt film as classroom material. For that reason, attitude studies on film-based pedagogy are important in order to establish contemporary views on film in the classroom.

In a study done in Saudi Arabia, Kabooha (2016) found that both students and teachers had positive perceptions toward “the use of movies in their classes to improve students’ language skills” (p.248). Furthermore, Kabooha (2016) found that the integration of English films in the classroom had a positive effect on the students’ motivation (p.253).

Closer to home, in Finland, Ruusunen (2011) investigated English teachers’ attitudes toward film in Finnish classrooms. The study found that teachers had differing opinions regarding the potential benefits of film, but that the use of film while teaching cultural aspects was viewed universally positively (p.90-91). Film was primarily seen as a source of authenticity and variety, while a majority of the participants viewed film as a potential motivator in the classroom (p.90-91). The findings also suggest that additional teachers would have used film as a teaching tool if the material was made more readily available to educators (p.90-91). The most important takeaway from the study by Ruusunen (2011), in relation to this study, is the fact that teachers viewed film differently in relation to what learning objective was being pursued. The current study was inspired by this fact and adopted Ruusunen’s learning objectives in as far as they were also found in the Swedish curriculum. A learning objective not found in Ruusunen (2011) was added: reading comprehension. This study should therefore be considered as a continuation of the investigation by Ruusunen (2011), as well as a contributor of data from a Swedish upper-secondary school context.

3 Method

The data were collected in semi-structured interviews with five English teachers with experience of using fictional films as tools for teaching EFL in a Swedish upper-secondary school. The five informants were interviewed and recorded individually. The teachers were asked questions (cf. Appendix 1) related to their use of fictional films. The interviews were on their general attitudes toward film or film as a motivator, but also on how they work with film in relation to what specific learning objective they were teaching. The interviews took approximately thirty-five minutes to complete, with some slight deviations due to unforeseen interruptions. The first step of the data analysis process was to transcribe the recorded interviews to text. Words and phrases related to the research questions were highlighted, coded and then sorted into groups based on the research questions, in order to ensure the validity of this paper. Consequently, established themes were: general attitudes toward film, approaches toward film pedagogy, motivation and the six stated learning objectives. The informants were assigned a random number ranging from 1-5, in order to differentiate between them and mask personal information.

3.1 Methodological framework

This study is an exploration of subjective thoughts and experiences, rather than of the general attitudes among the broader population of teachers. Hedin (2011) writes that some questions can only be answered through a qualitative approach, which is the case with this study. In order to fully understand the selected informants' attitudes toward film-based pedagogy, a qualitative approach was necessary. Both the selection process and the method of extracting data was influenced by the decision to focus on exploring subjective thoughts, opinions and experiences.

Interviews were decided upon early as a preferable method of generating data. Denscombe (2000) writes that interviews are, unquestionably, a desirable method when exploring opinions. Interviews are akin to conversations and allow for elaborations that might be impossible to achieve while filling in a questionnaire, for example. Since the interviewer and the informant are engaging in a civil discussion on a relevant topic, the informant's ability to adequately make a point is increased, mainly due to the verbal input from the interviewer. Follow-up questions are encouraged and occur naturally as the conversation progresses. With this in mind, interviews were chosen as the method, because the exploration of opinions is more easily made through actual human interaction, than through answers on a piece of paper.

3.2 Selection of informants

The selection of informants was based on two criteria: The informants had to have some sort of experience of teaching English on an upper-secondary level in the Mälardalen region, and a personal familiarity with film as a teaching tool in their English classroom. No other criteria were deemed to be relevant for this study. This study utilized a convenience sample (Bryman, 2002), since the informants were all colleagues from the same school. One teacher from the school contacted the rest and convinced them to participate in the study. For this reason, the concept of “snowball selection” had an effect on the process as well (Bryman 2002).

3.3 Reliability and validity

The fact that all informants were from the same workplace could affect the reliability of the study, since it limits the scope to opinions prevalent at just one school in Sweden, rather than at multiple. It is worth having in mind that different schools might encourage or discourage the use of film at will, which would have an effect on teacher attitudes. This study is therefore an exploration of attitudes and experiences prevalent at one particular Swedish upper-secondary school and the findings cannot be attributed to all schools or teachers in Sweden.

One of the requirements was that the informants had to be familiar with working with films beforehand. Certainly, this will have an effect on the generated data, since teachers with particularly strong opinions against film in the classroom would not bother working with said medium. Thus, the study will only explore the opinions of those who have already worked with film beforehand. However, since this study does not claim generalizability, this should not pose any serious threats against the credibility of the study. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning for the sake of reliability.

The interview questions were written down beforehand in order to ensure the validity of the study (cf. Appendix 1). The interview questions were based on the research questions and should therefore contribute to creating a valid study. Also, in the data analysis process, the organization into different themes was based on the research questions.

3.4 Ethical considerations

This study adheres to the ethical standards created by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet 2017). In order to meet the rigid standards of ethical research conduct, the informants were briefed extensively on the nature of the study and its topic before their participation.

Information regarding the purpose of the study and who will have access to it was expressed before the interviews were held. The informants were notified that they had the possibility to withdraw their participation at any time during the creation of this study, without having to justify a reason. Furthermore, the informants were granted the right to remain anonymous.

The informants were made aware that this study would only be used for an academic purpose. For that reason, this study will not be used in any commercial capacity in order to protect the integrity of the participants and the conducted research. Furthermore, the participants were emailed a copy of this study, with the stated intention of ensuring them the right to voice any concern regarding the content. For that reason, my contact information was provided to them before the interviews and they were encouraged to contact me if they had any questions regarding the final content of the study or their participation in the research.

4 Results

4.1 General attitudes toward film

The teachers' recreational film watching habits correlated with the inclusion rate of film in their classrooms. On the one hand, the teachers who stated that they watched film regularly (Teachers 2, 5) also claimed to use film regularly in their teaching. Concurrently, the teachers that were avid film watchers stated a continuous analysis of recent and old iterations of the medium from an educational perspective, in order to find new potential material:

“I watch a lot of film privately. I use lots of film in my classroom. It can be all types of multimedia, from documentaries and Ted Talks to whole feature films” (Teacher 2).

“The funny thing is, probably because I am a teacher, I always, always, without thinking, analyze film based on how interesting they would be, for example, in my economy class” (Teacher 5).

On the other hand, two teachers (Teachers 3, 4) stated that they only watched a couple of films per year, and that they currently did not actively include film in their classrooms:

“A few, maybe two films, per year. [...] We are not working with film right now but I have done so in the past” (Teacher 3).

“I have worked with film, yes. [...] I do not show a lot of film in class. [...] I think the time can be better spent on other important projects.” (Teacher 4).

Teacher 1 stated that she did not have enough time for watching the preferred number of films and also showed a set amount of films per year, usually the same recurring films:

“I wish I could watch more film, but they are quite time consuming if you are going to watch the whole film, which you probably want to do” (Teacher 1).

Consequently, a pattern emerged where film watching habits coincided with their pedagogical inclusion of film. Teachers with a noteworthy consumption of film were more likely to actively include film in their lesson planning, while teachers that did not consume the medium regularly included film, at most, once or twice a year, or not at all. The active inclusion of film was motivated by highly positive attitudes toward the medium:

“Students belong to a generation of huge consumers of images. We have a task ahead of us, as teachers, to teach them how to interpret these images correctly” (Teacher 2).

Conversely, the deprioritization of film coincided with pedagogical issues with the medium:

“Today, students tend to watch a lot of film. When I went to school, watching a film was a luxury. It was a big event. Today, it is not a big event anymore. [...] Film today does not have the same sort of effect” (Teacher 1).

Thus, the teachers with more positive attitudes toward the medium in general had regular film watching habits and actively included film in their classrooms, while those that brought up pedagogical issues with the medium had infrequent film watching habits and deprioritized film in the classroom. The findings suggest that general attitudes influence the inclusion of film in the classroom, and that film watching habits indicate positive or negative attitudes toward the medium.

4.2 Film and motivation

Similarly to the findings in 4.1, the teachers that actively included film stated that the medium can serve the role as a motivator during lessons:

“We have to find the easiest way to get to the heart of any individual in front of us. [...] Film is one way to do that because students watch a lot of film” (Teacher 5).

“When the students are supposed to make a film, make a podcast, write something, they include details from social media, from film, from their daily lives and I encourage them to do that” (Teacher 2).

However, the teachers that did not actively include film brought up issues with the idea that the medium could motivate students:

“The students used to be really happy when I told them we are going to watch a film. I do not see the same reactions nowadays. [...] Today, students tend to watch a lot of film. When I went to school, watching a film was a luxury” (Teacher 1).

Thus, two different perspectives on film as a motivator could be ascertained. The occurrence of film watching in students' spare time was treated either as an incentive to include film, or as an issue that negated the potential of film. In other words, the two perspectives could be described as: Film as material that relates to the students' interests and personal lives, on the one hand, and film as too mundane, on the other hand. Accordingly, the main reason brought up against film as a motivator appeared to be the overabundance of film watching in our culture, which negated any potentially motivating effect:

“Students already watch a lot of film outside school. I think the time can be better spent on other important projects because of this” (Teacher 4).

Consequently, film was considered as motivating among the teachers that saw its pedagogical potential as a result of students' film watching habits, while the teachers that did not see film as a motivator considered an active inclusion to be unnecessary due to the fact that positive language-related outcomes by film were already potentially garnered recreationally in students' spare time.

4.3 Film and learning objectives

The teachers indicated that learning objectives pertinent to a lesson dictate the approach and attitudes toward film as material. The learning objective influences how film is treated, either as the primary focus of the lesson planning or as complementary material, but it also influences the overall attitudes toward film. Cultural aspects and oral skills were acknowledged as the learning objectives that had the most positive use of film as a primary focus of the lesson. Conversely, issues was brought up with film in relation to writing, vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, film in relation to reading comprehension consisted of two differing views.

4.3.1 Cultural aspects

Film in relation to cultural aspects was recognized as a valid approach by all informants. However, two different approaches could be ascertained, where film was treated either as a primary or secondary focus of the lesson. The chosen approach coincides with the aforementioned attitudes found in 4.1 and 4.2. Teachers that considered film as the primary focus while teaching cultural aspects used the medium as a tool for bringing authenticity into the classroom and portraying English-speaking cultures in a way that only audiovisual experiences can achieve:

“[Film] gives the students a perfect opportunity to have a peek into an English-speaking world, to see specific situations of how people act, traditions, cultural aspects in that setting, dialects, and way of speaking, sociolects” (Teacher 2).

Film as a complementary material saw the medium as a gateway to further work or as a starting point in the discussion of themes and events:

“I use film more to emphasize a theme. [...] So for example, if we have a theme on Australia and the culture there, I showed a [fictional] film called Rabbit-Proof Fence, it is a film about the aborigines and their conditions [...] but then we used that film in another capacity. We used it to compare with other colonized nations so we could discuss colonization. I use film more to enhance or emphasize a theme” (Teacher 3).

Thus, while all teachers recognized film as a viable tool for teaching about different English-speaking countries and their cultures, two different approaches could be ascertained, where film was treated as the primary focus or used in a complementary capacity.

4.3.2 Reading comprehension

Two differing views on film in relation to reading comprehension could be ascertained. Teachers 1, 3, 4 and 5 stated that film, in relation to reading comprehension, was based around film adaptations of books that could lead to greater insight into a written work and therefore increase the comprehension of said text:

“We read a novel and then we watched a film adaption of that novel. Some words, particular words, were used both in the novel and in the film. The students got a better understanding of these words by both hearing and seeing them used in a film. [...] When I read their essays, I saw that they managed to use these terms correctly. I think the film adaption contributed to that. I think the film enhanced, or emphasized, the vocabulary from the book” (Teacher 3).

Teacher 2, on the other hand, argued that film in itself could teach reading comprehension, due to the fact that films have both written texts such as subtitles and moving images that are read by the students:

“Students are constantly bombarded by images in adverts or on the internet. Text in digital form, or printed form, is all around them. We have a task ahead of us, as teachers, to teach them how to interpret these images correctly. [...] Film has the same type of language” (Teacher 2).

Thus, in relation to reading comprehension, film was treated either as complementary material that could increase the reading comprehension of books, or as the main focus of the lesson that can be used for teaching students how to read images or texts correctly.

4.3.3 Vocabulary knowledge

Although film as a tool for teaching vocabulary knowledge was recognized as viable by all teachers, none of them stated that they had used film for the explicit purpose of teaching said learning objective. Instead, other material was more commonly used, such as articles from newspapers. Acquiring new vocabulary items was seen as a positive side effect of experiencing an audiovisual medium:

“Of course, students will pick up on words from films” (Teacher 2).

“I think the film enhanced, or emphasized, the vocabulary from the book” (Teacher 3).

Thus, vocabulary knowledge was not actively taught using film by the teachers, but the teachers still recognized the role film might have on the acquirement of vocabulary items. The learning objective vocabulary knowledge might be one that is not explicitly taught by teachers, but rather seen as a learning objective that will be achieved passively during the immersion in EFL-classrooms. Conversely, the teachers might consider other material as more valuable while explicitly teaching vocabulary knowledge, such as articles from newspapers.

4.3.4 Writing skills

As was the case with vocabulary knowledge (cf. 4.3.3), none of the teachers had used film for the explicit purpose of teaching writing skills. Instead, film was treated exclusively as complementary material during the pre-work stages of essay writing, for example.

“I would make them write keynotes while watching *Dead Poets Society*. I would ask them to upload a written reflection after watching, then we would discuss it in class and I would ask them to write a final essay on the film” (Teacher 1).

In relation to writing skills, film was, therefore, exclusively treated as inspirational material that would lay the groundwork for the assignment that actually improved writing skills, namely the writing process. The use of film as material during essay writing processes coincides with teachers' views on film as a motivator. Teachers that considered film as a motivator were more likely to include writing assignments based on film. Thus, film was exclusively treated as complementary material that could potentially aid the process of developing writing skills.

4.3.5 Grammar skills

Similarly to the two recent learning objectives (cf. 4.3.3 & 4.3.4), none of the teachers had used film for the explicit purpose of teaching grammar skills. Instead, two different views on film as complementary material during grammar lessons could be ascertained. The teachers that

believed film could act as a motivator during lessons also believed that film could teach students grammar through authentic experiences of the language. Film, as is the case with all representations of language, could invoke an implicit acquisition of grammar rules. However, those that did not consider film as a motivator were unsure of the utility of film in relation to grammar. Thus, teachers that considered film as a motivator saw the potential of film during grammar lessons, while teachers that did not consider film as a motivator did not believe that film would have a positive impact during the teaching of grammar.

4.3.6 Oral skills

The teachers were positive to the use of film for the purpose of teaching oral skills. In contrast with grammar, writing and vocabulary, the teachers stated that they had used film for the explicit purpose of teaching said learning objective.

“The students learn by listening, and I always have subtitles, no matter what, in English. They learn [...] new ways of expressing oneself through listening and reading” (Teacher 2).

“Most students find it useful [to learn how to speak correctly through film], and they also enjoy listening to English through film” (Teacher 3).

Film could expose students to authentic language use, which in turn showed them how certain words should be pronounced, or what kind of register is suitable in a certain context. Alongside cultural aspects, oral skills were one of the learning objectives that were associated with the most positive attitudes toward film. Oral skills was the only learning objective where the teachers exclusively treated film as a primary focus of the lesson. If the stated goal for the lesson was teaching oral skills, the need to apply film in a complementary capacity did not exist.

5 Discussion

5.1 Results discussion

The following chapter will discuss the results based on the four research questions (cf. 1.2). Furthermore, the analyzed data will be compared to the findings by Ruusunen (2011) and the previous research presented in the background section. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on the methodological framework of the study.

5.1.1 Attitudes to film and film pedagogy

The findings suggest a potential correlation between personal film watching habits and attitudes to film-based pedagogy. The informants that stated recurrent film watching habits had a more positive view on film in the classroom and actively included the medium in their lesson

planning. Conversely, teachers that had infrequent film watching habits did not actively include the medium and brought up pedagogical issues. This can be related to the reluctance to include film among EFL-teachers that Swaffar and Vlaten (1997) and Allan (1985) wrote about, namely that negative connotations might influence the inclusion rate.

Negative connotations, undoubtedly, influence attitudes, especially considering the fact that attitudes are not created in a vacuum. Furthermore, Keene (2006) detailed some of these negative connotations by assigning a so-called entertainment stigma to the medium and by describing film watching as something that students passively do in their spare time. These sentiments were also prevalent in the analyzed data, which indicates that there exists a gap between teachers that actively watched film and included the medium in their classroom, on the one hand, and teachers that did not watch a lot of film and did not actively include film in the classroom, on the other hand. The findings, therefore, suggest that film watching habits influence if a teacher attached negative connotations, or brought up pedagogical issues, with the medium.

5.1.2 Attitudes in relation to learning objective

Attitudes to film-based pedagogy among the five upper-secondary school teachers vary in relation to learning objectives. In particular, previous experience with film was reliant upon the learning objective: None of the teachers had experiences working with film for the explicit purpose of teaching grammar, while all of the teachers had used film to teach cultural aspects. Furthermore, the approach to film pedagogy was dependent upon the learning objective (cf. 5.1.3).

The findings in the current study correlate with those in Ruusunen (2011), since she could show that a majority of teachers acknowledged the potential value of film during, especially, lessons on cultural aspects, but also on oral skills. Furthermore, as was the case in Ruusunen (2011), film in relation to grammar skills was not realized as an obvious choice, since a majority of the respondents were unsure of the utility of film in that context. Thus, both studies could ascertain that learning objectives influence, to a varying degree, attitudes to film pedagogy.

5.1.3 Approaches to film pedagogy

Two different approaches to film pedagogy could be ascertained, specifically: film as the primary focus of the lesson or as complementary material. The topical learning objective of the lesson influenced whatever approach was decided upon as the most suitable in order to achieve

language development. As was the case in the previous research section, film was treated as either the primary focus of a lesson, or as complementary material, depending on what learning objective was relevant for the planning. As an example, film in relation to grammar was based on film primarily as a motivator (Van Abbé, 1965), while film in relation to cultural aspects was based on film as the main focus that would bring authenticity into the classroom (Sturm, 2012; Yalcin, 2013; Yue, 2019). This suggests that learning objectives not only influence overall attitudes to film in the classroom, but also the approach.

Film as a group process was highlighted in the results section, since the teachers mentioned the usefulness of discussions based around film. The utility of film as a group process seems to rely on learning objectives. As an example, film was exclusively treated as a primary focus while teaching oral skills, and no mention of group-related activities were brought up while discussing approaches in relation to this objective. Conversely, film discussions were used when film was treated as complementary material during the development of writing skills or cultural knowledge. Possibly, film as complementary material opened up for more group-related activities, since the main focus was not on the film but on themes or messages that could be discovered during the viewing. Thus, the results indicate that film as a group process, first described by Sturm (2012), is mostly utilized when film is in an auxiliary position.

5.1.4 Film and motivation

Two different views on film as a motivator could be ascertained. While previous research (Cunningham, 1925; Stoller, 1985; Rogers, 2007) suggested that film would act as a motivator because it brought in students' personal lives into the classroom or introduced much needed variety to the scheduled planning, some teachers brought up issues with the fact that film is so widely consumed in our culture: Film watching has become a mundane activity, or pedagogical benefits that could be gained from film watching are already garnered recreationally in students' spare time. As was the case with the inclusion rate of film, the findings also suggest that the perception of film as a motivator relies on general attitudes to the medium and personal film watching habits. Teachers that had frequent film watching habits disagreed with the aforementioned statements and pointed to the fact that film represents parts of students' everyday lives and should therefore be included for pedagogical reasons. However, the teachers that did not perceive film as a motivator did not necessarily disagree with the research presented in the background section (cf. 2.2.1), since the research might be outdated and no longer valid

for the present cultural landscape. After all, due to the current accessibility of film, the novelty associated with the medium might have waned slightly and thus affected its potency as a classroom activity.

Conversely, the informants that held positive views seem to appreciate the fact that film is an overabundant source for entertainment and information, since that means film can be successfully included in the classroom. In other words, students will be accustomed to the nature of film and how the medium works, which in turn would decrease any potential pedagogical barriers. Possibly, the current research has found two differing pedagogical views, where some teachers genuinely strive to include aspects from students' lives, on the one hand, while other teachers prefer to introduce aspects that are not present in students' lives in order to challenge them. Nevertheless, more research is required before it is possible to give credence to the arguments presented. Specifically, students' attitudes to film pedagogy would be of utmost interest to ascertain in order to answer if film can work as a motivator in the classroom.

5.2 Methodical discussion

The focus of this study was not on finding generalizable patterns that can be applied beyond the rather small sample group, but to delve deeper into the topic at hand and explore the potential connection between learning objectives, motivation and film pedagogy. Thus, while the method did not lead to generalizable data, it did provide an opportunity to highlight the importance of learning objectives and general attitudes toward film, while discussing teachers' pedagogical decisions regarding film in the classroom. Semi-structured interviews were therefore decided upon as the best choice for method.

However, conducting interviews in a semi-structured manner is not an effortless or uncomplicated task for an inexperienced researcher. At any given time, the wrong follow-up question might have been asked, or the right question might have been missed. It is, therefore, necessary to point out that this study does not claim to be an authoritative paper on the topic of Swedish teachers' attitudes toward film in the classroom. This study does provide additional data from a Swedish context that can be used to highlight how five Swedish EFL-teachers think or describe their past experiences and opinions, but one cannot extrapolate the data further than that. The interviews and the results should be understood as imperfect but at the very least representative of what was said during the conversations. Some fine tuning of the questions might have provided further information that could have been gainful for the aim of the study, but as it stands, the end results are at the very least representative of the attitudes held among the teachers interviewed.

A similar reasoning can be applied to the selection of informants, which was done under time constraints and thus limited to only five teachers that were all colleagues at the same school. It would have been interesting to investigate how different workplaces lend themselves to differing attitudes toward film, dependent upon feedback or directives from the heads of the schools' offices. However, since this study could prove that attitudes among even colleagues at the same school can differ, the selection process provided benefits as well.

6 Conclusion

This study investigated five Swedish upper-secondary English teachers' attitudes toward film in general, as a motivator, in relation to six learning objectives and choices regarding approaches to film pedagogy. The learning objectives were suggested by Ruusunen (2011) but adapted based on the national curriculum (Skolverket, 2011).

The findings suggest that general attitudes toward film and the frequency of personal watching habits influence the inclusion rate of film in the classroom. Thus, teachers with frequent film watching habits and positive attitudes toward the medium in general were more likely to actively include film in their lesson planning. Furthermore, the teachers that actively included film stated that the medium can serve the role as a motivator during lessons. Conversely, teachers with infrequent watching habits brought up pedagogical issues with the medium, did not actively include film in their classrooms and were not convinced that film could act as a motivator. Consequently, two different views on film as a motivator were ascertained, where some teachers claimed film in the classroom was unnecessary due to the overabundance of recreational film watching among students, while other teachers claimed that film would have a motivating effect because students were so accustomed to the medium.

Learning objectives influence attitudes toward the medium as well, since the utility of film as material during a lesson was dependent upon the topical learning objective(s). Similarly, two different approaches to film pedagogy could also be established, where film was treated either as the primary focus of a lesson or as complementary material for further work. Thus, learning objectives influenced not only attitudes to film pedagogy, but also the pedagogical approach.

An implication of this study is the importance of teacher attitudes for pedagogical choices within the classroom, which is in line with research on language teacher cognition (Borg, 2003). Aspects such as general attitudes toward film can be reflected in and determine the choices made as an educator.

This shows that further studying previous experiences and attitudes among teachers is one way of understanding the nuanced pedagogical choices that are made daily in schools and affect students during their education. Another implication of this study is that learning objectives should not be disregarded in further research, since the connection between them and the value of film as material has been established by both this study and Ruusunen (2011).

In order to build upon the findings in this study, further research should take Swedish students' attitudes into account, in order to grant more insight into the utility of film-based pedagogy in Swedish upper-secondary schools of today. Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate what teachers do with films and how they perceive what they do, e.g. in a combined observation and interview study.

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Appendix

Interview questions

Control question:

1. Have you shown a fictional film in your classroom, when teaching English on an upper-secondary level?

General attitudes toward film & film pedagogy:

1. What is your general opinion of film? Positive/negative? How often do you watch film?
2. How often do you include film in your classroom?
3. Have you noticed if film has a potential to increase motivation in the classroom? Why?
4. Have you noticed if the students prefer to watch a film rather than to read a book?

Questions on learning objectives:

1. What is your opinion of using films as tools for teaching about different English-speaking countries and their cultures?

Follow up 1: How do use films for teaching about different English-speaking countries and their cultures?

Follow up 2: What has been your experience of using films to teach about different English-speaking countries and their cultures? Positive/negative?

2. What is your opinion of using films as tools for teaching oral/verbal skills? Is it possible? Why/why not?

Follow up 1: How do use films to teach oral skills?

Follow up 2: What has been your experience of using films to teach oral skills? Positive/negative?

3. What is your opinion of using films as tools for teaching writing skills? Is it possible? Why/why not?

Follow up 1: How do use films to teach writing skills?

Follow up 2: What has been your experience of using films to teach writing skills? Positive/negative?

4. What is your opinion of using films as tools for teaching vocabulary knowledge? Is it possible? Why/why not?

Follow up 1: How do use films to teach vocabulary knowledge?

Follow up 2: What has been your experience of using films to teach vocabulary knowledge? Positive/negative?

5. What is your opinion of using films as a tool for teaching grammar skills? Is it possible?

Why/why not?

Follow up 1: How do use films to teach grammar skills?

Follow 2: What has been your experience of using films to teach grammar skills?

Positive/negative?